

## Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

A stereotype is a conception usually held in common by members of a social group based on a conventional and simplified perception of reality (social, cultural phenomena, and of a certain category of people) often evaluative and based on prejudice and incomplete knowledge.

There are:

- individual stereotypes which express personal opinions of an individual about characteristics of an object;
- group stereotypes which are a set of opinions and information connected with beliefs and expectations towards certain groups of people divided by members of a given community.

Stereotypes deep-rooted in a given culture are handed down from generation to generation in the process of socialization. They create areas of "common knowledge" which exerts influence on the community members' behaviour and attitudes towards stereotyped people.

Knowledge on stereotypes is usually passed on orally thanks to which members of a community not only share the information on the characteristics of the community representatives but also evaluate it. Stereotypes are passed on and reinforced by home, family, school and mass media (literature, radio, television, press, advertisements, etc.).

Social norms and roles have a great influence on shaping stereotypes. There is a tendency to attribute certain qualities to people playing certain roles without paying attention to the fact that their behaviours do not result from their personalities but from the roles imposed on them.

### Mechanism of creating sex stereotypes

- Tasks and duties assigned to men and women are linked to certain psychological traits. As women look after children more often, qualities such as protectiveness, empathy and gentleness are attributed to them. If men are employed on positions that require making decisions and managing people, qualities such as independence, rationalism, decisiveness and courage are attributed to them.
- Interpreting the above qualities as resulting from men's and women's nature and not from the specificity of the tasks they do strengthens the belief that women are "created" to undertake certain types of activities while men are "created" to do others.
- There is a transfer of expectations towards women's and men's behaviours to other situations according to the qualities attributed by stereotypes. These expectations begin to be treated as norms, i.e. positive, proper examples of behaviours' and responses.
- Under pressure resulting from the norms connected with the functioning in the roles of men and women, individuals usually submit to the expectations and present behaviours imposed on them not to lose social acceptance and not to lower their self-esteem.
- Behaviours which are in accordance with expectations confirm the rightness of the image of femininity and masculinity presented in stereotypes.

Stereotypical idea of masculinity (or femininity) in its definition constitutes justification of different social tasks and behaviours of both sexes and different social expectations towards men and women in normative aspect.

Masculinity is associated with professional work, power, and public service on different levels of the social hierarchy, interest in things and not people, orientation towards

achieving a position in the social hierarchy and not towards building bonds. Men are attributed with qualities connected with instrumental functions and professional, economic, political and scientific activity such as independence, domination, ambitious pursuit to defined aims, rationality, logic, reservation and self-control, abstract thinking, activity, assertiveness, decisiveness and effectiveness. There are also negative qualities: emotional coldness, aggression, indifference, tactlessness.

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