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THE STEREOTYPES IN PUPIL'S SELF ESTEEM

Abstract

Through the influences of our social environment, both boys and girls learn their sexual norms, specific rules and values from the early childhood. Hence, children grow up in the world of distinct sexual duality. In their efforts to act according to their sexual stereotypes, children adopt these widespread stereotyped conceptions in developing their self-image. This includes behaviour, emotions, and the role that each child connects with his/her own self - all in accordance with the accepted male and female image. In this comparative study, we tried to determine how fourteen-year-old schoolboys and schoolgirls in Slovene, Austrian and Croatian elementary schools evaluated the spheres of free time activities, domestic chores and schoolwork, and personal traits, characteristics and conduct. This study provides relevant information about the image of schoolboys and schoolgirls in the seventh grade, and shows the answers given by the girls are closely related to the sexual tendency of self-image and the image of the opposite sex.

Key words: pupils, field of activities, free time, stereotypes

Introduction

Sociologists determine sexual stereotypes as cognitive structures which comprise of socially determined knowledge of either feminine or masculine characteristics (Ashmore, Del Boca, Wohlers, 1986). These represent semantic schemes which influence social conduct and rely on patterns of perception through which individuals organise their social experiences. Concurrently, they reduce a great number of expected conduct and classify important patterns of conduct. Stereotypes express culturally important patterns which enable mutual conduct of individuals. Cultural and social meanings of sex influence the standpoint of an individual. These viewpoints express the individual's expectations and constitute the structure of needs with both men and women, and hence, represent a part of the individual's sexual identity.

Young people pay more to specific areas and activities of interest according to their ideals, orientations, daily tasks, and their ability and knowledge. The areas of interest the youth participate in can be interpreted as "spheres of action" or spheres in which these young people present themselves in view of their sexual concept, and including well thought out gender-related behaviour. Attraction to the specific spheres is amplified if it coincides with the individual's self-image, which suits notions and desires of the individual's own personality and nature.

In this comparative study, we tried to determine how fourteen-year-old schoolboys and schoolgirls in Slovene, Austrian and Croatian elementary schools evaluate the spheres of free time activities, domestic chores and schoolwork, and personal traits, characteristics and conduct. We wondered which activities and the types of characteristics or traits are attributed to oneself or the opposite sex. Are there any differences and if so, what are the reasons? The aims of the study are to explore:

1. Which free time activities are selected by schoolboys and schoolgirls for themselves and for the opposite gender, and the differences and reasons for their specific decision?
2. How schoolboys and schoolgirls evaluate the sphere of domestic chores: what is considered suitable for boys and for girls?
3. How schoolboys and schoolgirls evaluate the sphere of schoolwork: what are boys and girls better at?
4. Which characteristics, traits and conduct are attributed to schoolboys and schoolgirls: which are appropriate for the opposite gender?
5. Any such differences in the evaluation of the activities or characteristics among schoolboys and schoolgirls between those who live in urban or rural areas?
6. Any such differences in the evaluation of the activities or characteristics among schoolboys and schoolgirls who live in Slovenia, Austria and Croatia?

Method

The poll was conducted in Slovenia, Austria and Croatia. In each country, the study included five elementary schools selected from urban areas and five elementary schools from the rural settlements. Schools were randomly selected; nevertheless, we tried to consider specific living conditions. The urban schools we selected were located in Ljubljana, Klagenfurt and Zagreb, while the rural schools we selected were in rural communities (in the case of Slovenia and Croatia), or the urban outskirts (in the case of Austria). We planned to include twenty schoolboys and twenty schoolgirls, aged fourteen and in the seventh grade, from each of the five schools. The total number of pupils tested in a sample we analysed was 1130: 585 schoolboys and 545 schoolgirls. 51.2 % attended urban schools and 48.8 % attended schools in rural or outlying settlements.

Similar tests by Valtina and Klopffleisch (1996), Biskup in Pfister (1991, 1999) and Zipprich (2001), who researched only a specific field in their studies, were taken into account when designing our questionnaire. We were able to establish with our questionnaire which activities and characteristics schoolboys and schoolgirls attributed to themselves and to the opposite gender. This consists of four subspaces: the sphere of free-time activities (sports and cultural activities), the sphere of domestic chores, the sphere of schoolwork, the sphere of personal traits, characteristics and conduct. The factor analysis component model was used in defining the validity of the measuring instruments. We discovered the existence of statistically distinctive differences of all tested groups and emphasised those dimensions which contributed to the fact that the differences among the groups are statistically distinctive.

Results and Discussion

We interpreted the basic points of variable distribution according to separate spaces. Furthermore, we concentrated on the top five answers as to the estimated degree of characteristics when comparing results. In the continuation, we present findings which display dimensions in which schoolboys and schoolgirl differ according to their place of origin, their country of residency and their gender. Firstly, we will present the sphere of sports. Analysis shows that the selection of

different sport activities in the seventh grade regarding both genders in all countries is related to a large amount of male and female stereotypes which are based on social and cultural circumstances specific to each country. Typical male-oriented sports are swimming, football, seven-a-side, basketball, while typical female sports are dance, badminton, callisthenics, volleyball and beach volleyball. Sports activities which dominate within one gender group are not accepted with the opposite gender. Zipprich (2001) came to similar conclusions. Girls are slightly more open-minded and are interested in male-oriented sports, whereas boys are not as reciprocal to "female-oriented" sports.

We included cultural activities and festivals among activities in the individual's free time. Similarly, with the sports sphere both schoolboys' and schoolgirls' answers are closely linked with the tendencies specific of a particular gender group regarding self-image, and affirmed self-image of the opposite gender. Boys and girls from the three countries believe that going to the cinema, attending home parties, discos, pop concerts, watching TV and going to the library are suitable activities for both parties. Boys also place attending sports games quite high. Less suitable activities for both genders are: going to the theatre, fine art openings and classical concerts, participating in drama clubs or choirs. Greater conformity about domestic chores, which is thought to be more suitable for girls, is unanimous between Slovene and Austrian schoolboys. The most suitable tasks for girls are cooking, shopping, tidying up, dusting and watering flowers. Slightly lesser values of domestic chores are expressed by Croatian schoolboys. Less suitable tasks for girls are domestic up keeping, mowing the lawn and riding a motorcycle. Girls believe that dusting, gardening and tidying the home is equally suitable for boys of the same age. Again, Slovene girls strongly affirm these statements, while Austrian girls follow and Croatian girls appear to have slightly lesser values in their answers.

A stereotypical image generally attributed to girls and boys can be seen in the sphere of scholastic skills. Schoolboys attribute neat handwriting to schoolgirls who exceed in drawing and school achievements. Slovene and Austrian schoolboys strongly complied with the first two traits, while Croatian schoolboys did not emphasize the two traits much. In defining foreign language acquisition, all schoolboys from all three countries consider themselves to have a moderate ability, yet quite balanced assessors. Their opinions become rather dispersed when attributing mathematical skills to girls. Slovene schoolboys admit that the degree of acquired skills is high, while Austrian schoolboys are not such generous in their opinion. Girls on the other hand do not share the same opinion of their schoolmates. The girls attribute achievements in mathematical skills and emphasised scholastic achievement and knowledge in social and natural science, and acquisition of foreign languages. It may seem astonishing that when evaluating all spheres in a positive manner, Slovene schoolgirls exceeded the other girls from the other countries. Fellow schoolgirls from Austria were much more lenient assessors, and accentuated that their schoolmates are very successful in school, and emphasised their ability in second language acquisition. It may prove interesting that fellow schoolgirls from Austria and Croatia are far more withheld and entirely unified. Schoolgirls from Croatian schools exceed in all areas as more critical assessors of their schoolmates.

At the end, we will review the pupils' assessment of some personal traits, characteristics and conduct concerning themselves and the opposite gender.

Schoolboys from Slovene schools believe that their female classmates take great care of the body and in their physical appearance, and the boys equally like to talk on the phone and socialise as much as their fellow schoolgirls do. Schoolboys also do not deny their sensibility. Similar assessment was performed by Croatian and Austrian schoolboys, with the sole exception that the Austrians emphasised precedence of chatting on the phone over the physical appearance and concern for the body.

We tried to distinguish the differences in latent dimensions which determine free time activities (sports and cultural activities), the sphere of domestic chores and schoolwork, and the sphere of personal traits, characteristics and conduct which appear between countries, the residency and between genders, using of the multi-variant analysis of variance. Let us observe the differences among the countries. According to the results, we can establish statistically that there are typical differences defining boys and girls in all six subspaces. Regardless of the fact that Austria, Croatia and Slovenia present a relatively closed cultural circle, views of what is suitable for boys and girls differ subtly among the countries. One of the decisive factors is represented by a cultural orientation of a separate phenomenon. If we want understand these differences, which appear in the determined activities suitable for schoolboys and schoolgirls, we must consider their residency. It is of no surprise that the residency represents the variable in which statistically relevant differences in cultural activities and domestic chores exist between schoolboys and schoolgirls. This demonstrates that life in various demographic environments influence different perceptions of the world around the students, and hence, they evaluate their activities accordingly.

Traditional roles within the family are no longer compulsory and excusable as in the past in a more open society. Only exceptional modern couples play traditional roles. Each family member has to be more resourceful from time to time. This means having to wash the dishes, iron the shirt, change the fuse, tidy the flat or cook lunch, regardless of their gender. There is no other way; however, different viewpoints exist when determining what is important for girls and what is important for boys.

The next extension offers the possibility to discover distinctive divergence in activities and is represented by the gender. Schoolgirls evidently differ from schoolboys in determining: sports activities suitable for the opposite sex, domestic chores and personal traits. Schoolboys differ from schoolgirls in cultural activities, schoolwork and personal traits. We live in the society, in which the individual's self-image is defined through the body. In addition, it stands that everyone creates a different image about their own inferiority in relation to others. One example is the physically "perfect" group of people. Thus, it is not surprising that the differences in stereotypes between boys and girls are strongly expressed through sport. Such viewpoints from girls are more related to cultural determination of the society rather than the consequences of biological origin. All in all, last fortitudes of male dominance are decreasing even in the sport field. Women are taking interest in wrestling, boxing, playing rugby, lifting weights, and playing football, all of which reveal the picture of cultural and social societal functions. It is obvious that today the border between gender differences is slowly fading away even in the sports sphere where the differences between men and women have always been the most recognised.

Fixed stereotypical images are also exhibited with girls in the sphere of domestic chores: for which some have distinctly expressed the sharing of work

between the sexes. Boys differ from girls in their decision regarding cultural activities and school skills suitable for girls. Besides classical cultural activities, the importance of modern fun for young people was expressed. This would include going to discos and home parties. The culture of the young exposes and emphasises values of socialising and enjoying oneself. They are children of the consumer society which is proclaimed as the society of fun and recreation.

Conclusion

The study provides relevant information about the image of schoolboys and schoolgirls in the seventh grade. It reveals that the girls' answers are closely related to the sexual tendency of self-image and the image of the opposite sex. Findings show that the selection of activities defined in five spheres relates to the great amount of male and female stereotypes. School and other institutions would need to educate schoolboys and schoolgirls in becoming more critical to clichés presented in the study. This is applicable for all spheres; however, sexual images contain comparable and stable images which will linger since they enable social orientation. In addition, social orientation sustains the subsequent inequality and distinction in power between men and women.

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