

Gender norms and stereotypes

Sheila Greene



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Definitions

Definitions of sex and gender are often unclear and are still debated.

Sex - determined by biological characteristics associated with being male or female (v. rarely intersex) Meaning of transgender

Gender - a person's social and cultural identification as male or female, masculine or feminine

Norms and standards - the behaviours expected from males and females, which vary cross-culturally and historically

Sex-role stereotypes - beliefs held about male and female natures and capacities

Impact of stereotypes

From stereotype to injunction

'Boys don't cry' ----- 'Don't cry'

'Boys don't cry' ----- 'I am a big boy. I mustn't cry'

From stereotype to sexism (discrimination and bias)

'Women are soft and emotional' ----- 'We can't hire a woman for that tough leadership role'

From stereotype to lack of options

'Girls love pink and cute animals'-----nothing in shops but pink clothes covered with butterflies and unicorns

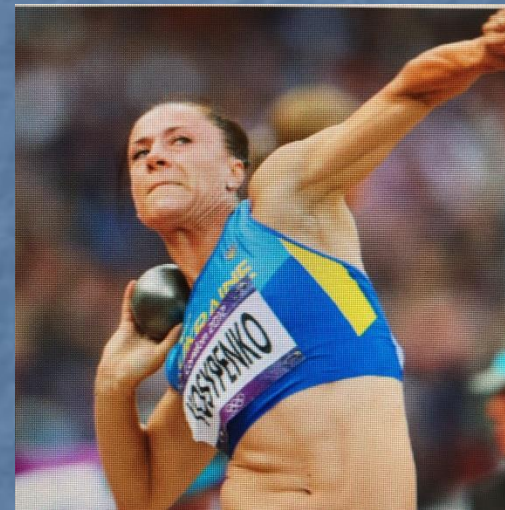
From stereotype to infringing human rights

'Women's role is to serve men'-----domestic slavery

Where do the differences we see around us come from? 1

BIOLOGY There are differences between boys and girls at birth: in size, in activity levels, in vulnerability – but differences are small and evident at group level *So simply knowing an individual baby's sex is uninformative
*As they get older other differences emerge that have primarily biological roots: in language development, muscle strength, sexual and reproductive activities/roles

SOCIALIZATION *We take small biological differences and build on them *Overlap remains considerable, e.g. in muscle strength and language skills *Biological differences are universal but what society makes of them will vary *Lack of opportunity can create biological differences
'Throwing like a girl'



Here's where norms and stereotypes come in

The Experiment

<https://youtu.be/nWu44AqF0iI>

Based on an old and often replicated study
by Condry and Condry (1976)

'Cultural myths'

- 'Most gender role stereotypes are cultural myths' Maccoby and Jacklin 1974
- But they persist
- We use stereotypes all the time, not just in relation to gender
- They simplify a complex world
- Might also serve agendas, of those who have power or those who feel threatened.

Gender norms and stereotyping in the family 1

- Family does not exist in isolation
- But the family has an early and direct impact on the child's behaviour and beliefs so is very important
- It starts early, earlier than ever!



Gender reveal parties

Gender norms and stereotyping in the family 2

Parents may participate in sex-role stereotyping consciously or unconsciously

- Choice of decor and clothing and toys.
- Behaviours directed towards the child.

E.g. Parents encourage play with sex-typed toys
They sit closer to girls and talk more with them

Relationship found between stereotyped thinking in parents and stereotyped behaviour in their children

The outside gets inside: via books, TV, clothes, toys et c

Children adopt the stereotypes

- By age 2 children become aware of boy-girl distinction
- By 3 have started to develop stereotyped ideas about boys and girls
- Gender role conformity very strong from 3-9. See Young Scientists 2020
- More marked in boys. 'Tomboy' more accepted than 'sissy' ('gay') boy
- Self-policing and policing by peers, starts in pre-school years.

9 year-olds in GUI on the opposite sex:



Boy: The girls dress different and play different and they think different'

Boy: ' They (girls) like to do their make-up and their nails and puppies and everything cute. And they like pink things.'

Interviewer 'And what about boys?'

Boy: 'Boys like the outdoors more. They like to stand in a field.'

Girl: 'And they (boys) are much more immature than girls I think... They just, when you are trying to be serious with them ..they just like go and mess with their friends or something'

Girl: 'They (*boys*) are really different. They play different sports, wear different clothes, do different stuff. They spend way too much time watching TV and on the computer and they don't read books unless they are nerds.'

How might Ireland counteract stereotypes? 1

■ Legislation and regulation:

Laws against discrimination.

Self-regulation by trade bodies e.g. Irish Advertising Standards Authority for Ireland (ads 'should avoid stereotyping')

Positive discrimination and quotas

■ Education:

of teachers. E.g., modules on gender role equality for pre-school and primary teachers. See INTO of school children E.g. Use counter-stereotype books and materials and discussions

How might Ireland counteract stereotypes? 2

Activism

- ❖ Together: Campaign

- ❖ As individuals

Say no

Challenge retailers

Change your own interactions with children



What other countries have done

In schools Add gender role awareness training to teacher training and school curricula, e.g. in Sweden national pre-school curriculum requires teachers to 'counteract traditional gender patterns and gender roles'. In UK NUT conducted review in 2013 'Stereotypes stop you doing stuff' and encouraged members to challenge stereotyping

Campaigns In UK 'Let toys be toys', 'Let clothes be clothes' 'pinkstinks' in UK and Germany. 'becausewhy.com' in Australia

International treaties CEDAW (1979) ratified by 189 states. Article 5(a) requires States Parties to take "all appropriate measures" to "modify the social and cultural patterns of conduct of men and women" in an effort to eliminate practices that "are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women". United Nations report (2013): 'Gender stereotyping as human rights violation'

Conclusions

- The way in which we think about sex and gender is deeply embedded in our culture and we learn about it from babyhood
- It operates in subtle and not-so-subtle ways
- The goal in challenging stereotypes is not to make the sexes the same.
- Males and females with highly sex-stereotyped behaviour are found to have lower levels of well-being
- Dangers of 'toxic masculinity', 'passive femininity'
- Aim is to allow boys and girls to express their own individuality and not be constrained by rigid stereotypes
- Stereotypes manifest in multiple ways and need to be tackled through multiple forms of intervention: formal and informal; by institutions and by individuals