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GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE MINDS OF RUSSIAN STUDENT YOUTH

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Abstract

The article presents the results of an empirical study aimed at studying gender stereotypes among Russian students. The article aims to study the images of the "ideal woman" and "ideal man" in the minds of young people and the degree to which they correspond to the traditional stereotypes of masculinity and femininity. The study was carried out on a sample of 169 students at the Pedagogical University (73 boys and 96 girls). The subjects were asked to characterize the following images: "Ideal woman", "Ideal man", noting the degree of their agreement with phrases characterizing personality traits. All qualities were divided into two groups: "traditional" and "non-traditional", following the characteristics of traditional gender stereotypes. The research results show that in the image of the "ideal woman" in the assessments of both girls and boys, non-traditional features are more pronounced, while in the image of the "ideal man", traditional features prevail in the assessments of both groups. The difference in assessments is most pronounced in the group of girls: they are the ones who most highly rate non-traditional features in the image of an "ideal woman" and traditional features in the image of an "ideal man". This carries with it potential moments of disagreement in relations between the sexes, as, moving away from the traditional stereotype of femininity, girls expect men to implement the traditional stereotype of masculinity. Young men are not yet ready to accept a masculine woman, although they do not want her to be necessarily feminine either.

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Keywords: Gender, gender stereotypes, masculinity, femininity



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1. Introduction

In modern society, there is an increasingly intense change in gender stereotypes, i.e., stable generalized social ideas about the personal and behavioral characteristics of men and women. The literature contains conflicting data on the prevalence and transformation of traditional gender stereotypes in modern society. Some believe that they are going through a period of intense decomposition, and others believe that they are highly resistant (Ageev, 1987). It is likely that in different countries, the state of gender stereotypes is very different. It can be assumed that in the countries of Western Europe and North America this process is going at a faster pace, and in Russia and the countries of the East - at a slower pace; this is due to various factors - social, economic, cultural ones. However, these assumptions need empirical verification. The question of the possibilities of transforming traditional gender stereotypes in the modern changing world is also debatable; they can be preserved, but at the same time partially changed. All of the above makes it relevant to conduct empirical research on gender stereotypes in different countries, with different social and cultural characteristics. It is especially important to conduct such studies on a youth sample since it is this age group that most quickly assimilates the changes taking place in society. We have carried out an empirical study aimed at studying gender stereotypes among Russian students.

2. Problem Statement

The problem of gender differences in modern society is extremely controversial. Differences between the sexes in the field of intelligence and behavior were associated with both their biological characteristics and social factors associated with differences in the socialization of boys and girls. At present, as the researchers note, the model of the interaction of biological and social factors is becoming more and more approved in comparison with earlier monocausal models (Jenkins, 2010; Levant, 1996; Prostotina, 2017). This model views gender differences not as biological or even social “facts”, but rather as psychologically and socially constructed entities.

Gender stereotypes are understood as stable generalized social ideas about the personal and behavioral characteristics of men and women (Prostotina, 2017). Gender stereotypes include cognitive and emotional characteristics, social roles, behavioral characteristics of men and women, as well as gender-related expectations arising from the characteristics of gender socialization (Neimand, 2016; Romanovskaya, 2005). Over the centuries, traditional gender stereotypes have developed based on the division of functions between the sexes: a rational, leading man who supports the family in the face of the outside world, and an emotional, driven woman who supports the family from the inside.

In modern society, assessments of the meaning of gender stereotypes are different. Many studies point out their negative aspects, primarily for women. First, gender stereotypes can be one of the reasons for gender discrimination, especially in a number of professions traditionally considered male; this phenomenon can be viewed in the context of stigmatization of women in some areas of professional activity (Biernat & Dovidio, 2000). Secondly, gender roles imply that women still bear greater responsibility for fulfilling family responsibilities, while they have begun to actively carry out functions that were usually delegated to men in the past, for example, generating income. This leads to role overstrain of women, as they are still considered to be more responsible for the family (Galick, 2016). Thirdly, gender stereotypes

can contribute to the limited self-realization of women in a number of areas of professional activity in which they consider themselves incapable, and negatively affect their self-esteem (Crocer & Quinn, 2000; Shevchenko, 2010).

Some researchers note the negative effects of gender stereotyping on men as well. First, it was noted that the stereotype of a strong and restrained man contributes to the fact that men tend to deny their emotional experiences and displace them into the unconscious instead of reacting to them. They rarely discuss their psychological problems, considering it "unmanly", and, therefore, do not receive the necessary social support in the immediate environment; they also seek professional psychological help significantly less than women. All this leads to the fact that many men use alcohol, drugs, and going to the Internet (Internet addiction, gambling) as means of coping with stress; suicides are much more common among men (Zivotofsky & Voslowsky, 2005). Secondly, the traditional stereotype of masculinity imposes on a man a very high responsibility for the financial support of his family, therefore, in difficult socio-economic situations, men experience severe stress. As noted by Möller-Leimküller (2004), in Eastern Europe at the beginning of the 21st century, the mortality rate in the group of middle-aged men was 4 times higher than that in countries with stable economies. According to the author, it is middle-aged men who, considering themselves unable to cope with their gender role as breadwinner, have proved to be the most vulnerable during the period of intense changes.

Recently, however, studies have appeared that note the positive functions of gender stereotypes associated with the translation of social experience and social adaptation of the individual (Chen et al., 2019; Piotrowski et al., 2019).

The issue of the prevalence of gender stereotypes and their resilience to change is also controversial. Their loosening and erosion in modern society have been noted (Ageev, 1987; Thelwall, 2020). At the same time, as recent studies show, traditional ideas about men and women still have a significant impact on the experience and expression of feelings (Szabo et al., 2019), on the features of the manifestation of empathy (Silfver & Helkama, 2007), on the patterns of behavior in interpersonal relations (Wu et al., 2019), on the perception of politicians (Hunt et al., 2014). Moreover, recent evidence suggests that in countries with a high gender equality index, psychological differences between men and women are more pronounced; thus, as gender equality rises, both men and women gravitate towards their traditional gender roles (Giolla & Kajonius, 2019).

3. Research Questions

The study of gender stereotypes among Russian students was carried out in December 2019. 169 students at the Pedagogical University (73 boys and 96 girls) were the respondents. The age of the subjects varied from 18 to 22 years. 2.9% of the respondents were married.

The following research questions were posed:

- To study the images of the "ideal woman" and "ideal man" in the minds of Russian student youth.
- To study the degree of correspondence of the images of the "ideal woman" and "ideal man" among young people to the traditional gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity.

4. Purpose of the Study

We set out to study the extent to which the images of men and women among Russian student youth correspond to traditional gender stereotypes.

5. Research Methods

To conduct the research, we modified the gender stereotypes survey questionnaire (O. L. Kustova). The subjects were asked to characterize the following images: "ideal woman", "ideal man", noting on a 10-point scale the degree of agreement with adjectives and phrases characterizing personality traits. All qualities were divided into two groups: "traditional" and "non-traditional", following the characteristics of traditional gender stereotypes. So, for the image of the "ideal woman", such characteristics as "attentive to the needs of others", "trusting" were considered as "traditional", and "loves to compete", "callous" as "non-traditional". For the image of the "ideal man", such characteristics as "analytical mind", "strong personality" were considered as "traditional", and "prefers compromises", "hopes for the help of others" as "non-traditional". Then the average score was calculated in the assessments made by each subject in the group of "traditional qualities" and in the group of "non-traditional qualities" for both images - "ideal woman" and "ideal man".

6. Findings

The results of the study of the image of the "ideal woman" are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The image of the "ideal woman" in boys and girls

Groups of respondents	Traditional traits		Unconventional traits	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Girls	5.21	1.31	6.38	1.26
Boys	4.93	1.29	5.11	1.23

The results of the study of the image of the "ideal man" are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. The image of the "ideal man" in boys and girls

Groups of respondents	Traditional traits		Unconventional traits	
	Mean	Standard deviation	Mean	Standard deviation
Girls	6.29	1.16	4.95	1.21
Boys	5.94	1.30	4.32	1.36

The data presented in the table show that in the image of the "ideal woman" in the assessments of both girls and boys, non-traditional features are more pronounced, while in the image of the "ideal man", traditional features prevail in the assessments of both groups. Checking the statistical significance of the revealed differences between the level of expression of traditional and non-traditional traits was checked

using the Student's t-test. All differences are statistically significant at $p < 0.05$, except for their severity in the perception of the image of an “ideal woman” by young men.

The difference in assessments is most pronounced in the group of girls: they are the ones who most highly rate non-traditional features in the image of an “ideal woman” and traditional features in the image of an “ideal man”. Thus, girls believe that women can move away from the traditional stereotype of femininity, but men should generally adhere to the traditional stereotype of masculinity.

Young men believe that the “ideal man” should be dominated by traditional masculine traits; as for the “ideal woman,” she should be approximately equally combining traditional and non-traditional traits.

The data obtained indicate that the traditional male stereotype is much more preserved in the minds of Russian student youth than the female one. Both boys and girls give higher marks to the traditional traits of the “ideal man” image.

As for the image of the “ideal woman”, it is intensively moving away from the traditional stereotype, acquiring more and more nontraditional, masculine features. Both boys and girls give higher marks to non-traditional traits of the “ideal woman” image. In modern conditions, when women are more and more focused on professional growth, this can be considered a natural process. However, this carries with it potential moments of disagreement in relations between the sexes, as, moving away from the traditional stereotype of femininity, girls expect men to implement the traditional stereotype of masculinity. Recall that traditional gender stereotypes were built on the principle of complementarity: a rational, leading man and an emotional, driven woman. Modern girls themselves strive to demonstrate masculine traits and expect the same from men, which can lead to conflicts over the distribution of leadership and the performance of various social roles. As for the young men, they are not yet ready to accept a masculine woman, although they do not want her to be necessarily feminine.

Our data, on the whole, are consistent with the results of studies carried out in recent years on the Russian sample. Thus, the results of a survey of Russian men show that 88% of respondents now consider their earnings as the main family income. As for leadership in the family, 56% of men are in favor of equality in relationships, 25.8% are inclined to a patriarchal form of relations in which a man takes care of a woman, and only 17.4% support a matriarchal model of relations when a woman takes care of a man (Sukhareva et al., 2019). A survey conducted on a sample that includes representatives of both sexes shows that 38% of respondents believe that husband and wife should be the leaders of the family equally, 34% tend to male leadership, 28% – to female (Bragina, 2016). A significant part of conflicts in young families arise over the distribution of leadership and non-observance of gender roles in the family. Thus, women three times more often than men consider the insufficient level of family income and the inability of the husband to provide it as one of the most important causes of conflicts (Dadaeva, 2015). Thus, the majority of both women and men agree that the distribution of leadership in the modern family should be equal, however, the responsibility for the material support of the family is still mainly assigned to the man.

7. Conclusion

Our research shows that the potential for conflict over family leadership and family roles can be identified in young people even before marriage. Girls demonstrate masculine traits and claim leadership in the family; however, they want to rely on a strong man from whom they still expect support and solutions

to the financial problems of the family. The young men agree that they should play the role of breadwinner and support of the family, but they already agree to share leadership with the woman.

So, traditional gender stereotypes in the minds of Russian youth are still very strong, although the process of their transformation is underway. At present, it is possible to identify some discrepancies in the expectations of boys and girls regarding the distribution of leadership and the fulfillment of various social roles in the family. This creates the basis for the family conflicts and a high level of divorce, which is a significant trend in marriage and family relations in modern Russia.

Our results allow us to identify certain problems related to the gender aspects of the upbringing of children and adolescents. The resolution of the above contradictions is possible only based on fostering a culture of equal, respectful relations between the sexes, based on freedom and mutual responsibility.

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