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DETAINED CHANGE? NEGATIVE PRESCRIPTIVE STEREOTYPES AND COGNITIVE GENDER SCHEMAS OF POLISH FEMALE STUDENTS

ABSTRACT: This article addresses the topic of negative prescriptive stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, and cognitive gender schemas of young women. The aim of the research performed was to identify definitions of non-femininity and non-masculinity and to explore the gender identity of young female students. The study sought to answer the following questions: What are their individual gender identities, and how are these identities related to definitions of non-femininity and non-masculinity? The study surveyed a representative sample of 1152 randomly selected student women using the standardized 'Inventory for the Assessment of Psychological Gender', an instrument based on the Bem Sex Role Inventory. Analysis revealed that the most common individual gender identities identified were androgynous and definite schemas. These schemas diversify definitions of non-femininity and non-masculinity. When defining non-femininity, women using masculine and indefinite schemas were more likely than androgynous and feminine women to reject the distinction between feminine and masculine characteristics.

KEYWORDS: femininity, masculinity, gender stereotypes, negative prescriptive stereotypes, cognitive gender schemas.

Introduction

Recently conducted studies show that although there has been progress towards gender equality, it has been noted that this progress has slowed down or even stalled since the 1990s (Cotter, Hermsen & Vanneman, 2011; Goldscheider, Bernhard & Lappegård, 2015). While changes noted by researchers have mainly concerned the public sphere and employment, simultaneously there has also been little progress in gender equality in the private sphere: family life, childcare, and household work (Parker & Wang, 2013; Scarborough, Sin & Risman, 2018). The interpretive framework of so-called egalitarian essentialism has been used to explain this situation. This combines the feminist ideal of free choice with cultural beliefs in women's important educational role. This has manifested itself in increased support for traditional attitudes towards the family

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and simultaneous growth in the acceptance of gender equality in the public sphere. In addition to its occurrence in older generations, in recent years, this trend has also been observed among younger generations (Cotter, Hermsen & Vanneman, 2011; Fate-Dixon, 2017; Pepin & Cotter, 2018).

In Poland the exit of women from the private to the public sphere was not balanced by the entry of men into the family and home spheres. Moreover, the situation on the labour market still requires changes. Despite the fact that both spouses most often (64%) work professionally in a Polish family the employment rate is definitely lower for women (47%) compared to men (65.2%) (MRPiPS 2020). Additionally, the analysis of the problem in Poland shows that young women of reproductive age are most exposed to exclusion from the labour market. Moreover, despite the fact that women are better educated – education at the level of at least a bachelor's was possessed by every third Polish woman and only every fifth Pole, as many as 75% of women earn less than PLN 2000 and only 10% of women earn more than PLN 3000 (Warat & Kowalska, 2018). Research shows that although the majority of men and women say that women and men should share household chores equally, as many as 64% of men and 57% of women believe that women are ultimately responsible for the family home. 37% of women and 46% of men also consider it right that a woman gives up her own career to support her husband in his career. Moreover, 75% of women and 78% of men believe that mothers of young children up to 3 years old should not work (Slany & Ratecka, 2018). The findings from the research show, on the one hand, the following change of attitudes regarding the differences in the socio-professional roles of women and men, and on the other hand, the durability of traditional messages regarding the division of roles in private life – in line with the model that in relationships, women share professional work and perform household chores to a greater extent than men (CBOS 2018).

The subject of interest in this article are the changes that have occurred in Polish female students under the influence of coexisting egalitarian patterns and the traditional model. We analyze how young Polish women define femininity and masculinity, relating their interpretations to the traditionally defined model of femininity and masculinity in the light of its transformed nature. The research presented in the article focused on negative prescriptive stereotypes of femininity and masculinity, and on the cognitive gender schemas of young women. The research was explanatory in nature. The study's purpose was to investigate definitions of non-femininity and non-masculinity, and to consider the issue of gender identity in young female students. Finally, the research sought to examine the structure of gender identity and explore relationships between gender identity and definitions of non-femininity and non-masculinity.

The research sought to answer the questions: 1) What form does gender identity take in young Polish female students? 2) Does gender identity differentiate the definitions of non-femininity and non-masculinity adopted by young Polish female students?

Theoretical insights and their respective implications

In the article, we attempt to analyze the definition of femininity and masculinity by young Polish women, referring the interpretations to the traditionally defined model of femininity and masculinity and changes in this model. By the traditional model of gender roles, we understand a model that is based on the dualism of gender roles, the asymmetry of features between the two sexes both in biological and socio-psychological terms and on specialisation, that is, the division of social roles according to gender (see Birch & Malim, 1995; Renzetti & Curran, 2005). The female gender role in the traditional model is mainly related to the private sphere – the family. The basic task, command and goal of a woman is to bear and raise children (the role of a mother) and to care for her husband and home (the role of a housewife combined with the role of a wife). Stereotypically, feminine features include passivity, "chastity", focus on others, tenderness, emotional delicacy, lack of abstract interests, as well as the ability to show feelings, empathy, emotional lability, caringness, subordination, poor physical and mental condition (Bardwick & Douvan, 1982). Women are expected to be gentle, sympathetic, "warm", dependent, helpful, ready to make sacrifices, sensitive to the needs of others, polite, gentle. Unlike men, they should be more intuitive and reflective, and less intellectually flexible, lacking initiative and willingness to compete (Williams & Best, 1982). The male gender role includes professional roles and activity in the public "sphere". The man assumes financial obligations, controls and exercises authority over the family. The male gender role has a triple structure consisting of status, hardness and anti-femininity (Renzetti & Curran, 2005) includes activity and even moderate aggressiveness and self-concentration (Bardwick & Douvan, 1982), energetic, initiative, intelligence, objectivity, responsibility, courage, resourcefulness, rationalism, emotional balance and emotional control, mental and physical strength, leadership skills (Birch & Malim, 1995). According to the traditional stereotype, men are to be characterised by independence, domination, assertiveness, courage, expansion, ambition, and self-sufficiency. The "masculine" also includes features such as composure, rationality in thinking, innovation, a tendency to dominate, the need for achievement, controlling emotions, self-orientation and striving for social advancement, as well as the expectation of being served by women (Williams & Best, 1982).

Our analysis focused on the relationship between constructs at a social level (models of femininity and masculinity) and personality. The focus was on individual definitions,

but from the perspective of identification with socially constructed and transmitted models of femininity and masculinity. Given this, the currently presented research adopted the assumptions of Sandra Lipsitz Bem's (1981) concept of gender schemas, which corresponds with the widely accepted definition and conceptualisation of gender. The cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity, the so-called cultural matrices of gender in Bem's conception, are seen in terms of cognitive actions. These definitions are acquired in the process of socialization and, as a result, form cognitive gender schemas that organise individual styles of behavior for women and men. These schemas constitute criteria for regulating the behaviour of individuals and assist in the evaluation and assimilation of new information by classifying people, their characteristics and behaviour, into female or male categories. They also form the basis for both evaluating one's own behavior and for using the dimensions of femininity and masculinity in relation to personality traits – gender identity. The process of gender formation is analysed here as a particular process of socialisation, in which institutionalised social practices program an individual's everyday experiences so that they fit into designated cultural matrices in a particular society, time and place (Bem, 1981).

The research presented in this paper combines Bem's conceptualisation with the concept of gender stereotyping, defining cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity as simplified, pervasive, socially agreed-upon beliefs about the attributes of men and women (Sczesny, Nater & Eagly, 2019). Researchers most often point to the existence of two components of gender stereotypes. First, a descriptive component which describes what men and women are typically like. Second, a prescriptive component which indicates what men and women should be like (Eagly et al. 2019; Koenig 2018; Rucker, Galinsky & Magee 2018; Rudman et al. 2012; Sczesny, Nater & Eagly, 2019). Within the prescriptive component, a distinction is made between a positive component that specifies desirable behaviours for a specific gender, and a negative component that indicates undesirable behaviours that people of a specific gender should avoid (Koenig, 2018). The following hypothesis was forwarded: Gender identity diversifies definitions of non-femininity and non-masculinity.

Methods

The study was conducted in 2018, using a diagnostic survey method and a self-completed survey questionnaire. The research was conducted at the University of Zielona Góra on a randomly selected representative sample of 1152 young female students aged 18-24 years old. A proportionate stratified sampling process was used, with students being selected by faculty and size of student group from 327 student groups and 12 strata (faculties of the university).

Data

For the analyses presented in this article, answers to two open questions were used: 1) In your opinion, what do you think is unfeminine and does not suit a woman? 2) In your opinion, what do you think is unmasculine and does not suit a man? It was intended that the respondents should define (non-)femininity and (non-)masculinity themselves without the questions imposing operationalised conceptual categories on them.

The Inventory for the Assessment of Psychological Gender (IPP) by Anna Kuczyńska (1992) was used to determine individual gender schemas. This tool is based on the theoretical assumptions of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1981), and is its Polish adaptation. An individual's gender schema is identified from items forming two scales: femininity and masculinity. The position on each scale is calculated from their responses to 15 adjectival statements, responses being on a 5-point scale, with (1) indicating "I am not like this at all" and (5) indicating "This is how I am". From their responses, it is possible to allocate women to one of four gender identities: definite (conforming to traditional feminine patterns – feminine women), cross-definite (formed in contradiction to traditional feminine patterns – masculine women), androgynous (characterized by integration and complementarity of features traditionally regarded as both masculine and feminine – androgynous women), and indeterminate in terms of socio-cultural gender (women who weakly identify with culturally defined definitions of masculinity and femininity – indefinite women).

Analytical strategies

Answers to the two open questions were analyzed qualitatively. The unit of analysis was a statement indicating a behaviour or trait constituting an independent whole. On average, respondents produced four statements (4.4 non-feminine, and 3.8 non-masculine). Each statement was categorised separately. In total there were 4109 utterances – 2198 of these were related to defining non-femininity, and 1911 to defining non-masculinity. Qualitative analysis followed recognised procedures for the qualitative analysis of open-ended responses (Miles & Huberman, 2014). In step one (open coding), statements in each of the analysed ranges were generated based on comparative analysis, and 48 categories of non-female traits and behaviors and 46 categories of non-male traits and behaviors were extracted. In each case, a category labelled "other" remained after open coding and was again subjected to analysis using theoretical coding procedures. Next, theoretical coding was conducted with respect to traits and behaviours defined by stereotypes of femininity and masculinity. Analytic induction resulted in the construction of a catalogue of traits and behaviors defined as non-feminine, which consisted of

18 categories and 48 subcategories, and a catalogue of traits defined as non-masculine, which consisted of 18 categories and 46 subcategories.

Variables

In considering the relationship between gender identity and definitions of non-femininity and non-masculinity, the independent variable was gender identity, the values of which were determined using IPP. Dependent variables were the (binary) variables extracted during the previously described qualitative analysis procedure, describing the presence (or absence) of a specific non-masculine/non-feminine category in students' statements.

Statistical analyses

To test relationships, Pearson's chi-square tests were used, and strengths of relationships were estimated using Cramer's *V* coefficient. A critical significance level of alpha = .05 was adopted. Calculations were performed using the PS IMAGO 6.0 and STATISTICA 13.3 statistical packages.

Results

Individual gender schemas and definitions
of non-femininity and non-masculinity

Identification of participants' individual gender schemas as shown by their responses on the femininity and masculinity dimensions of the IPP trait inventory showed that the young women most commonly defined themselves in terms of an androgynous schema. This was true for half of the surveyed women. The next most frequently represented schema was one describing the women in terms of their own gender (feminine women): this applied to almost one third of the respondents. Women defining themselves according to a cross-definite schema (masculine women) and an indefinite schema were in the minority. This structure coincides with the gender identity structure obtained for women in the 18-24 age category in the national research of Emilia Paprzycka, Edyta Mianowska & Zbigniew Izdebski (2014), and the percentages of 18 to 24 year old women subsumed under each gender identity type in the two studies were not significantly different. However, a comparison of the present data and frequencies for all women in the national study showed that the crossed pattern was more frequent while the indefinite pattern was less frequent in the present study (Table 1).

Table 1. The structure of individual gender schemas of female students in the present
and national studies and the results of *z*-tests comparing the proportions
of gender identity types in the two studies

Gender schema	Female students – present study	Nationwide survey (data for women)		z-tests (present data vs. 18-24 year-olds and all women in the national study)	
	N = 1152	18-24 years old, N = 223	N = 1430	18-24 years old, N = 223	N = 1430
Definite women (feminine schema)	30.2%	25.5%	29.9%	p > .05	p > .05
Cross-definite women (masculine schema)	10.9%	8.2%	6.3%	p > .05	z = 4.213, p < .001
Androgynous women	50.5%	56.7%	49.0%	p > .05	p > .05
Indefinite women	8.4%	9.6%	14.8%	p > .05	z = -5.002, p < .001

Source: study based on the authors' own research.

Individual gender schemas and definitions of non-femininity

Of the 18 categories of features the respondents referred to when defining non-feminini-ty, participants with different gender schemas differed only in terms of (a) the frequency with which they gave responses falling into three of the *non-femininity* categories, and (b) the frequency with which they adopted a stance rejecting a dichotomous approach. Statistically significant differences were found for two non-femininity categories con-cerning features incompatible with the traditional stereotype of femininity ("addictive behaviors" and "negative attitudes toward others") and for the "emotional immaturity" category, these results fitting with the traditional model of femininity (Table 2).

Labelling addictions as unfeminine was most often done by feminine and androg-enous women: they did this almost twice as often as masculine women. Indefinite women were the least likely to perceive alcohol abuse, smoking and the use of other drugs as unfeminine.

Negative attitudes toward others as a marker of unfemininity appeared most often in the statements of androgynous women. Female and indefinite women were the least likely to cite characteristics belonging to this category, and masculine women were the least likely to cite these characteristics as markers of non-femininity.

Although characteristics connected with "emotional immaturity" were mentioned quite rarely, the frequency with which they were mentioned differed across partici-pants differing in gender identity. Such characteristics are traditionally identified with femininity and were mentioned most often by masculine women and mentioned least often by androgynous women.

Participants of differing gender identities also differed in the extent to which they expressed opinions rejecting the division between feminine and masculine characteristics. A position denying the definition of non-femininity was most often taken by masculine and non-definite women. Feminine and androgynous women were only around half as likely to declare such a view.

Table 2. Differentiation of non-female characteristics according
to different gender patterns (*N* = 1152)

Feature category	Indefinite women	Feminine women	Androgynous women	Masculine women	Test result and effect size
Frigidity	1.1%	5.7%	4.3%	1.8%	ns
Dishonesty in relationships with others	0.0%	0.0%	1.3%	1.7%	ns
Unthoughtfulness	0.9%	6.1%	8.0%	5.5%	ns
Negative attitudes toward others	14.9%	15.9%	21.8%	8.8%	chi = 12.482, df = 3, p = 0.002; V = 0.116
Ungentleness, insensitivity	2.4%	7.3%	7.1%	6.8%	ns
Vulgarity, lack of personal culture	41.8%	52.0%	54.7%	43.6%	ns
Neglecting one's appearance	9.4%	14.8%	14.9%	11.5%	ns
Addictive behaviors	6.8%	22.5%	21.5%	11.8%	chi = 14.488, df = 3, p = 0.002; V = 0.125
Messiness	5.8%	2.2%	5.0%	3.3%	ns
Promiscuity	12.3%	9.2%	8.7%	4.4%	ns
Independence, opposing the traditional role of women	0.0%	6.9%	5.0%	3.7%	ns
Dominance and self-confidence	0.0%	5.8%	7.4%	5.8%	ns
Aggression	25.2%	24.3%	20.3%	21.2%	
Emotional immaturity	2.6%	4.5%	1.8%	6.2%	chi = 8.998, df = 3, p = 0.029; V = 0.099
Fulfilling the traditionally defined role of a woman	2.2%	2.9%	4.3%	0.8%	ns
Lack of ambition	11.4%	9.0%	9.4%	12.1%	ns
Similarity to men	16.9%	13.8%	13.7%	10.9%	ns
No categorisation of features	14.7%	6.6%	8.0%	18.3%	chi = 15.435, df = 3, p = 0.001; V = 0.129

Source: study based on the authors' own research.

Individual gender schemas and definitions of non-masculinity

Three of the 18 categories of characteristics used by respondents to define non-masculinity were found to be differentially associated with different gender schemas. Two of these categories – "dependence, lack of responsibility" and "aggression and violence

against women" – fell within the perspective whereby non-masculinity was defined by traits and behaviors opposed to the stereotype of masculinity. The third category – "neglecting one's appearance" – belonged to a set of traits consistent with the traditional model of masculinity (Table 3).

Feminine women were more likely to cite "dependence and lack of responsibility" as traits that are markers of unmanliness than respondents characterised by other gender schemas.

On the other hand, "aggression and violence against women" was most often cited by androgynous women. This characteristic was referred to slightly less frequently by indefinite and feminine women when defining non-masculinity. Cross-definite women

Table 3. Differentiation of non-masculinity characteristics according
to different gender patterns (*N* = 1152)

Feature category	Indefinite women	Feminine women	Androgynous women	Masculine women	Test result and effect size
Life helplessness	13.5%	8.4%	9.4%	16.1%	ns
Subordination and submissiveness	12.7%	9.3%	10.5%	10.0%	ns
Lack of mental strength, sensitivity and delicacy	17.1%	17.5%	19.6%	14.7%	ns
Indecisiveness, lack of courage	4.8%	13.5%	12.7%	14.5%	ns
Independence, lack of responsibility	11.7%	27.6%	17.2%	14.8%	chi = 16.455, df = 3, p = 0.001; V = 0.136
Aggression and violence against women	13.6%	13.4%	17.7%	7.4%	chi = 8.096, df = 3, p = 0.044; V = 0.095
Lack of ambition	7.7%	4.8%	4.4%	6.0%	ns
Addictive behaviors	1.2%	4.7%	3.8%	0.7%	ns
Not taking care of the partner, family and home	10.5%	11.1%	11.3%	9.8%	ns
Excessive attention to appearance	10.7%	14.6%	11.7%	12.5%	ns
Unmanly appearance and character	9.2%	6.1%	4.5%	8.3%	ns
Strong personality	4.1%	3.6%	3.0%	3.6%	ns
Arrogance	4.8%	7.8%	12.7%	9.2%	ns
Emotional instability, unfaithfulness	3.1%	4.7%	6.0%	0.5%	ns
Neglecting one's appearance	10.0%	1.1%	5.5%	2.8%	chi = 13.938, df = 3, p = 0.003; V = 0.125
Similarity to women	11.3%	21.6%	20.6%	20.3%	ns
No categorisation of features	10.3%	4.5%	6.4%	10.5%	ns

Source: study based on the authors' own research.

(those with a masculine schema) invoked characteristics from this category only around half as often as other women.

A clear difference in defining non-masculinity can be seen in the case of features subsumed under the category "neglecting appearance". Indefinite women most often indicated neglecting one's appearance and hygiene as a designation of unmanliness. On the other hand, definitions of masculinity in terms of neglecting one's appearance hardly ever appeared among the opinions of women with a defined schema (feminine women).

To summarise, to a great extent, different gender identities were not associated with the frequency with which participants cited various characteristics defining non-femininity and non-masculinity. Of all the categories of traits identified, only seven were differentially associated with certain gender patterns. In the case of non-feminine traits, these were: "addictive behaviors", "negative attitudes toward others", "emotional immaturity", and resistance to making categorisations in terms of feminine and masculine traits. Non-masculine traits which were differentially associated with certain gender identity types were: "dependence, lack of responsibility", "aggression and violence against women" and "neglecting one's appearance".

Discussion

The results provide an argument that weakens the narrative of change (Sczesny, Nater & Eagly, 2019). The results indicate the persistence of the traditional model and the gender stereotypes derived from it. Although the respondents' self-perceptions may indicate changes, the negative normative gender stereotypes identified reflect entrenched expectations constructed on the basis of the traditional gender division of social roles.

This analysis taking gender identity perspectives into consideration suggested that being opposed to cultural patterns consistent with the traditional model is supportive of the rejection of the traditional masculine-feminine dichotomy, and that this reinforces the adoption of a neutral stance on the issue of arbitrarily deciding what should be regarded as unfeminine (or unmasculine). The analyses conducted show that the classification of traits into non-feminine and non-masculine is commonly rejected by women who do not define themselves according to feminine (indefinite or masculine) models.

The gender identity structure identified by the present research, showing a high percentage of androgynous women, may be attributed to the effect of a weakening of messages promoting the dualism of gender roles and gender functioning in a situation where various models of femininity and masculinity have become available. Thus, these results may signify a departure of young women from patterns of femininity and

masculinity defined by the traditional model. This is in line with research using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) showing that gender identities have become less stereotyped (Haines, Deaux & Lofaro 2016). However, although previous gender identity studies of Poles using the same tool (Paprzycka, Mianowska & Izdebski, 2014; Titkow, 2011) showed an increase in the percentage of androgynous women and masculine women between 2002 and 2011, and that the percentage of feminine women and indefinite women decreased by almost half between these years, a comparison of the present gender identity data with these studies shows that such changes have come to a halt: the present results (from 2018) are comparable with those from 2011. This observation supports the thesis that the gender equality revolution is at a standstill (Cotter, Hermsen & Vanneman, 2011; Fate-Dixon, 2017; Goldscheider, Bernhard & Lappegård, 2015; Pepin & Cotter, 2018).

The findings contribute to the still ongoing discussion surrounding the concepts in S.L. Bem's schema theory and the accuracy of the BSRI and its adaptations. The study is also useful in showing how new tools for research on femininity and masculinity and stereotypes can be developed. The study's findings offer also new Polish data, and help to fill the gaps in defining femininity and masculinity and gender identity research that have arisen in the new century.

Conclusions

The respondents were most commonly characterised by either an androgynous schema or a definite schema (representing a feminine woman). In general, gender identities did not differentiate how respondents described what they considered to be unfeminine and what they considered to be unmasculine. Gender identity differentiated the frequency with which participants cited characteristics shown by the research to be important in defining non-femininity and non-masculinity for only seven of the categories of non-masculinity and non-femininity identified.

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