

# GENDER IS AROUND US

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*Girls are perceived as delicate beings ever since they are born, unlike boys who are viewed as the strong ones. These are popular stereotypes associated with the notion of gender, which are later reflected in behavioural expectations of both genders. The aforementioned expectations are passed on to children through socialization. Majority of socialization theories emphasize the fact that children adjust to the pre-existing models or cultural patterns because socialization is nothing else but a lifelong process of teaching and learning the values and social norms including those concerning gender. However, not only parents are responsible for socialization. Media, the school and peers take over the roles that parents abandon becoming active socializers throughout our life.*

*Keywords:* Androcentrism; Gender polarization; Feminism.

## **1. Selected theories in research on gender**

The views on the impact of social mechanisms on shaping gender identity that have prevailed in sociology in the last few decades emphasised socialisation, situational limits conditioned by the social structure, psychodynamic conflict or shaping the identity by a given entity. The first and the second factor emphasise the influence of culture on an entity, the third and the fourth emphasise what happens in the psyche of the entity (cf. Connel 1987).

All socialisation theories emphasise that a child adapt to the previously established model or cultural pattern. Theories that stem from sociology and anthropology emphasise other aspects of this process than theories that stem from psychology. Sociologists and anthropologists do not start their socialisation analysis with a single child or entity but with the necessity (which drives the society) of preparing every next generation of young people to take definite places in the social structure. Having taken into account the fact that the aforementioned structure is based on the division of work with regard to gender, therefore, such preparation cannot only relate to skills buy also to the psyche of the entities – boy and girls must be shaped in such a way as to be able to play the predetermined, quite different roles.

Psychologists begin the socialisation analysis not with the social structure but with the gender stereotype filled expectations of mature individuals who create this structure. “Self-fulfilling prophecy” is a basic psychological model used in the aforementioned analysis (Lipsitz Bem 2000: 130). In other words adults treat boys differently from girls because they have a gender stereotype filled preconception of what boys and girls usually like. This adults’ prejudice determines the fact that boys and girls are shaped diversely.

The influence of culture on an entity is also emphasised, similarly to socialisation theories, by social structure theories or situational theories. Their proponents, unlike the proponents of socialisation theories, do not think that culture has profound and long-lasting impact on the child’s developing psyche. They perceive children and adults as entities limited by situations in which they function. The attribution of different and unequal positions for men and women in the social structure is responsible for shaping conventional men and woman with respect to gender and not socialisation conducted in childhood. Attributing varied and unequal position imposes on children and adults mental limitations moving their motivation and abilities towards a stereotype of a man or a woman. It also hinders the possibility of developing these skills, which, if they wanted, could exceed the roles attributed to them. Psychological implications of social and cultural prospect should be clearly defined: if the woman’s position in social structure changes, her motivation and abilities will soon change too. Political

implications should also be clear: if women are ever to gain such political and economic power as men, it is not the psyche or even the socialisation of an entity that should be changed but the androcentric social structure which strengthens and preserves men's power regularly (Lipsitz Bem 2000).

### **1.1 Androcentrism**

The notion of androcentrism was first used at the beginning of the XX century by Ch. Perkins Gilman. She wrote: "All patterns that exist in our world are based on the same presupposition that the man epitomises human beings and the woman is just some kind of addition to him or a subordinate assistant who is only useful when it comes to giving birth to progeny. The woman has always had the same role in relation to men as the preposition to the noun. She has always been under, over, behind or next him; she has always been dependent on him" (1911/1917, Lipsitz Bem 2000: 50). Gilman goes even further: "what we see around us, the environment we are born in and raised we tend to perceive as natural order of things, (...) however, what we have always referred to as 'human nature' (...) has predominantly been male nature". She summarises "therefore, our androcentric culture appears to be overwhelmed by male culture, hence it is undesirable" (1911/1971: 20-22, Lipsitz Bem 2000: 50).

S. de Beauvoir developed the aforementioned notion, without using the term "androcentrism" and incorporated it into gender-inequality theory. She also stated that the relations binding men and women over the centuries are not best characterised by comparing them to the relation between a superior and a subordinate or between low-status and high-status individuals or between negative and positive elements. "The man represents both the positive pole and the neutral point so intensively that the French language uses *les hommes* to refer to all human beings. (...) The woman is presented as a negative pole to such an extent that even the definition reflects her limitations. (...) The mankind is masculine, the man determines the woman not as she is but with reference to himself; he does not view her as an autonomous entity. (...) The woman is something insignificant in the face of something significant. The man is the Entity, an absolute: the woman is the Different one" (1972: 25-27).

Therefore, androcentrism is the perception of men as the centre of the universe. They divide the reality into what is with them or what is against them, thus "different". Defining "the different" men categorize women as similar or dissimilar to them. They themselves and their experience are a point of reference. This is how they formulate a cultural norm or a species norm as a whole. Other creatures are just an imperfect diversion or deviation from a norm, which is set by men. Everything they see is considered in terms of their personal benefits and not regardless of everything. Over the centuries women have been defined in terms of their sexual reproduction or the role they played in a men dominated household or in terms of satisfying men's sexual needs.

All four mentioned theories emphasise socialisation, psychodynamic conflict or self-shaping, they analyse ways in which male and female children transform into men and women who consciously and willingly accept different and unequal roles they are attributed by society characterized by androcentrism and gender polarization. An adult woman and an adult man are, according to socialisation theory, partly the result of being exposed to culture during childhood. According to psychodynamic theories socialisation process regulates child's natural impulses out of necessity and in consequence there are suppressed and repressed desires as well as psychical conflicts in the psyche of an adult human. Identity formation theory recognises that even a child is never a passive object of culture mechanisms: both children and adults actively attribute meaning to phenomena and objects they come across including their own "I". Who children and adults become depends on their daily social experiences. These experiences are programmed by institutionalised social practices, which are the embodiment of culture prisms.

Social-structural theories say that who we are, even as adults, to some extent, does not depend on who we have become internally but it depends on what is expected from us or what our current social

position and scope of power in our possession enable as to do. (Lipsitz Bem 2000) Socialization and social-structural theories focused on how culture attributes men and woman male and female gender respectively. Whereas psychoanalytic theories focus on how child's psychic conflicts affect the formation of their gender identity. It is believed that such conflicts are created when a child perceives their own impulses and desires as emotionally problematic.

### **1.2 Freudian theory of identification and feminist responses to it**

S. Freud (1995) claimed that child's attraction to mother becomes emotionally problematic due to developing in boys fear of castration or developing in girls penis envy. These phenomena occur only when a child discovers the differences between male and female reproductive organs. This internal conflict leads the boys through identification with the father to masculinity and the girls to femininity through acceptance of women's inferiority and replacing love towards the mother with love towards the father. Freud believed that behaviour connected with gender, which developed in early stages of childhood is unambiguous and does not change over time. This theory neglects personal and social change. There is no doubt that gender is flexible, therefore, it is true to say that learning is a life-long process and we can modify our behaviour and attitudes while experiencing new situations and with newly emerging patterns. Freudian theory of identification claims that women are incomplete; perceives them as envious, passive and masochistic (C. M. Renzetti 2005).

Psychoanalysis proponents transformed and reinterpreted the primary assumptions of Freud's theory when he was still alive, due to the aforementioned weaknesses. The works of his successors questioned both his assumptions about women's inferiority and his interpretation of Oedipus complex. J. Lucan (...) thinks that it is not a simple anatomical discovery but realising what penis symbolizes in patriarchal society, it makes men identify with privileges and power and women with subordination and inferiority (Lipsitz Bem 2000).

According to N. Chodorow (1989) critical events occur at earlier stage of child development – in pre-oedipal stage. A conflict regarding dependence and symbiosis arises in boys' psyche. Chodorow thinks that boys develop a personality that excludes independence and girls develop dependent personality because mothers have a tendency to refer to male progeny as different beings, different from themselves and to female progeny as close and similar to them. Chodorow based these beliefs on object relations theory and the fact that it is mother who are entrusted with the task of rising children more often than fathers (1989: 15). Furthermore, boys develop such a strong need to deny their dependence on the mother and women in general that in as adult men they use all the power which is their possession to define women as "different" beings.

All the aforementioned theories emphasis socialisation or situational limitations caused by the social structure or psychodynamic conflict or shaping the identity by an individual, they analyse ways in which female and male children transform into men and women consciously and willingly accept different and unequal roles they are attributed by society characterized by androcentrism and gender polarization.

### **1.3 Contemporary feminism**

In the eighties and nineties of the XX century media announced and impending end of feminism because it transformed into a global social movement. Women are convinced that their situation has improved over the last few decades but majority of them feels that sex discrimination is still a crucial problem. J. Lorber (1998) proposed a new classification of perspectives, which form contemporary feminism. She differentiated three main feminist theories with regard to their attitude towards the existing cultural femininity and masculinity. These are the following: *gender-reform feminism, gender-resistance feminism and gender-rebellion feminism.*

Gender-reform feminism is based on an assumption that there are significantly more similarities between men and women than differences that divide them. The main objective of gender-reform feminism is to change the existing forms of femininity and masculinity. J. Lorber distinguishes four types of the aforementioned feminism namely: liberal feminism – whose core essence is to strive for formal and legal equality of men and women, Marxist and socialist feminism – its female representatives claim that the fundamental cause of women's oppression is their economic dependence on men, therefore it is crucial to improve their employment prospects, salaries and work conditions. The fourth type – developmental feminism expresses interest in women from developing countries, it is particularly focused on improving their chances of employment and education. Gender-resistance feminism emphasises that possible legal realisation of gender equality does not mean that the social domination of men will be completely eradicated. It is well preserved in everyday social interactions including heterosexuality. Female proponents of this viewpoint propose that women should establish their own, exclusively female, organisations and communities. This is the only condition for the eradication of male dominance. Although separatist strategies propagated by this trend are based on the existing social order, no attempts, with the scope of their activity, are made to change the society. J. Lorber refers to this viewpoint as “gender-resistant feminism”. The following types of feminism can also be included into the aforementioned trend: radical feminism and lesbian feminism, which emphasise sexual exploitation of women, especially violence against women, psychoanalytic feminism that refers to Freud's idea which attempts to explain the inequality among genders and stand-point feminism, which tries to research into all aspects of life from women's point of view.

The term gender-rebellion feminism is very often called “the third wave of feminism” as the ways of conceptualization of the biological sex as well as cultural gender, which are no longer used within its framework, are so typical for the theory of the first- and the second-wave of feminism (cf. Ranzetti 2005). The Rebellion feminism is focused on correlation between various inequality forms, however, not only is sex, race, ethnic and class origin the criterion taken into account but also sexual orientation. Inequality between men and women is solely considered to be a part of the complex social stratification system. The rebellion feminism includes: multiracial feminism and men's feminism which examine the place taken by the groups of men and women in the social stratification system-a capacity to achieve a life success relationship, social constructivism feminism attempting to define ways used by people – during their everyday interaction – in order to construct varied identities and stereotypes. What is more, postmodern feminism and the queer theory, which regard biological sex and cultural gender as social roles, are also the constituents of the gender-rebellion feminism. Depending on situation they alter its elements and change the identity attributes. In this prospect, cultural gender may take the form of “smooth” character.

## **2. Environment for positive learning?**

It has been outlined that girls, in terms of education, are still unprivileged. Teachers, when asked questions on how they treated their pupils, replied that students were treated in the same fashion as if they were treated by their parents – mostly “everyone was treated equally” and it did not matter whether or not it regarded the boys or girls. The recent studies, however, reveal that in practice the teacher-student interactions are not based on the grounds of justice but they take a different form that is dependent on the student's sex. The differences concern both the frequency of the teacher-student interaction and the constituents of those interactions. Whatever the teacher's sex, male students interact with teachers more frequently than female students. Boys draw teachers' full attention and are given more instructions than girls. M. and D. Sadker (2002) demonstrate that distinctions dependent on the students' sex, in terms of their interactions-with-teachers' character, are related to their constituents as well. It is the authors who noticed throughout the years of observing the school lessons

that those boys who were assigned a task to do or were to solve a problem were also given a greater number of instructions by the teachers. Furthermore, teachers forced boys more often to intellectual effort and self-reliant thinking by applying a question-answer approach, which leads to the optimization of the results (cf. Ranzetti 2005).

Alternative education is on many occasions identified with organizational forms and education or upbringing models that are different from commonly accepted or the dominant ones. According to W. Okoń – alternative education, alternative schools is a popular term used in western countries which carries polysemic connotations related to education (schools) and forms an alternative for the “ordinary” upbringing, for “ordinary” schools. (cf. Okoń, 1992: 233). It was here where the author emphasized at the same time two-dimensionality of the mutually excluding situations or educational solutions. The creators of the movement, which has been trying to revive for over 20 years in the world of schools or classes monogamous in respect of sex, hence the schools separating children with regard to sex, are entering into the way of perceiving alternative education. It was not until the XIX century when education and upbringing at schools and educational centers for children and the youth was conducted separately for each sex type. The programs and rules varied (cf. Jarecka-Żyluk 2013).

In large families, education is by nature of co-educational character although it tends strongly and consistently to encourage children to partake in sexually featured activities or to emphasize sex-related stereotypes during games or doing household chores. The notion of coeducation stems from 1792 when one could notice in a French philosopher’s, writer’s, mathematician’s, political activist’s and in a school institutions, as far as the secular idea of education is concerned, reformer’s writings – de Condorcet who put emphasis on the need of creating a homogeneous school, taking into account children’s social diversity. Education for both sexes appeared in Polish elementary schools at the beginning of the XIX century. The concept of coeducation has thrived faster still in the public education not only in the United States of America, where in the second half of the XIX c. civil and education rights of men as well as women were made equal to everyone, but also in Spain, Switzerland, the Nordic countries (since 1876) and in England (since 1899). Despite making this organizational solution widely popularized due to women’s emancipation movements, making education democratic and civil rights movement at the turning of the XIX and XX century it has not become either mass or obligatory until now. It prevails in national and public schools. Yet it is still being avoided in prestigious private school.

The results of the survey on the classes and one-sex schools (for girls only) lead to optimistic conclusions. One might notice that girls attending those schools are much more confident and their school records are getting better and better year by year, which may result in them reaching a higher social status and holding better-paid positions at work. For instance, female students in one-sex schools are allowed to play with bricks and cars as well as to use a computer without being afraid of being interfered with by the male students. On the other hand, at the female academic level women are allowed to study physics, engineering or Information Technology. The phenomenon of discrimination does not appear in such institutions unlike in the coeducational ones where women studying the aforementioned majors represent the minority of the undergraduates. One will not notice a phenomenon of women being questioned on the reasonableness of studying majors popularly considered to be “male majors” by the male majority of the academic population nor by the lecturers, either. Although sex segregation has generated a heated debate in the public eye, there are also other sources of standardizing educational experience acquired by both men and women. One of them is by formulating the curriculum in such a way so it includes the range of women’s lives related problems as well as ethnic minorities or homosexual people’s issues, of course, by applying the equal rights policy. At the academic level it has become partially successful by creating so called *gender studies*.

Mixed-sex education is a supranational phenomenon noticeable in many countries of a democratic system, i.e.: in Ireland, in Luxembourg, in Austria, in Great Britain or in Australia. Apart from the legal pluralism and tolerance that are to be obeyed in a particular country the existence of mixed-sex education is conditioned by the openness of the society to “distinctness,” anti-fundamentalism, flexibility and spontaneous actions. Only thanks to that can it become a supplement part of the contemporary culture.

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