

GENDER-ROLE SOCIALIZATION OF YOUTH IN CONTEMPORARY CONDITIONS

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Summary

The article examines the factors that influence the process of shaping an individual as a representative of a particular gender and that determine the behaviours of individuals as men or women. It explores approaches by foreign and domestic scholars in defining the terms “gender-role socialization” and “gender socialization”, as well as related concepts of “sex” and “gender.”

The primary stages of the gender-role, or gender socialization process, are described, including primary socialization, which begins at birth and ends at adulthood, and secondary gender socialization, which begins during social maturity and continues throughout life. The factors affecting a child’s personality development are characterized. The most significant agent of a child’s gender socialization is the family, as children consciously and subconsciously model their behaviour after their parents, internalizing gender roles and aspects of inter-gender relationships. Another factor influencing gender-role socialization is the presence of older or younger siblings and whether the child is raised in a complete or single parent family. Peer groups, school environments, and mass media also affect the internalization of social values, as specific norms and behaviour patterns and the acquisition of formal and informal knowledge regarding theories and practices of gender behaviour stereotypes.

Key words: sex, gender, gender socialization, gender roles, gender identity, gender-role identification.

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1. Introduction

A necessary factor in personality development, without which the formation of personal qualities does not occur, is socialization – the process through which individuals not only internalize established forms, attitudes, behaviour patterns, and methods of social life, interacting with material and spiritual culture, and adapting to society, but also develop their own social experience, value orientations, and lifestyle.

In contemporary psychological and pedagogical research, the process of personality formation is increasingly viewed in terms of gender identity, examining individuals as representatives of a particular gender and carriers of specific inherent qualities that determine individual behaviour as male or female, boy or girl.

It is generally accepted in science that the formation of human gender differences occurs under the influence of the sociocultural environment as a result of internalizing a system of

social values, which includes specific norms, behavioural patterns, and appearances associated with male or female gender roles.

Children acquire social behaviour norms and values by emulating their parents and identifying with them. These processes are particularly significant, as they are not consciously recognized by children nor explicitly controlled by parents. Children orient themselves toward the example set by their parents, strive to emulate them, and adopt the gender-role behaviours of their parents.

2. Approaches to defining the concept

In a broad sense, gender-role socialization is the formation of an individual as a representative of a particular gender. Frequently, the term “gender socialization” is used instead of “gender-role socialization.” It is believed that the term “gender” was first introduced into scientific discourse by American psychoanalyst Robert Stoller in his work “Sex and Gender: On the Development of Masculinity and Femininity” (R. Stoller, 1968). R. Stoller viewed “gender” as a concept reflecting psychological, social, and cultural traits, independent of those explained by biological sex. Thus, it is not necessary to link a woman’s existence with “femininity” or a man’s with “masculine” behaviour. This approach was supported by many sociologists, initiating a new direction in social research –gender studies. Today, this term is used in various senses: to denote sex – “social sex”; to express societal expectations of what men or women should do. The process through which individuals acquire gender roles is denoted by the term “gender-role socialization.”

Numerous factors influence the development of human gender characteristics. Over recent decades, significant changes in gender roles have occurred, resulting in various models that do not always align with traditional stereotypes of masculinity-femininity. Against this backdrop of change within the sphere of gender culture, a contradiction arises between the evolution of gender roles and the conservatism of gender stereotypes, affecting the nature of the gender-role socialization process.

The issue of gender-role socialization is not new; however, its relevance not only remains but has grown. This is evidenced by the large number of international and domestic scientific works in which authors explore various aspects associated with gender identity. Nevertheless, there is still no consensus on the terminology for this process, leading to diverse perspectives: gender-role, sex, gender, differential, and gender-role socialization. Here are some definitions of this term proposed by scientists.

According to American sociologists T. Parsons and R. Bales, “gender socialization” is the process of a child’s internalization of gender roles and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity as required by society (T. Parsons *et al.*, 1955). V. Kravets defines “gender socialization” as a process of directed and spontaneous influences on an individual that helps them assimilate norms, behavioral rules, and attitudes in line with cultural representations of the role, position, and purpose of the sexes in society, thereby becoming a complete man or woman and integrating into an established system of gender roles (V. Kravets, 2003). In T. Hovorun’s research, gender socialization is defined as “a social function aimed at the distribution of gender roles, expanding their range, and harmonizing gender interactions in various spheres of human existence” (T. Hovorun *et al.*, 2016).

V. Romanova describes gender-role socialization as “the process by which individuals internalize sociocultural factors that account for most existing features of gender-role behaviour. These factors primarily include: gender attitudes as a system of views about men

and women; cultural stereotypes of masculinity and femininity; distinct methods of raising boys and girls; gender-specific types of labour; and differentiated male and female roles” (V. Romanova, 2002). V. Moskalenko interprets this as “the process of forming characteristics that define an individual as male or female” (V. Moskalenko, 2013). A. Ablitarova defines this concept as “the assimilation of sociocultural values by an individual, which determines most of the existing characteristics of gender-role behaviour” (A. Ablitarova, 2010). P. Hornostai defines gender-role socialization as the process by which a person internalizes gender roles, societal expectations regarding these roles, as well as gender development of the individual, i.e., the formation of psychological characteristics that correspond to gender roles (P. Hornostai, 2010).

3. Stages of Gender-Role Socialization

Researchers present the process of gender role or gender socialization, which gives rise to gender identity, as a three-stage process associated with personality development. It includes three stages:

1. Gender identity (sex identification), achieved by the age of three (referred to as “awareness of gender affiliation” or “gender identification”);
2. Competence in behaviour during the ages of 7 to 12 years (termed “gender differentiation of behaviour” or “self-socialization”), which aligns with the perceptions of gender roles and standards of masculinity and femininity, as well as the formation of psychological traits attributed to the respective gender by society;
3. Establishment of primary identity, described by Erik Erikson (referred to as “re-evaluation of gender identity” or “self-regulation”) (E. Erikson, 1968).

Researchers differentiate between primary and secondary gender socialization. Primary gender socialization begins at birth and continues until the onset of adulthood (18 years). Awareness of one’s gender affiliation develops in children by the age of one and a half years. A two-year-old child knows their gender but is not yet able to justify this attribution. By the age of three to four, a child can distinguish the gender of others but often associates it with purely external characteristics (such as clothing) and allows for the possibility of gender fluidity. By the age of six to seven, the child fully realizes the irreversibility of gender affiliation. Between the ages of seven and ten, they learn the basic rules of propriety, and their behaviour significantly differs from that of a three-to-five-year-old child. During the ages of 14 to 17, issues of gender socialization and sexual education become central to school life. In this period, and sometimes at an earlier age, adolescents experience their first crush.

In accordance with the role of the child’s leading activities and the institutions that play a crucial role in gender socialization, two important stages are identified in primary gender socialization: firstly, childhood, in which the dominant institution is the family and play is the leading activity; and secondly, adolescence, characterized by the addition of the school as an institution and peer interaction becoming the leading activity. Secondary gender socialization begins during the period of social maturity and continues throughout life. This period also has several stages corresponding to the transition from one social-age status to another (T. Hovorun et al., 2014).

During gender socialization, the establishment of gender identity occurs under the influence of biological prerequisites and the regularities of gender differentiation. Among its most important elements are the personal and gender characteristics of parents, including their gender identity and role models, the child’s gender, parents’ expectations about how their child of a particular gender should behave, and the features of socialization institutions. As noted above,

gender socialization literally begins at the moment of a child's birth, although the anticipation of the birth of a child of a particular gender also entails a certain attitude from the parents. Parents attempt to determine the future child's gender and build various plans regarding them, choose a name, and create an image of the unborn child. Through upbringing, the family, the education system, and culture embed gender norms in children's consciousness, forming specific rules and creating notions of who is a "real man" and what a "real woman" should be, i.e., gender stereotypes (*O. Kononko, 1998*).

American sociologist Ruth Hartley identifies four primary ways in which adults construct a child's gender role: socialization through manipulation, verbal appeal, channelling, and demonstration of activities. An example of the first process is a mother's concern about her daughter's appearance; the second involves addressing the child in a style like "you are my beauty", emphasizing her attractiveness. The child learns to view herself through her mother's eyes, while verbal appeals enhance the manipulative action. The girl gets the idea that appearance and nice clothing are very important. Channelling refers to directing the child's attention to specific objects, such as toys suited for playing "house" or imitating household items. Children often receive social approval for playing with gender-appropriate toys. Demonstration of activities is expressed, for instance, in the fact that daughters are much more often asked to help around the house than sons. Thus, girls learn to behave and act "like Mom", while boys learn to act "like Dad".

In Western psychological literature, the gender schema theory (*S. Bem, 1993*) has recently been the most widely used to explain the mechanism of gender information transmission from parents to children. It is based on two theories of role acquisition: social learning theory and cognitive development theory. Proponents of social learning theory believe that the development of gender role behaviour depends on parental models that the child tries to imitate and on the reinforcements that parents provide for the child's behaviour (positive reinforcement for behaviour appropriate to their gender and negative reinforcement for behaviour that is contrary to it). According to cognitive development theory, in the process of acquiring a gender role, the child's own activity is of paramount importance. The child learns about the existence of two genders and identifies themselves within one of the categories, subsequently regulating their behaviour based on this self-definition and choosing various forms of behaviour. The ability of children to categorize and process information facilitates gender typing.

Gender typing is the result of processing information through a gender schema, meaning the readiness to assimilate information about oneself in the context of "male-female" concepts. This processing occurs because society has accepted gender-identifying practices. Gender typing, as a process of acquiring preferences, skills, attitudes, and behaviours appropriate to one's gender, occurs as a result of gender schematization. Gender schematization is a generalized and trained cognitive readiness of children to code and organize information about themselves and others according to cultural definitions of "male-female".

The next stage of gender role acquisition involves the integration of the gender schema into the child's self-concept structure. The child learns to apply the schema not only for selecting external information but also in relation to themselves. Children choose from many possible human characteristics only those that are culturally defined as acceptable for them or their gender, thus organizing the content of their self-concept. Concurrently, children learn to evaluate themselves against the gender schema (as parents and others discipline them), contrasting their own preferences, behaviours, and traits with those of the opposite gender. The gender schema becomes a prescription that dictates behavioural standards.

S. Bem emphasized that the gender schema theory is a process theory rather than a content theory. Gender typing distinguishes individuals not by the degree of femininity or

masculinity but by the extent to which their self-concept and behaviour are organized based on the gender schema.

4. Factors of gender-role socialization

The development of a child's personality is influenced by numerous factors, including the type, composition, and structure of the family, the birth order of children, the professional roles of parents, and the nature of marital and parent-child relationships. The most significant agents of gender socialization within the family are the personal and gender characteristics of the parents, their identity and role models, the sex of the newborn child, and the parents' perceptions of what a child of a given gender should be like. Through their parents, children fulfil their needs for psychological and physical security, emotional communication, and learn about the rules of behaviour among individuals of the opposite sex. Contemporary researchers, such as A. Ablitarova, place great importance on the relationships between mothers and children, shared experiences, and parental communication with children, which stimulate the child's individuality according to gender and shape their vision of future family life.

Regardless of how much a boy loves his mother, he primarily imitates his father. The same happens with girls; despite their love for their father, they identify themselves with their mother. Through the process of identifying with their parents, children develop their attitudes toward men and women and learn the norms of inter-gender communication. Parents support typical behaviours for boys, girls, and exhibit negative attitudes toward behaviours that deviate from their gender norms. Through words and example, children internalize a set of behavioural rules "for boys" and "for girls." Boys are taught to restrain their emotional expressions earlier than girls do. In any relevant situation, a father reminds his son how real men behave: they are not afraid of the dark, they offer their hand to their mother and sister when getting off the bus, etc. (*L. Oliynyk, 2010*).

After the age of 5–6, the process of gender role socialization becomes more complex, as children begin to choose book and movie/video heroes as role models: for girls, this includes princesses, ladies, and fairy tale characters. Imitating female figures often encourages children to develop artistic abilities. For example, when portraying their favourite heroine, girls dance, sing, and tell their own stories. Unfortunately, among contemporary boys, the bearers of masculine behaviour often include not-so-positive heroes, characters from cartoons, action movies, and video games. As a result, behaviours such as defiance and rudeness emerge, which are mistakenly perceived as displays of masculinity.

The family shapes a child's conscious attitude toward themselves as an independent personality equal to others, leading to the development of a positive self-image, a sense of dignity, and personal significance among others. According to S. Lytvynenko, the family can determine the development of personality, promoting self-development at both conscious and subconscious levels, but it can also negatively impact the process of a child's gender role socialization (*S. Lytvynenko et al., 2003*).

Many children are raised in single-parent families, where upbringing is solely the responsibility of the mother. Such "feminine pedagogy" complicates the formation of adequate gender role perceptions and masculine gender-role identification in boys, hindering their assimilation of "male" gender roles and values. A boy who grows up without a father may gradually exhibit feminine traits. Masculine characteristics may be absent due to excessive maternal care. The absence of a father can also lead to serious disruptions in the child's psychological development, decreased social activity, personality deformities, and impairments in the process of gender-role identification,

as well as various behavioural issues and mental health problems. Psychologists believe that boys raised solely by their mothers adopt feminine behaviour patterns or develop unrealistic notions of male interaction models, leading to difficulties in future relationships with the opposite sex. Often, such boys vulgarize masculinity by adding aggression, rudeness, and irritability to their behaviour as markers of male behavioural stereotypes. As they mature, these boys tend to be less socially mature than their peers from well-off families are. The absence of a father also affects the gender-role socialization of girls, as gender-role socialization for children of different sexes requires the presence of both male and female role models. If the child remains with the opposite-sex parent, the process of gender identification is slowed and complicated. At the same time, the motivated absence of one parent has a less negative impact on the child's development than an aggressive relationship between the parents. As noted, parental influence derives not only from their words but also from the atmosphere within the family. Not only biological differences in sex but also cultural traditions of child rearing determine how future men and women will build their families. Simultaneous exposure to both parental roles provides awareness of the patterns and characteristics of inter-gender communication and develops skills for establishing and regulating harmonious relationships between the sexes. Psychologists have proven that girls from single-parent families have less chance of understanding their husbands and sons in adulthood, as well as predicting their behaviour and desires, compared to girls from complete, well-functioning families (S. Kharchenko et al., 2012).

When analysing the family's influence on children's gender-role socialization, it is important to note the impact of siblings on this process. Research by L. Yatsenko shows that older siblings significantly influence the formation of gender identification. The researcher notes that an older sister has a greater impact on a younger sister, just as an older brother does on a younger brother, since younger children prefer same-sex interactions and more easily identify with same-sex relatives. In particular, the example of an older brother helps a boy identify with the role of a father, facilitating the process of gender role typification in male behaviour (L. Yatsenko et al., 2007).

According to T. Hovorun and O. Shargana, gender-role upbringing in the family is a dynamic phenomenon that changes over time. In modern families, the stereotypical division of roles into male and female gradually diminishes in significance due to the overall democratization of traditional gender norms in the socialization of children (T. Hovorun et al., 2016).

Another significant system of gender identity formation is the socialization system "child-child," which comes into play somewhat later compared to the family and takes place within various types of collectives. Adults have always granted children the right to form their own, unique child subculture, which includes methods of discussing forbidden topics and sharing necessary sexual knowledge. This subculture contains the most acceptable, child-friendly, and time-tested forms, texts, and behaviour stereotypes.

The child community has always served as an important educational institution, a kind of testing ground where children acquire relevant knowledge and practice the behavioural skills they have learned. It is within peer groups that children receive a large portion of the knowledge they need and assimilate the stereotypes of sexual behaviour accepted in that particular society.

A powerful means through which society reproduces gender and social relations is the education system. According to many feminist researchers, schools play a significant role in establishing ideas about the natural role limitations of women, fostering feelings of professional inadequacy and social deprivation among girls.

At the same time, it should be noted that there is currently some progress in maintaining gender equality through educational materials. Modern textbooks represent a broader range of women's occupations, bringing them closer to male professions, and vice versa.

Gender role typification and socialization are also reinforced by mass media, including magazines, radio broadcasts, television, and most powerfully, the Internet. Today, the Internet offers quick and easy access to any information. Modern youth are often Internet-dependent; spending a significant portion of their time online, where there is not only a wealth of useful information but also easy access to pornographic sites and adult literature, which can negatively affect the overall development of the individual.

5. Conclusions

Thus, one of the main components of the socialization of the younger generation is gender role socialization, during which adaptation and integration into society occur, and the gender role repertoire is assimilated. The formation of human gender differences takes place under the influence of the sociocultural environment as a result of the individual assimilating a system of social values, which includes certain norms, behaviour patterns, and external appearances associated with the male or female gender. It is essential to clearly differentiate between the concepts of "sex" and "gender", as recent scientific discourse distinctly separates the biological and sociocultural aspects of male and female differences, linking them to the concepts of sex and gender. These two concepts are interrelated and mutually complementary.

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