

A BROADER PERSPECTIVE OF GENDER SOCIALIZATION ACROSS FOUR SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Alina COMAN¹

Abstract: *Gender socialization is key for understanding how gender-related attitudes become internalized. This paper sheds lights into the gender socialization process and how it is reflected across the four traditional social institutions of family, church, school and mass-media. It advances the argument that gender stereotypes which continue to be enforced across centuries are power-driven social representations for limiting women' access rights across all social institutions.*

Key words: *socialising gender, social institutions.*

1. Introduction

Gender socialization captures the process of learning the social attributes of one's gender (Anderson et al., 2013). This process takes place primarily in family settings through children's interaction with their parents, but continues throughout the whole formative years. This paper offers a description of the gender socialization process across four key social institutions: family, church, school and mass-media. It draws from relevant scholarly work in gender studies and author's previous empirical work (Coman, 2002a; 2002b, 2005; 2012), to build a broader perspective of how gender becomes socialized, and how gender stereotypes continue to be enforced across centuries. The reviewed work contributes towards the argument that gender stereotypes are power-driven social representations for limiting women' access rights across all social institution: the right to express negative feelings of aggression in family context, the right to claim educational and professional achievements on the basis of skills and competencies; the right to claim women's relationship with the Divine; and the right to claim full ownership of one's body and its standards of beauty.

2. The Family Institution

Family practices strongly impact on the gender socialization; on the one hand, through the different ways in which parents treat children, and on the other hand, through the relationships between adults. With respect to the parents' different ways of treating children, findings point out the asymmetric, gender biased perceptions of children. This is reflected in the attribution of the role of toys gifted to children, as well as in parents'

¹ Transilvania University of Braşov, alina.coman@unitbv.ro

discourse about the gendered expression and control of emotions, i.e., girls can cry while boys can be aggressive. The perspective dream that was assumed in childhood and adolescence is also marked by the gender socialization.

Regarding the relationships between adults and family we have analyzed the distribution of the gender roles concerning the power traffic in the parental dyad (Coman, 2005). The distribution of gender roles in the family represents a resource for children's gender socialization because the roles offer models of gender identities and provide support for learning to assume such gender roles. Mothers' intention to teach their daughters the household chores is connected in a functionalist way to the marital and maternal roles that they will have in the future. Girls are thought to do the household chores for being able to respond to the requests that are prescribed by the wife and mother roles. These girls learn to reproduce their mothers' lives. The attention that mothers pay for teaching the boys the household chores is limited because the husband and father roles do not require this kind of instructions. Studies in this area have shown that girls are taught to do reproductive roles in a greater measure than boys (Nivette et al., 2014).

The functionalist perspective of gender socialization proposes a rigid circularity. Although the homeostatic equilibrium of the traditional family has been conserved for more than two thousand years, the costs of this incongruence of rights and obligations were exclusively felt by women. The fact that the family institution has functioned this way does not say much about the equity of women's unequal access to the personal rights and opportunities of affirmation. The massive entrance of women in the work market has been determined by the social changes due to the industrialization process, and not by the will of the patriarchal society regarding women's emancipation. The patriarchal discourse was very well conserved towards maintaining women's oppression inside the private sphere of the domestic world. The functionalist perspectives underpinned scholarly work on prostitution (Davis, 1937, 1961), and pornography (Polski, 1967, 1969), while Wood (1994, page 78) synthesized the principles of the gender socialization in family:

Becoming as man

- Don't be a woman
- Have success
- Be aggressive
- Be sexual
- Count only on yourself

Becoming as woman

- Look good
- Be sensitive and take care of others
- To be treated depreciatory by others
- Be a super-woman
- After 90 years there are a multitude of meanings assigned to womanhood

3. The Church Institution

In a critique of the church institution, Manolache (1994) argues for its role in driving women away from the church. Women were accused of being dirty, impure and untouchable and therefore forbidden to enter the church that Christ had offered for everybody without exceptions. In the author's vision, Jesus has abolished all the taboos affirming that nothing is impure but the evil in people's hearts and their actions. This echoes the Gospels' story in which Jesus breaks the taboo of menstruation, healing a woman that was considered impure for twelve years because of her continuous hemorrhage (Mark, 5:24-34; Mathew, 89: 18- 26; Lucas, 8: 40-56). In an earlier work entitled "Women, Earth and Creator Spirit", Johnson (1993) presents an inconsistent justification that was preferred by the clergy regarding sex in

the religious communities: women cannot represent Jesus in the Christian communities because their gender is different from that of Jesus'. This way the two most feminine experiences - menstruation and giving birth continue to substantiate during two millenniums the concept that the woman is full with negative energies and therefore incapable for intimacy with the Divine. In the Middle Ages the Christian Church successfully associated the women and sexuality with the "devil". Johnson (1993) argues that the witch hunting has connections with the concept according to which the relationship between the moon cycle and menstruation gave women an occult and heathen wisdom. The servants of the Church banned the relief of the pains implied by giving birth because they thought that pain was a natural punishment for women. The priests advised women to assume their abusive and violent domestic relationships "as a contribution to God's will".

Later on, the laws of purity were overtaken by the Hebraic tradition and from the celibacy discussed by the hierarchical and Greek cultures. Christianity has inherited this discriminatory vision about women and perpetuated it within the monarchal and church concepts. According to the catholic and orthodox traditions, the entering of women in the altar risks profaning the sacred rituals.

In her work "Women's Difference and Equal Rights in the Church", Ruether (1991) discussed and analyzed the consequences of a recent misogynic religious practice. This relates to the Pope's letter in 1988 which affirms that although women and men have equal rights, women's are special. The author insists on the consequences that derive from this affirmation officially declaring that "*women are equal by nature but unequal by grace*". The Christian Church perpetuates a fundamental legitimacy (in the middle of the modern era), namely the prohibition ordaining women as priests.

A similar argument has been advanced by Grahn in his work "Sacred Blood to the Curse and beyond" (1982) about perceptions and beliefs connected to the exclusive female experiences. The discrimination of the woman by the man is based on ancestral power traffic. The control that purity laws have had on women was considered proof of this thing. In the author's vision the clerk regulations of this control have turned the woman's body- sacred because of the capacity of giving birth - into an element of patriarchal control. In our opinion women's were not banned from entering the altar and from occupying key positions in the clerical hierarchy because of the discriminatory interpretation of the natural experiences of men and women. The patriarchal discourse was the one declaring the woman's body impure for preserving the state's power.

4. The School Institution

Coppock and colleagues (1995) reviewed the key aspects underlining the presence of gender stereotypes in the context of the educational practices in schools. The teachers' expectations have a very important role in defining the incongruence between role and sex and the girls' marginalization. Stanworth's work (1981) emphasized the fact that teachers' attention is focused on students advantaging the boys, that the expectations towards girls' achievements are lower than those for boys, and that teachers appreciate less girls' achievements than boys'. Stanworth concludes that such attitudes determine children to realize their belonging to a certain gender and produce a certain reference to the members of the other gender.

In their study on primary school girls, Licht and Dweck (1983) analyzed girls' lack of confidence in their abilities to solve different intellectual tasks, despite the well-known fact

that school girls have at least as good academic achievements as boys'. The two researchers have concluded that girls, more frequently than boys, connect the failure with the lack of abilities while boys think that the reason for not understanding a concept or the incapacity of solving correctly a problem is due to the lack of effort. If in the primary school, girls constantly obtain higher achievements, they should obtain greater university results in comparison with boys. However, when it comes to the job market, the well paid positions that result in the highest social statuses are occupied by men. In the authors' vision, the fact that girls continue to underestimate their own achievements is the result of the gender stereotypes transmitted by the educational practices and of the fact that girls have been treated by teachers in a different manner than boys.

The representatives of the two sexes are encouraged to develop and to introduce themselves in a socially desirable way. Therefore girls become more modest and boys get more self-confident. That's why girls could be more perceptive to the negative feedback, while boys are much more receptive to the positive feedback. Girls are thought to look nice, to behave properly, and they will work harder to satisfy their teachers and to build up a career. Due to the fact that girls are less criticized regarding their efforts and respect for the disciplinary rules, both teachers and students tend to explain girls' failure by the lack of certain abilities than by the lack of a sustained effort. In reality the fact that few girls are affirmed should reflect the lack of a sustained effort in teaching and the use of inefficient teaching methods.

Miroiu (1999) argued that the formal educational curricula mark the socialization of the gender stereotypes from childhood until adolescence. The primary school and the high-school create "*a comfortable feminine*" environment, receptive to any kind of enforcement, order and discipline that punish or inhibit divergent thinking. While girls are banned to behave aggressively, boys are allowed to. Boys are also encouraged to aspire towards professional careers allowing increased vertical mobility on the professional market while girls are advised to orientate exclusively towards female professional roles that are stereotypical and limitative. In the educational practices the de-mixed games are encouraged. There are subjects in which these kinds of differences are omnipresent, i.e., physical education or crafts. If the studied texts are about a boy and a girl, the boy's name comes first- the boy's name has priority. For professions, the gender accord is not done. Women are presented as having natural features and not virtues.

They are presented in rational terms: mothers, daughters, friends and lovers while men are defined in occupational terms. We mention that in the Romanian gender studies there is limited work focusing on gender issues in connection with the reality that contains these differences and which delivers them based on several social discourses (family, school, church, mass-media). An exception is Grunberg's work (1996) describing the outcomes of a content analysis of several primary school textbooks, insisting on the gender stereotypes that were transmitted through these educational materials. Following I presented the results of a content analysis of Romanian primary school textbooks (Coman et al., 2002).

5. The Mass- media Institution

We first focus on how mass-media socializes the gender among adolescents and young people, and how it promotes positive enforcements of gender inequalities across ages.

Discourse for gender roles

In June 1985 *Antenne 2* and *Telerama* have organized and filmed an experiment in which a

group of 22 families who volunteered to take part in a study, were asked to not watch TV. A year later this idea generated a TV show that illustrated the central role that television has in people's lives. Here are the voluntaries' most important reproaches:

It brakes the relationships within a couple, estranges children from their parents, disturbs the study of the latter, diminishes curiosity and the practice of other activities (reading, music, going out, dates, sports) and finally it is a conserving instrument of the family's traditional roles because the man watches TV while the woman takes care of the household (Coste-Cerdan and Le Diberder, 1991, p. 152).

In the chapter entitled "Mirror, dear mirror who is the most beautiful in this country? - the image of women in Romanian television shows" (Dragomir, 2002), Surugiu offers a synthesis of the gender differences enforced by the mass-media. In a similar direction, Gunter's "Television and Sex Role Stereotyping" (1986) describes woman's image in television as tributary to the gender stereotypes. The study outcomes indicate the modest presence of women in television roles (and when it happens, it consists mostly of traditional female roles). In TV soap operas, women spend much time in the house and are not shown working. In spite of the fact that reality is different, women are presented incapable of doing things that are not connected to the household chores. Gunter further argues that irrespectively of their age, all women appearing on TV productions are overly preoccupied with their physical appearance.

Discourse for the masculine aggressions

Now we turn our attention to the mass-media's discourse on aggressiveness. In a review of the impact of gender models on aggressive behaviors, Feshbach and Singer (1971) have shown the negative impact of TV violence on increasing aggressive behavior. The authors insist on the fact that those that argue for the cathartic effect of the violent TV scenes, and arguably their harmlessness, consider only the short term effects. The long term effect of TV violence is higher aggression.

I have explained the manner in which boys are more socialized for aggression than girls. The mass-media delivers contents loaded with violence but often in association with masculine models. We refer here to the productions in which masculine aggression is crowned as art or spectacle (Arnold Schwarzenegger, Chuck Norris, Jean Claude Vandame) and to those in which men beat women (e.g. the TV show called *Leana si Costel* of Vacanta Mare group).

The woman's vulnerability: family violence

By crowning male aggression as an art, mass-media encourages female's victimization. Although most of the films rich in violent scenes do not necessarily intend to victimize women, they nevertheless continue to enforce the patriarchal discourse according to which the man is powerful and can use his force, he is superior and has almost total rights upon his woman. We illustrate this discourse with the below excerpt from the *Playboy* magazine (April, 2002, pp. 100-101).

Discourse about the woman's body and the access to it

By all its forms, but especially by publicity, the mass-media promotes an obsessive feminine beauty which limits women. *In the second half of the 20th century the socially desired female beauty is unnatural and that's why the whole transformation ritual of the*

woman's body necessarily implies certain costs. The same thing happened in other historical ages too.

In Woolf's critique (1997) the beauty myth prevails over other myths of gender stereotypes (maternity, domesticity, virginity, virtue, and passivity). According to such studies, in the last decade of the last century, 3300 American women declared that their main objective was to lose about 5-10 kilograms. In the last two decades of the last century, cosmetic industry and plastic surgery have greatly developed because of women's unhappiness with their appearance. Therefore this transformation has to be assisted by hair and make-up artists that are experts in cosmetics, dermatology and plastic surgery and by cosmetic products that are continually promoted through advertisements. The success model of the happy housewife is replaced by a perfect silhouette and a wrinkle free complexion.

Bandura (1977) described a similar argument about exposure to pornographic materials, which supports the beliefs of men's enforcement and maintains the myth of the rape. The pornographic portray of kidnapped women that were shaken by the ecstasy of the sexual intercourse with the kidnappers, encourages men to arrive to an inhuman judgment that women need to be abused.

According to several studies completed in the USA in the 7th and 8th decennials of the last century, approximately a fifth of the male population has used pornographic materials even from adolescence (Clinard and Meier, 1995). Thatcher (1993) describes a UK study where teenagers below 14 years interviewed about the source of their sexual knowledge answered that it was pornography. Beyond the fact that it is a successful industry, pornography socializes. Another element that has to be underlined is the Internet. According to several studies, the Internet is a great way to reach pornographic materials. In spite of the fact that the informational globalization brings huge benefits to the whole civilization the liberty to maximum access to information in all domains and to all kind of services makes pornography on the Internet accessible to any curious young man that has no real sexual life.

6. Conclusions. The circularization of the gender socialization

To conclude, we argue that the gender socialization enlightens an intense traffic of gender attributions. With respect to educational and professional achievements, these are differently explained depending on gender. While men's successes are explained through internal causes, often in terms of superior intellectual abilities, women's successes are based on circumstantial, external factors rather than intellectual abilities. The causes of men's success are predominantly intrinsic. In contrast, their failure is also connected to intrinsic elements but with no reference to the cognitive capacities. In other words men's success has a well-marked natural character. Women's success is unnatural and therefore attributed to circumstances and to external factors that have nothing to do with their labor. Women's failure however is connected with poor intellectual skills.

The conclusion to which these attributions lead is that women are predisposed for bankruptcy behaviors because they are not intelligent, even when they are successful. Success is landed to men. This idea is supported by the fact that both in the family (National Public Radio, 1992, USA.) and the school practices (Stanworth, 1981), men's successes are gratified while women's aren't. The use of these attributions in the informal and formal educational discourses (family, school) obsessively retries the socialization with gender contents that are considered to be self-affirming prophecies.

The consequences of this fact are multiple (Ilut, 2000). One of them is gender educational

and professional orientation. This is of modest value for girls because their success depends on luck, and massive effort; but of considerable value for men because they grow up in the comfort of being naturally equipped for success. Another consequence shows the women's lower expectancy and aspiration levels in comparison with men on the same ability level (Beyer & Bowden, 1997). Women are less oriented towards the dimension of the social dominance; a reason for not actively pursuing careers that imply social ascendance (Paretto et al., 1997). In comparison with men, women provide a greater social support to others (Shumaker & Hill, 1991; Unger & Crawford, 1992), while the locus of control is also gender-driven, with women being externalists in a greater proportion than men (Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).

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