CEDAW - Gender Stereotypes, Pegah Kassraian Fard

Stereotypes – the oversimplified characterization of people or things – can be an important tool in navigating through the world. Simple characterizations can help us to integrate new experiences quicker and hence to respond quicker to them. As means of communication between individuals, stereotypes also reflect shared knowledge – we assume other know what we mean when we refer to a stereotype. In this function and because of their oversimplification - leading to the impression that they represent a core truth - stereotypes can also be powerful tools in reinforcing norms, actions and expectations. Stereotypes influence us more than what we might think: It can be shown that sexist jokes can undermine womens performance in mathematics [1], jurors exposure to sexist stereotypes influences their verdict in sexual harassment cases [2] and that we assess the same performance differently depending on what gender we believe the performer posses [3]. Although gender stereotypes consider all gender, this text is discussing stereotypes regarding women, together with some final remarks on how the negative consequence of stereotyping can be counteracted. Women are still a social group with clear minority in political, economical and social power – and gender stereotypes can act as a way to hold up these power imbalances.

Gender stereotyping and performance

Stereotypes can have a profound effect on the cognitive performance of subjects, a well documented mechanism is for instance the so called "**stereotype threat**": subjects who fear to fulfill a negative stereotype do perform significantly worse than otherwise [4]. Telling women before a mathematics test that mathematics performance is determined by gender will for instance negatively influence their performance. In contrast, when women are told before a test that men and women are equally capable, no performance differences between the groups could be measured in several studies, see for instance [4]. Importantly, the negative effect on performance need not be preceded by explicit messages – stereotype threat can be observed after consumption of media which depicts women in clichéd gender roles [5]. Stereotypes do also affect the *assessment* of performance: A well known example are auditions for orchestras – since blind auditioning (auditioning behind curtains where the gender of the performer cannot be easily inferred) has been introduced, the number of female musicians has multiplied - up to parity with male musicians in some orchestras - counteracting the belief formerly held by many musicians that women are simply less capable as musicians [6] (this wrong belief was up to then of course justified by all kinds of biological "facts" [7]). The same bias in performance assessment is also eminent in studies where subjects are asked to assess CVs with once a female and once a male name indicated [3]. The influence of stereotypes starts very early: It can be shown that linguistic capabilities later in life highly correlate with the amount of verbal communication received from birth on, and, simultaneously, that parents communicate significantly more with female children than with males from birth on due to gender stereotypes [8]. Nevertheless, the difference between male and female verbal capabilities is perceived in popular culture as much larger than as it actually is: Recent studies suggest that difference in linguistic capabilities can only be attributed between 1 to 3% to gender [8]. These are illustrative examples on the effect of stereotypes, and the effects can be observed on larger social scales, too: The perception of one's own capability influences life choices, one factor for choice of profession is what people believe they can succeed in [9] – and where they think their capabilities will be appreciated [10]. This can lead to a gender segregation of professions, with women mostly underrepresented in the more prestigious and financially rewarding fields [11], leading to the further solidification of economic inequality, and inequality in terms of societal influence. The undervaluation of women's performance, as a further implication, contributes to a general underrepresentation of the achievements of women: although for instance women have significantly contributed to political events throughout all decades, their achievement is often invisible for instance in schoolbooks [12]. Stereotypes having the described self-

fulfilling character – leading to behavior which they present as unchangeable characteristic of one group – do however vary from country to country. Portugal (where mathematics performance is much less seen as gender specific) has reached for instance an equal share of female and male mathematicians in the recent years [13], indicating that what seems as "unchangeable" or "natural" might not be.

Gender stereotyping in mainstream media

Mainstream media are an important deliverer and normalizer of gender stereotypes, with their effects being cumulative and sub-conscious. Due to their pervasiveness - with an estimate of up to 20 000 commercials seen by the average person per year [14] – and clear cut imagery, commercials serve as a good starting point for analyzing the portrayal of women in media. Women in commercials are vastly represented in submissive poses, sexualized or else presented with a persistent lack of competence in anything else than caretaking and beauty [15],[16], with a focus on their body or even represented by single body parts as a representation of the entire female human. That the vast presence of images of women "decapitated" (the body a stand-alone representation of women) is connected to a mechanism described by "**faceism**". Faceism describes the body-to-face ratio on images (how much of body is presented, and how much of the face). It can be shown that generally on images of men, the face is much more prominent than the body. This invokes the impression of intelligence and autonomy [17] - in short of a thinking *subject*, with their personality at centerstage (the center of his world and master of his environment etc. etc. etc. …). This stands in contrast to imagery of women where the focus is much more on the body than on the face (this is true even when women take and post images of themselves). How much the subordination of women is accepted in mainstream portrayals, is furthermore underlined by a prominent number of commercials which depict violence against women in glamorizing or eroticized ways [18], [19]. It is also important to note that any depiction also assumes a viewer looking at it - in the case of the sexualized, submissive depiction of women - the viewer is assumed to be male – a second way of manifesting the male as the subject of the event. However, in the position of media consumers, women too will associate themselves *as viewer*s with the presupposed male view on the subordinate woman - internalizing the message of the female as the subordinate participant, as well as associating through the own experience "subjectivity" with "maleness". As already mentioned, women's performance in various fields worsens when women consume clichéd portrayals of their gender, furthermore it can be shown that precedent exposure to hypersexualized images correlates with a higher rate of mental illnesses for adolescent girls [20]. As already mentioned stereotypes also help to establish, communicate and normalize societal values. The media portrayal of women which focuses on the female body, excluding other properties of the woman in question, defining the woman as derivative to the male viewer, and in their portrayal of women as a body depicting them as interchangeable goods, helps establishing a dehumanized portrayal of women. And while the causes for gender-specific violence are complex and the attitudes supporting such violence are not solely delivered by media, media portrayals can contribute in creating an atmosphere in which the dehumanization of women and the corresponding power-asymmetry can be fully normalized. Perceiving people not as subjects in their own rights, but firstly as instruments to for our own ends, lowers the threshold of crossing the persons boundaries. With this objectification observable as a precursor of violence against any social minority.

Gender stereotyping as exclusion mechanism

Studies on online harassment find that women are disproportionally subjected to all kinds of harassment – with an even clearer divide when it comes to severe forms of harassment [21]. While it is sometimes claimed that this sort of harassment stems form a tiny percentage of "women loathing" users, gender-specific harassment is not restricted to internet and rests on stereotypes rooted in the larger society. Gender-specific harassment is for instance also experienced by woman in public spaces, where 25% of girls up to age 12 and 90% of young women up to age 19 have experienced harassment, while 60% of women overall have experienced unwanted physical harassment [22]. A similar pattern is true for women in the workplace, where at least one third of women have been subject to sexual harassment [23]. The silencing of women online for instance happens on the background of socially widely shared stereotypes: It is shown that women who talk as much as men in groups are seen as "taking up too much space" [24] and it is known for some time that women get interrupted during discussions much more than men are being interrupted [25]. Even more subtle forms of stereotyping can contribute to an atmosphere where harassment can flourish, leading to women leaving these spaces or perceiving them as not desirable for them [26]. Sexist jokes for instance, which might seem on a first glimpse harmless, exist in a specific societal context and represent and communicate accepted norms of this context: the punchline of any joke assumes shared knowledge and agreement on certain assumptions of the joke - in the case of sexist jokes the punchline rests on shared sexist stereotypes – hence the joke reinforces these stereotypes as mutually held beliefs. It can be shown that such jokes raise acceptance of sexist behavior, and even lead to higher acceptance of violence towards women [27, 28, 29], and normalize sexism as a shared value [27]. Taken together these form of pervasive harassments can contribute to the exclusion of women in male-dominated areas: It is reported for instance that one reason women leave the technology sector is the sexist culture of it (this also includes the formerly discussed bias towards womens performance) and it comes as no surprise that given the choice generally people tend to avoid harmful environments.

Counteracting gender stereotypes and their implications

Gender stereotyping and its implications can be counteracted by either policy change or a change in attitudes. However we believe that a change in policies might be the more effective and faster solution. This is due to the fact that policies are effective without presupposing that the entire societal attitude has changed, and that a change in policies can cause a change of attitudes in turn. Even if individuals have equalitarian views on childcare for instance, the reality of women earning less and the lack of paid fathers-leave will make it much less likely that these equalitarian views can be realized. One the other hand, data from countries like Sweden show that a change in father-leave policies have led to practical changes as more equally shared childcare duties between the parents, but also to changes in attitudes regarding gender and childcare responsibilities [30]. Other examples to demonstrate that punctual change in attitudes are not enough are for instance that in a society where women are strongly reinforced for (a certain kind of) looks, investing in these might be an efficient strategy, or that given the bias in the perception of academic performance hiring a male candidate might be more likely to ensure success for a research group. Hence even if the particular individuals might not personally adhere to gender stereotypes, acting on them and as such in a sexist fashion, might be the "rational" choice in a society which holds up views and norms structurally disadvantaging women. Policies can help to alter the consequences of people actions, and hence can influence which actions people choose. Some suggestions for policies regarding the points discussed might for instance be a stricter regulation of sexist advertisement, in collaboration with gender equality groups. Furthermore we believe that introducing quotas can counteract gender bias in performance assessment, and will also help

to reduce gender stereotypes since the later rarely rest on facts. Additionally there is only little discussion about gender stereotypes and their effects in Switzerland, yet such a topic should be addressed not only as a means of changing attitudes, but also as an indication that these stereotypes are detrimental - and not socially acceptable. Another important approach is to direct measures for change also at men. Gender stereotypes regarding women presuppose often a male actor who is assumed to endorse the stereotypes, and act on them. Tackling hence stereotypes should also be done by questioning this assumption, by involving men into the discussion about gender roles, gender perception and expectations.

[1] Sexist Humor: Local and Systemic Manifestations of Privilege and Disadvantage, 2008, PhD Thesis, Kate M. Pickett

[2] Potential Impact of Rape Culture on Juror Decision Making: Implications for Wrongful Acquittals in Sexual Assault Trials, Hildebrand M. and Najdowski C., Alb. L. Rev., 2014

[3] Science faculty's subtle gender biases favor male students, Corinne A. Moss-Racusin et al., PNAS, October 2012, vol. 109, no. 41, p. 16474–

[4] Stereotype Threat and Women's Math Performance, Spencer et al., Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, Volume 35, Issue 1, January 1999, p. 4–28

[5] Consuming Images: How Television Commercials that Elicit Stereotype Threat Can Restrain Women Academically and Professionally, Paul G. Davis et al., Pers. Soc. Psychol. Bull, December 2002, Issue 28, p. 615-1628

[6] Orchestrating Impartiality: The Impact of "Blind" Auditions on Female Musicians, Goldin et al., NBER Working Paper No. 5903, Issued in January 1997

[7] http://www.linfoulk.org/quotes_resources.pdf

[8] Gender Differences in Adult-Infant Communication in the First Months of Life, Katharine Johnson et al., PEDIATRICS Volume 134, Number 6, December 2014

[8] Sex differences and individual differences, Robert Plomin et al., *Child Development* Vol. 52, No. 1, Mar. 1981, p. 383-385

[9] The Relationship between Self-concept and Career Awareness amongst Students, Rohany Nasir et al., School of Psychology & Human Development, Faculty of Social Sciences & Humanities, National University of Malaysia, Bangi, Malaysia, December 31, 2012

[10] Gender and the Career Choice Process: The Role of Biased Self-Assessments, Author: Shelley J. Correll, Source: American Journal of Sociology, Vol. 106, No. 6 (May 2001), The University of Chicago Press, p. 1691-1730

[11] http://www.nwlc.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/final_nwlc_lowwagereport2014.pdf

[12] Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2015 Education for All 2000-2015: achievements and challenges Eliminating gender bias in textbooks: Pushing for policy reforms that promote gender equity in education Rae Lesser Blumberg 2015

[13] https://womenandmath.wordpress.com/past-activities/statistics-on-women-in-mathematics

[14] http://sjinsights.net/2014/09/29/new-research-sheds-light-on-daily-ad-exposures/ ev

[15] Content Analysis of Gender Roles in Media: Where Are We Now and Where Should We Go? Rebecca L. Collins, Sex Roles, February 2011, Volume 64, Issue 3, p. 290-298

[16] Female role stereotypes in print advertising. Identifying associations with magazine and product categories, Emmanuella Plakoyiannaki and Yorgos Zotos, European Journal of Marketing, Vol. 43 Issue 11/12, p. 1411 – 1434

[17] Face-ism: Five studies of sex differences in facial prominence, Archer Dane et al., Journal of Personality and Social Psychology 45 (4), p. 725–735

[18] Contribution of Media to the Normalization and Perpetuation of Domestic Violence Stephanie Kohlman et al., Austin J Psychiatry Behav. Sci., Volume 1 Issue 4

[19] The Impact of Violence Against Women in Advertisements, Capella, Michael L et al, Journal of Advertising 39, no. 4, p. 37-51

[20] Sexualization of Girls is Linked to Common Mental Health Problems in Girls and Women--Eating Disorders, Low Self-Esteem, and Depression; An APA Task Force Reports - February 19, 2007

[21] http://www.onlineharassmentdata.org

[22]http://www.stopstreetharassment.org/resources/statistics

[23] http://www.nwlc.org/our-issues/employment/sexual-harassment-in-the-workplace

[24] https://debuk.wordpress.com/2015/05/23/why-women-talk-less/

[25] Interruptions in Group Discussions: The Effects of Gender and Group Composition, Lynn Smith-Lovin, American Sociological Review, Vol. 54, No. 3, p. 424-435

[26] Women's Experience of Workplace Interactions in Male-Dominated Work: The Intersections of Gender, Sexuality and Occupational Group, Tessa Wright[*]
Article first published online 27 January 2015 for Gender, Work & Organization

[27] Exposure to sexist humor and rape proclivity: The moderator effect of aversiveness ratings, Romero-Sánchez et al, Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 25(12), p. 2339–50

[28] The enjoyment of sexist humor, rape attitudes, and relationship aggression in college students, Ryan, K. et al., Sex Roles, 38(9-10), p. 743-756

[29] The effect of sexist humor and type of rape on men's self-reported rape proclivity and victim blame, Viki G. et al., Current Research in Social Psychology, 13(10), p. 122–132

[30] Gender Inequality and the Division of Household, Labor in the United States and Sweden: A Socialist-Feminist Approach. Calasanti, Toni M. and Carol A. Bailey, Social Problems, 38(1), p.34-53

Deutsche Übersetzung:

Stereotype sind in der Regel eine vereinfachte Charakterisierung von Leuten oder Sachen und können helfen, sich zurechtzufinden. Sie helfen uns neue Erfahrungen schneller zu integrieren und darauf zu reagieren. Stereotype können aber auch, weil sie zum Eindruck führen, sie seien wahr, starke Werkzeuge sein, Normen, Handlungen und Erwartungen zu verstärken.

Frauen sind nach wie vor eine in Politik, Wirtschaft und Machtpositionen untervertretene Gruppe und Gender Stereotypen können dazu führen, dieses Machtungleichgewicht aufrecht zu halten.

Gut dokumentiert ist, dass Personen, die Angst davor haben, negative Stereotype zu erfüllen, signifikant schlechter abschliessen als sonst [4]. Dies kann auch beobachtet werden, wenn Medien, die Frauen in klischeehaften Geschlechterrollen zeigen [5]. Stereotype wirken sich erwiesenermassen auch auf die Beurteilung der Leistung aus. Die Wahrnehmung der eigenen Kompetenzen beeinflusst die Lebensentscheidungen. Ein Faktor für die Berufswahl ist, was die Leute glauben, wo sie erfolgreich sein können [9] – und wo sie denken, dass ihre Fähigkeiten geschätzt werden [10]. Dies kann zu einer Geschlechtertrennung der Berufe führen, mit den Frauen meist untervertreten in den prestigereicheren und lohnenderen Bereichen [11], was zu einer weitern Verfestigung der wirtschaftlichen Ungleichheit und Ungleichheit in Bezug auf sozialen Einfluss führt.

Studien zu online-Belästigungen haben ergeben, dass Frauen unverhältnismässig oft allen Arten von Belästigungen ausgesetzt sind. 25 % der bis 12-jährigen Mädchen und 90 % der jungen Frauen bis 19 Jahre erleben genderspezifische Belästigungen im öffentlichen Raum. 60 % aller Frauen haben ungewollte körperliche Übergriffe erlebt have experienced unwanted physical harassment [21, 22]. Am Arbeitsplatz war mindestens ein Drittel der Frauen Objekt sexueller Belästigungen [23]. Seit einiger Zeit ist bekannt, dass Frauen in Diskussionen viel öfters unterbrochen werden als die Männer [25]. Sexistische Witze mögen zwar auf den ersten Blick als harmlos erscheinen, bestehen aber in einem spezifischen sozialen Kontext, stellen akzeptierte Normen dar und vermitteln sie. Damit verstärken die Witze wieder die Stereotypen. Es konnte gezeigt werden, dass solche Witze die Akzeptanz von sexistischem Verhalten erhöhen und sogar zu höherer Akzeptanz von Gewalt gegen Frauen führen [27, 28, 29], und Sexismus als einen gemeinsamen Wert normalisieren [27]. Dies alles kann zum Ausschluss von Frauen aus männerdominierten Gebieten führen, da sie schädliche Umgebungen vermeiden wollen.

Gender Stereotypen und deren Folgen kann entweder mit der Änderung der Politik oder der Einstellungen entgegengewirkt werden. Eine Änderung der Politik dürfte die effektivere und schnellere Lösung sein, weil diese wirksam ist, ohne vorauszusetzen, dass sich die gesamte gesellschaftliche Haltung verändert hat. Sie kann aber die Änderung der Einstellung bewirken. So haben die Daten von Schweden gezeigt, dass die Änderung der Politik betreffend Vaterschaftsurlaub im Alltag zu einer gleichmässigeren Verteilung der Kinderbetreuungspflichten zwischen den Eltern geführt hat, aber auch zu einer Änderung der Einstellungen in Bezug auf Gender und Kinderbetreuung [30].

<u>Empfehlungen</u>

In der Schweiz sind Gender Stereotype und deren Folgen unter dem Gesichtspunkt zu diskutieren, dass sie ein Mittel sind um Haltungen zu ändern, aber auch als Hinweis, dass Stereotypen schädlich und gesellschaftlich nicht akzeptierbar sind.