Journal of Gender and Power

Vol. 4, No. 2, 2015

Journal of Gender and Power is aimed at providing an international forum for discussing various issues and processes of gender construction. It is a scholarly, interdisciplinary journal, which features articles in all fields of gender studies, drawing on various paradigms and approaches. We invite scholars to submit articles and reviews reporting on theoretical considerations and empirical research.

Journal of Gender and Power is published
by Faculty of Educational Studies, Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznan – Poland).

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A clear answer to what it means to be a woman and a man has existed for centuries. Femininity and masculinity, in most cases, have been conceptualised in terms of two antinomies. In the course of socialisation, disparate identities, as well as aspirations and social roles of men and women were construed. He who was destined to function in the public sphere, yield power, and concur the world, had to be brave, self-confident, precise and success-oriented, intellectual, assertive, aggressive, and competitive. She, in turn, who was confined to the private sphere, was socialised to be emphatic, caring, delicate, focused on hearth and home, looking after children and psychologically defensive.

Thus, following J. Lorber, it can be stated that this way of thinking epitomises the fact that "biology has become an ideology" (Lorber, 1998, p. 12). As a consequence, as put forward by the same author, in the course of the last century, a number of gender stereotypes have emerged. They concerned, for instance, unequal (and biologically determined) competences in the area of "using technology". This resulted in women being excluded from dozens of professions as well as impacted mutual relationships between genders in the everyday life. For Lorber, the metaphor of driving a car becomes symbolic in this context. She writes that "if a man and woman who are a couple are in a car together, he is much more likely to take the wheel than she is, even if she is the more competent driver". "Men drive cars whether they are good drivers or not because [as it is assumed] men and machines are a «natural» combination. But the ability to drive gives one mobility; it is a form of social power". It is worth adding that at the time when the first automobiles were manufactured, "feminists «co-opted» the symbolism of mobility as emancipation «Donning goggles and dusters, wielding tire irons and tool kits, taking the wheel, they announced their intention to move beyond the bounds of women's place»" (Lorber, 1998, p. 16).

The recent decades undermined the dichotomous perception of gender. We are dealing with the radical women's emancipation in all spheres, but most importantly in education and the labour market. We are also witnessing the emergence of such forms of female identity which in the past were exclusively the male preserve. Masculinity and femininity ceased to be seen as contrasting poles, and within a given society a number of equally-important inflections of masculinities and femininities exist; sometimes determining which one is more adequate can pose considerable difficulty.

The majority of articles in this issue is inscribed in the debate on the essentialist and constructivist approaches to gender. It is hoped that they show new, very interesting ways of thinking in this field.

Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik
Editor-in-Chief

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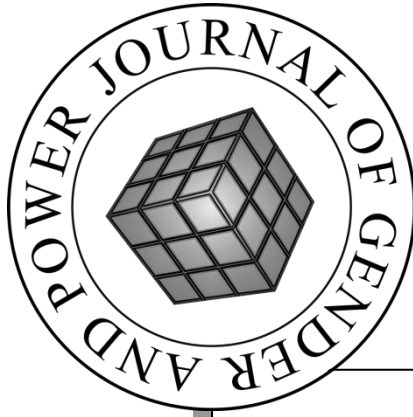
ARTICLES

Agnieszka Gromkowska-Melosik

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan (Poland)

Women's Education and Professional Success. Paradoxes of Access and Exclusion

ABSTRACT. The article considers the paradoxes of dynamics of women's access to the higher education and the labour market. The prevalent assumption behind an educational gap between men and women is that of privileged men who enjoyed much greater access to all levels of education. However, most data on women's access to higher education is telling of an educational emancipation of women. It is difficult to talk about female discrimination in terms of numbers. On the other hand when we analyselabour market structure the position occupied by women and men differs to a significant extent when compared to the educational context. It turns out that the rule of meritocracy, which applies to women at the level of education, is not applied once they have graduated. The same diploma, which is a definite advantage for males, is a less significant advantage for females.

KEYWORDS: education, labour market, gender gap, success, access to higher education, exclusion

I would like to start with the assertion that social and educational discrimination of women used to bea common sense belief among millions of people. When talkingabout women's position in the educational system, categories of exclusion and marginalisation are brought up. The prevalent assumption behind an educational gap between men and women is that of privileged men who enjoyed much greater access to all levels of education. This translated into their professional opportunities, and even more so, the market has always preferred men, especially those holding high-salaried senior positions. However, something exceptional occurred during the last two decades, something which can be called an educational emancipation period for women or women's power. In developed countries, a good metaphor for capturing the increase in aspirations and educational attainments of women is the metaphor ofan express train in motion, while boys changed from a fast train to a stopping train. And so, all macro tendencies point to the fact that women enter spaces traditionally reserved for men only in an inva-

sive way, an observation which is especially pertinent to the higher education sector.

Analysing women's access to higher education in 74 countries globally, allows us to conclude that in 51 countries women constituted the most numerous group among university students. In about 60 out of 74 countries women majored in pedagogical, humanist and art programmes, and in 50 countries they majored in programmes related to social sciences, law, and management. It is only in the area of engineering studies that women are in a significant minority (UNESCO, 2012). The data I'm drawing on can lead to somewhat surprising observations. In many countries, which are labelled as patriarchal, the participation of women in education is much higher than that of men (classic examples are Namibia, Israel, Jordan or Turkey).

Globally, for every 100 male student, there are 105 female students. Turning to a local perspective: in Western Europe and North America, there are 133 female students for every 100 male students, in Central and Eastern Europe the numbers are 125 and 100 respectively. In Latin America it is 112 and 100 respectively. The dominance of women in Arab countries, in this respect, is somehow amazing as for every 101 female students there are 100 male students. Only in Asia and Africa women constitute a significant minority.

Most data on women's access to higher education, then, is telling of an educational emancipation of women. It is difficult to talk about female discrimination in terms of numbers. In Western countries, populated by diverse races and ethnicities, minority women have absolutely dominated minority men. Women are gaining much better access to elite higher education institutions, which until recently were the bastion of sexual reproduction of the elites. Among the Harvard University students, women constitute over 48% of the student population, including 46% in the Law School and nearly 49% in the Medical School. Women are the majority at the undergraduate level (Degree Student Head Count: Fall, 2009). A very similar situation can be observed in Oxford, where women constitute almost 47% of the student population at the undergraduate level, and more than 45% at the graduate level (www.ox.ac.uk, 2015). Access to the doctoral degree is also on the increase which is clearly visible in the USA context. In 1978 doctoral degrees granted to women were a mere 27% of all the degrees, while in 2008 this number has soared to 46%, more specifically 53% in the medical studies and life sciences, more than 58% in the social sciences, 52% in humanities, and

more than 67% in educational studies (National Science Foundation, 2009). It could be claimed that in the developed countries, it's difficult to talk about female discrimination or excluding women from education. Predictions regarding women's access to educationwithin the next 10 years are unambiguous and point to a radical increase placing men on the educational defensive.

A logical goal of university alumni is to use the degree on the job market – getting a high-salaried professional and social position. In this context, however, the position occupied by women and men differs to a significant extent when compared to the educational context. It turns out that the rule of meritocracy, which applies to women at the level of education, is not applied once they have graduated. The same diploma, which is a definite advantage for males, is a less significant advantage for females; in other words, this diploma might prove useless for women on the job market. Logically, if we take into consideration the fact that professional success is to a great extent a derivative of educational attainment, then the "increase in access to diplomas" for women should bring about changes in the domain of "gender parity" in the professional structure. However, this isn't happening: "the professional distribution of women and men has undergone a merely insignificant change". Consequently, women occupy lower levels of the professional status pyramid – as compared to men. Analysis of the social praxis leads us to consider the validity of this claim: educated women are excluded from the access to professional success. What are the reasons, then?

At the outset I'd like to refer to the premises of neoliberalism. Without a shadow of doubt, it rejects the essentialist perception of an individual and exposes the idea of a "fair" fight for professional and educational success. In practice, the rule of "equal access" and "equal possibilities" (chances) comes to be seen as the political ideal. While critics of neoliberalism rightly emphasise the fact that this philosophy leads to the reproduction of cultural and economical inequity along with validating social inequity, within the meritocratic approach – which cannot be divorced from neoliberalism – gender equality (however idealistic it might be) has become a matter of common sense and everyday life. As a result women have been granted access to new spaces of emancipation; and even if this was – on a global scale – only an illusion, still the "impossible became possible". In the Western societies, female upward mobility has been increasing with every decade – they've been receiving more and more university diplomas, and more prestigious diplomas,

they are "invading" professional domains which have been a male pre-serve until now. It seems then that we're witnessing a return – although in a different social and ideological context – of an American idea of a "self-made man" – a man who should own everything to himself. In the current neoliberal version of reality the idea of a "self-made woman" is becoming more and more common, a woman who takes her own life in her own hands and rejects the attributes of the traditional femininity. In the context of neoliberal reconstruction of female identity a new label has been invented: "Thatcher's daughters", which refers to those young women who wish to be economically independent, climb the career lad-der and at the same time don't expect any support from men (Kimmel, 2004, p. 137-138).

Critics of neoliberal attitude claim that the job market functions within the frames of social development logic embedded within the ide-ology and structures of patriarchy. It can be metaphorically stated that "a big company is a man". Logically, in such an institution, success and career can be pursued only by people who embody its "rules", or to put it bluntly its – masculinity (inevitably in the traditional paradigm).

In this context, it's worth adducing Jackson's theory explaining gen-der inequity in accessing senior roles in big companies and corporations. The researcher discriminates between two approaches to this issue.

The first one assumes that employers are driven by the rules and regulations of the free market which substantially limit the scope of fe-male discrimination. Employers behave rationally and don't discrimi-nate against women on the basis of their gender if they are in possession of relevant qualifications – such attitude is to benefit the employer. From this vantage point the reasons of women's professional failure is to be found in themselves: less motivation, worse qualifications and stereo-typically feminine personalities. The second approach assumes that the employer decisions are motivated by socially constructed prejudices re-ferring to the ideas of gender asymmetry and the socio-biological pri-macy of men. Employers think that women are destined to give birth to and bring up children. It's thought that women do not possess qualities required for senior roles. We can also observe the phenomenon of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Jackson contends that, at present, lower levels of pro-fessional hierarchy are dominated by rationalisation – a characteristic of the first approach – which denies discrimination against of women on grounds of profitability (Jackson, 1998, p. 125-126). This would account for an increase in the number of women taking up more senior positions.

Jackson, however, thinks that rationalisation didn't reach the most senior roles in the professional hierarchy, as the higher in the pecking order the more important are personal relationships and interests. At this point the rule of gender loyalty and identification of men with other men serving in the capacities of managerial positions kicks in. Additional context is provided by the lack of promoting women due to the fears of company heads that promoting women to senior roles will lead to their discrimination by the male majority and thus will render her ineffective. And so, discrimination starts being rational, while gender inequity is perpetuated on all levels of professional career – always to the benefit of men (Jackson, 1998, p. 14-105).

R.M. Jackson's conception is splendidly complemented by the analysis of the well-known concept in sociology – the oldboy culture, typical for the British society. In the UK, according to the centuries-old tradition, male members of the elite are still educated in public schools only to pursue further studies in either Oxford or Cambridge. During their studies they enter life-long friendships, reaffirmed by memberships in more or less formal associations or clubs. Thanks to this, a peculiar social order is born, which entails mutual support on the part of participating men in the future (Pacześniak, 2006, p. 36; also Susan Vinnicombe states that industrial elites in the UK form "a bastion of male golf players", who have finished public schools and one of the two universities, Vinnicombe & Colwill, 1996, p. 24). One matter of common interest for the mutually supporting men is sport, with football and women in particular, women who are excluded from the access to senior positions by loyal men.

We need to expose another, very "structural" in its nature, factor of excluding women from professional success – it is related to the sex segregation on the job market. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu, three gender aspects of the origin of this segmentation can be singled out. The first one is connected with the contention that female jobs are, in a way, a continuation of household chores; hence they take up roles in education, care, and services. The second aspect stems from the general submissive social role of women to this of men who also enjoy the social monopoly for positions imbued with authority. Finally, the third aspect which is premised on the assumption that only men can control machines and technical devices (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 112).

Sex segregation on the job market concerns situations in which women undertake jobs characterised by low prestige and thin chances of social promotion or gaining social power; men, in turn, occupy posi-

tions which provide them with such possibilities. Hiring structure of women reproduces, then, social inequities. That's how women are over-represented in less prestigious and low-salaried job, while men – in prestigious and high-salaried ones. This takes place irrespective of any changes, which are to boost women's access to education and job market (Gender Gaps, 1998, p. 85).

Among the mechanisms reconstructing sex segregation on the job market – following Barbara F. Reskin and Patricia A. Ross – we can adduce primarily sex desegregation. It occurs when an increasing number of women take up occupations which earlier were seen as typically masculine – and as a consequence these occupations lose their prestige and become relatively low-salaried (i.e. an increasing number of women within an occupation is either an evidence of its lowered prestige or contributes to the lessening of its prestige) (Domański, 1999, p. 36). With reference to Boudon's conception, it can be claimed that we're dealing here with the turn-against effect, i.e. outcome of deliberate actions of persons wanting to gain certain benefits, turn against the goals, which these persons tried to achieve (Boudon, 2008). Pierre Bourdieu writes about this phenomenon in the following way: "the increase of the ratio of women is an indicator of a certain general tendency within one occupation, and in particular, irrevocable or relative devaluation, which can stem from the changes in the nature of the organisation of work within a given occupation (...) or changes in its relative position in the social sphere" (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 109; see also Schriewer 2000, p. 247). Now, we're left with the question: how does cultural capital and symbolic power of occupations change under the influence of gender-related changes within a given occupation (Delamont, 1989, p. 196). Moreover, the phenomenon of men leaving jobs – precisely because of their feminisation – further contributes towards their devaluation ("snowball effect") (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 109; see also Schriewer 2000, p. 247). We could recall, at this point, after Urlich Beck, the mechanism of a "regularity of reversed hierarchy" – the more social importance is attributed to a given occupation, the fewer women take it up, and vice versa, domains labelled as marginal and deprived of any influence are populated by women (Beck, 2004, p. 156).

It can also be observed that there is a phenomenon of clear gendered division in terms of elite occupations. And so, men and women in the area of law, natural sciences, or architecture take up jobs in different sectors which enjoy different degrees of prestige and provide different

degrees of pay possibilities. Women are more involved in the sectors whose activities concern symbolic and cultural capital, and not material wealth. Female lawyers specialise in family law, female doctors pursue careers as GPs (also often become paediatricians). Men, however, enter areas which are vested with direct prestige and are profitable (Delamont, 1989, p. 214). This leads to yet another conclusion: both female and male lawyers, female and male doctors (and so on) take up drastically different social roles despite the fact that they possess the same professional qualifications.

At the same time – as has been observed by Eva Stina Lyon – on the sex-segregated job market, women predominate in the segments which are to a great extent susceptible to politically-motivated economic decisions. The researcher enumerates such parts of the public sector as the healthcare (nurses), education (teachers), and social care. Thus, political decisions (budget reshuffling) can – to a great extent – trigger sudden and dramatic turns in women's professional biographies; more than in the case of "men's segments" (Stina Lyon, 1996, p. 302). Women, as has been observed by P. Bourdieu, traditionally occupy positions of lower prestige, threatened by liquidation, those which fall prey to a state's neo-liberal politics connected with labour market deregulation (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 110).

At this stage, it's worth pointing out some general approaches to the phenomenon of professional discrimination against women, especially with reference to promotion to higher levels of professional hierarchy. And so, the metaphor of "glass ceiling" is used in order to describe the phenomenon of the impossibility of promoting women onto managerial positions. The glass ceiling symbolises here a formal-cum-legal possibility of potential promotion while at the same time signifying its impossibility. The concept of "sticky floor" is used with reference to the impossibility of promotion in the case of women in the lower social prestige roles (clerks, PAs, tailors, etc.). Another relevant notion – encapsulated in the metaphor of "glass escalators" – refers to a speedy and not objectively justified promotion of men in occupations dominated by women (Titkow, 2003).

Trying to account for blocking women's promotion to senior positions, it's useful to draw on the idea of "Queen Bee Syndrome"[1]. It con-

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[1] The concept was used for the first time by G. Staines, C. Tavris, T.E. Jayaratne, after: Blau & De Varo, 2006, p. 16.

sists in the appropriation of male standards and values by women achieving professional success and at the same time disrespecting and disregarding traditionally feminine values and other women[2]. Such women underline their otherness and distance themselves from other women not feeling gendered belonging. They demonstrate, as described by K. Horney, an "escape from femininity", which is – according to them – worse and deprived of values. Such women, once they've secured senior positions, lead a consistent policy of depriving other women of the access to professional promotion, explicitly favouring men in this respect (Mandal, 2003, p. 21).

Furthermore, mechanisms of self-exclusion from professional success, which are closely tied with modest aspirations, can also be discerned. One of these, noteworthy of further elaboration, is connected with the fear of masculinisation. Cynthia F. Epstein draws our attention to the conflict between traditional discourses of femininity in the West and those of a professional. If she's to achieve success, she needs to possess "personality attributes" typical of men (especially as a doctor, manager or lawyer), and in particular, "unemotional assessment" emphasised by the author, as well as ruthlessness, drive to success, or competitiveness paired with high-level assertiveness (Epstein, 1973, p. 22-23). Referring once again to Epstein's views, we could claim that "Women who work in occupations dominated by men (…) seem to be genderless". Thus we arrive at a situation where "feminine and professional configurations of social roles (…) are mutually exclusive". Many critics contend that the woman – in a position vested in power over other people and decision-making – finds herself in a peculiar "trap" of femininity and masculinity – social expectations which are contradictory. In such a situation many women quit their struggle for success in the male-dominate corporate world, just to secure and maintain their femininity (Epstein, 1973, p. 22-23).

Another paradoxical context of women's emancipation can be derived from the context of masculinisation analysed above, and especially in situations where successful women identify with men. Women, who

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[2] The following text provides interesting analyses of 'queen been syndrome' in the academic milieu (among female professors), Ellemers et al., 2004, p. 325-326 (women who have been successful researchers in domains perceived as masculine are more prone to oppose promoting other women in these domains; moreover, in their self-assessment, they dissociate themselves from their gender and show stereotypical perceptions of other women).

achieved professional success, on "men's terms" and framed it in traditional masculine logic of companies, constitute on the one hand – in the neoliberal world – a symbol of emancipated femininity. Who could be a better exemplar of emancipatory dreams of equality? On the other hand, however, successful women confirm general androcentricity (and patriarchy) of the contemporary culture, and in particular the "organisational culture" not to mention the "corporate culture". In a neoliberal society (seemingly gender-, ethnicity- or race-blind) women assume an identity of the dominant group – i.e. men – at the same time lose their traditional femininity. It's also necessary to underscore one more problematic fact about the masculinisation of women in power. In contemporary societies, the woman is still perceived as a "sexual object", as a "conquest space". Thus, in order to recall P. Bourdieu's views, women constitute "symbolic objects", whose fundamental trait is to be exposed to the male (and female) gaze and the – associated with it – state of anxiety about their appearance. As a consequence, in the social perception of women, one of the most basic forms of stratification – between different groups –does not go along the traditional division axis (such as class, education or socio-economical status), but rather along peculiar socio-biological criteria related to sexual attractiveness (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 82). All research suggests that the sense of being attractive to men constitutes one of the most important components of every woman's self-esteem. How, then, can women in power maintain being sexually attractive, and at the same time not lose power? Well, the most straightforward way is to assume the male way of being as well as exercising power, at the same time distance herself from her male colleagues (subordinates). The constructed image of: I'm a beautiful woman outside, but inside I'm a "tough man". Masculinisation of identity, in such cases, seems unavoidable.

It's also worth emphasising the second mechanism – one of self-exclusion – which is connected with motherhood and perceiving her degree as merely a "marriage credential". Available American research shows that many women perceive quality education not only in terms of access to professional and social career but also as a symbol of emancipation (Schriewer, 2000, p. 247). Their professional choices seem to refer to only one assumption: "I've got my degree, I'm emancipated, I can give birth to and bring up children". An academic diploma – for them – is merely an emblem of their potential possibilities and a manifestation of their intelligence and knowledge. This diploma is a peculiar kind of per-

sonal capital, often useful – as the research says – when choosing the right partner. For many Americans, a degree from a quality higher education institution is treated as one of the important assets when seeking the best husband, the ideal being a Harvard graduate. This argumentation is inscribed in a broader,immensely significant issue of the contemporary professional woman, which is focused on the problem of choosing between being success-driven and bringing up offspring. For many of them children and family are absolutely most important and they quit their professional pursuits.

The neoliberal ideology also includes a broad cultural offer for the female body and identity, from which she can choose in order to reconstruct her identity as a successful person. While in the past women were socialised according to a clearly defined identity matrix, nowadays one might be under the impression that "everything is possible". Hence, now it seems that the woman can construct and reconstruct herself in almost any way. Paradoxically, however, this unlimited liberty in terms of construing herself and the cultural pressure on endless "recalibrations" according to the developing requirements concerning the shape of the body and identity can form a means of enslavement. Discourses of femininity are spinning faster and faster. The woman has, admittedly a historically unprecedented freedom of choice, however (again – paradoxically) her enslavement resides on the fact that she's forced to constantly make choices. For instance, in the domain of body, fashion, advertisement, beauty industry and women's magazines have one main message – "keep up with the trend". The woman, thus, jumps from one image to another one. She reconstructs herself according to the changing – every year, every season, almost every moment – rhythm of change. Hence, on the contemporary feminine horizon, one can discern anorectics, bodybuilders, once-famous celebrities and women who find their fulfilment in rosary clubs.

The "tyranny of choices" concerns not only visual aspects of the female identity but also her personality. It is – in a way a paradox – but it seems that neoliberalism leads to situations where the woman – at least in the cultural aspect – needs to adapt to the social context, while at the same time, she is assumed to be free and responsible for her success in chasing the changes. In the logic of neoliberal thinking, one should ask the question: how can a woman feel fulfilled in her desire to be a superwoman (such issues are discussed more broadly in: Hansen-Shaevitz, 2015) desired by men, abound in "female appeal and charm", and at the

same time attain social and professional success, a task which is undoubtedly not made easier if she wants to be and think in a charming and empathetic way. How can one be a mother, wife, perfectly manage a household, develop spiritually and her interests and at the same time ruthlessly climb the career ladder?

Sometimes one is under the impression that a neoliberal society conceptualises of the woman as if she was a radio – "tuning up" at a given moment to be appropriate for a given situation seems to be a prerequisite; she should possess unlimited potential in the domain of "tuning up". She should – at the same time – be this, this, and that, and that other one. She should be everybody. However, she herself usually desires to be "a concrete" and well-rounded woman, not only a repository of the "named" and reconfigured" images.

In the neoliberal "cultural chaos" at the turn of the century, the woman more and more often feels like an Aborigine in the New York City streets – shedoesn't know how to find a place of her own in the labyrinth of self contradictory images and desires, which society constructs in her. Give birth to a child or write a doctoral thesis? Accept a prominent position and travel the world or devote myself to the household chores and be happy when the husband likes my soup? Dress in an ethereal and feminine way and wear high heels or go for the male suit? Be empathetic, soft and good (and lose everything I can) or tough and determined (and become a lifelong single or a triple divorcee)? An increasing number of women seek clear answers to their dilemmas, clear answers to such questions as: who do I want to be? How do I want to be? How to think (Gromkowska, 2002)?

This type of a situation – a simultaneous cultural chaos and the tyranny of freedom with respect to choices regarding the construction of her identity – causes panic reactions in women, escape-like. Women run away from a complete ambiguity and a complete freedom. They try to imbue their lives with meaning; through assuming a certain rhythm, focusing on rituals with the view of arriving at cultural and psychological "certainty", they have to erase this ambiguity, help to flee the haunting and internally contradictory questions, help to flee the haunting freedom. Who to be? Who to become? How to live? – these questions stopped irritating us with their banality. They, once again, take on an existential dimension.

Caught in a neoliberal freedom and responsibility net, women are fighting for adequacy. Many of them succeed, which is corroborated by

the data concerning educational, professional and personal successes. On the other hand, however, the growing pharmaceutical and psychopharmacological industry proves the existence of very destructive outcome of neoliberal freedom. In this context, the aim of pedagogy is to educate – since childhood – to develop critical distance from her own biography and socially constructed criteria of life success; it also concerns professional career as well as other aspects of structuring her own biographies.

Finally, I'd like to make an attempt at a macro forecast with respect to women's access to career, status and salary. It seems that in developed countries the possibilities of women's socio-professional success are determined – to a great extent – by economic and demographic factors which are susceptible to different ideologies. In a situation of a greater demand for workforce, the job market opens up to women who receive better possibilities with respect to getting employed and promoted. We need to add though that in countries with patriarchal fundamentalism, the ideology takes priority over the economic factor in the way that women do not have a chance for professional success as such a consent would strike at the very foundations of the existing social structures. In turn, in periods of increased unemployment (where many men seek work), there is usually a turn – at the level of social consciousness – to essentialism. Women are again perceived in terms of their traditional traits and attributes There is an call for traditional femininity: the idea of the woman devoted to the roles of a mother and wife. The idea of the family crisis gets exploited as well as the decline of traditional values.

I'm personally positive that, irrespective of the economic and ideological situation, in view of substantial legal and consciousness changes it's not possible to substantially reverse the role of women in social life. The dynamics of access to the socio-professional success will be played out at the level of everyday pressure and choices, both on the part of women and the employers. Analyses of all possible tendencies – both at the level of education, and in spite of everything, on the job market – leads to formulating forecasts which are optimistic for women.

Acknowledgement

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Olga Rutkowska-Lis
University of York (United Kingdom)

The Issue of Gender in Educational Inequalities in Post New Labour England. An Outline of the Problem

ABSTRACT. The paper presents some of the problems referring to the issue of gender gap when considering educational inequality with the focus on England. Interestingly, the problem of educational inequality or inequality as such has been the focus of researchers' attention for quite a while. However, there seems to be a lack of solid data allowing to draw better conclusions referring to the interconnections of gender and inequalities. There seems to be a general agreement that the problem of gender gap in educational environments is later negatively reflected on professional life and career. Yet, there is little research proving this belief right. The reasons behind the problem of gender and gender gap may be rooted in the complexity of the matter. It is rather difficult to precisely define and name everything that may and should be involved in a gender related research. It also seems to call for more psychologically oriented terms, which forms yet greater challenge for any sociologist. Calling upon the data present, researchers tend to interpret the same sets differently due to employing varying theories, which further muddles the issue of gender, gender gap and its possible relation to educational inequalities. The article is aimed at showing some of the aforementioned problems within the context of educational inequalities in England. It is merely an attempt calling professional circles if not policy writers, to take a step back and rethink the issue of gender inequalities within the context of education.

KEYWORDS: gender, gender gap, educational inequalities, attainment

There is very little agreement on how to measure the concepts of inequalities of educational attainment or access to education. It is a truly tortuous problem that influences professional life, equality in one's workplace, equality of wages and many others. Simultaneously, the differences of the sexes are crucial to understanding gender inequalities. The reasons provided in literature as responsible for gender gap lead to emphasizing the complexity of this problem. Among these we can find information based on various cognitive theories claiming boys and girls have different learning styles; girls are more motivated to hard educational work, more likely to revise material and prone to verify their

knowledge than boys. Then, boys are more self-confident but get easily distracted, lose attention and get disheartened, none of which helps in a learning situation and school environment. They are also more susceptible to negative peer pressure and so, more frequently belittle the importance of gaining knowledge.

In its work Willis (1981) wrote that work on academic success contradicts the concept of masculinity. These ideas are reflected in research of Francis (2000), Howe (1997), Spender (1982), Younger, Warrington & Williams (1999), all showing that boys are typically louder, more physically active and easily distracted. It is often believed girls have to work hard to gain knowledge whereas boys are naturally talented and learn with ease (Cohen, 1998; Epstein, 1998; Power et al., 1998; Quenzal & Huzzelman, 2010).

There are multiple papers with research data on various gender interconnections. Many of recent research shows a rather optimistic picture with gender gap in educational attainment becoming smaller (Müller & Haun, 1994; Erikson & Jonsson, 1996; Vallet, 2004; Buchman & Di Prete, 2006). Nonetheless, the reports published since 2006 prove the complexity of the gender gap problem and the way its issue is transferred to educational attainment, and later professional life and career. And so, on the basis of the data from publications Aitken et al. (2007); DCSF (2007); OECD (2007); Lupton & Sullivan (2007); Machin et al. (2007), Meadows & Metcalf (2007) we can draw a following picture of the connections between gender differences and educational inequalities in England. Gender gap in results from English is greater than maths. On the whole, girls perform better than boys. When it comes to sciences, the differences between the sexes remain insignificant or really small. The difference in GCSE[1] exam results for students receiving 5 or more grades A*-C remains on a steady level of 10 percentage points since 1988. In 2006 this difference equals 9.6 percentage points (i.e. 63.4% girls and 53.8% boys) with greatest discrepancies (over 10 percentage points) in languages, art and humanities. Smaller differences (about 5.5 percentage point) are visible in maths and other sciences. What is worse, it seems that a stereotypical subject choice division is further strengthened – humanities, languages and the arts prevail among girls whereas geography, PE and IT are chosen by boys. Yet greater differences are observed between older teenagers (above 16 years old) who decide to take

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[1] General Certificate of Secondary Education – an exam introduced in 1989.

academically oriented A-levels. Amongst 10 most popular exam subjects chosen by students are respectively:

• Physics, business studies, geography and PE (by the boys).

• Psychology, art and design, sociology, media/film/television (by the girls).

Physics is the least popular of girls' choices yet it remains amongst the most frequently picked examination subjects (being at the time 6th in the rankings).

Interestingly, gender differences at the level of primary education (Key Stages 1 – 3) remain rather small.

Gender is not the strongest predictor of attainment and yet it remains an important and quite a reliable one. For example, the differences in attainment on GCSE level are similar for all social groups though gender gap can be portrayed differently once we look at ethnicity. Here in particular black Caribbean boys seem to be performing really poorly which is not quite the case for black Caribbean girls. White British who are entitled to free school meals constitute another group characterised by poor educational attainment[2]. Also, black Caribbean boys come last no matter whether they are eligible for free school meals or not.

Gender differences in attainment are visible mainly in results in reading and the knowledge of language as such. At the same time differences in mathematics and sciences are minor when looking both at home results dating 60 years back and international data. It is further worth mentioning there are no differences in attainment between girls and boys depending on the type of school they attend, which contradicts the beliefs of the general public.

Behaviour patterns seem stereotypical with 80% permanent exclusion referring to boys. Yet, there is a growth in the proportion of girls in the same situation (from 16% in 1998 to 20% in 2005). This is the result of lowering the percentage of excluded boys and the level of girls exclusion remaining nearly unchanged. Differences in exclusion are also slight when we look at ethnicity. Students receiving free school meals are three times more likely to be excluded that their peers, regardless their gender. Girls more often become victims of psychological harassment and boys of physical.

Looking at the gender gap in tertiary education women constitute majority of students at every level apart from postdoctoral research. It is

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[2] Only 22% gets 5 or more A*-C marks from their GCSEs, which makes 33 percentage points less than this exam's average attainment.

also mostly women who graduate with first degrees (DCSF, 2007). Unfortunately they are far less likely to choose the sciences with greatest differences in engineering and technology where only 9.1% are women and 90.9% men[3].

Considering the youngest group in education it is necessary to point to a few trends. When talking about measuring cognitive abilities using IQ or logical thinking tests (thus directed towards the youngest), gender differences are small and do not seem to reflect any later differences in achievements from English and the humanities. A report published in 2010 by Euridice points to generally better results in reading when it comes to girls. Girls devote more time to reading books and magazines whereas boys read mostly online. When it comes results on mathematics boys get better results at the primary stage of education (their fourth year) but already in the eights year of education gender gaps disappears. Also, there are no evident differences in attainment in sciences when it comes to gender division and that is regardless of the level (primary or secondary).

Unfortunately, despite well-developed cognitive and social skills in young girls, which may be the result of parents being more prone to reading to girls, teaching them songs and rhymes since their first months of life, already in primary school girls are characterised by low self-esteem including their self-efficacy with regard to what they can achieve in sciences. In an article that appeared in The Guardian Asthana (2010) wrote that the statistics are truly staggering. Boys remain far behind girls in 11 out of 13 categories at the age of 5. It is also more than a half less probable for children from poorest families to achieve good GCSE results, and Caribbean descent back boys are three times more likely to be excluded than their peers. 4 out of 5 children with special education needs (SEN), regardless their gender, are bullied at school and between one third and one fourth of Muslim girls have no qualifications.

Type of school seems to have no influence on gender gap. There are practically no schools where boys would get better results than girls. One study however shows that there are many schools where both boys and girls receive similar results. Unfortunately, these are schools where

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[3] Data provided by Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and published in a report entitled Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2014*, available at www.ecu.ac.uk.

attainment levels are generally low. It could be inferred that gender differences are greater in schools with higher attainment levels.

According to new data gender gap, instead of becoming smaller, has been gradually widening. World Economic Forum (WEF) has begun research into the area of gender equality in 2006. Then, UK was placed 9th in world rankings whereas in 2014 it dropped to 26th place. What is more, widening of the gap has been registered across all measured categories, namely:

(1) Market participation (from 37th to 46th),
(2) Educational attainments (from 1st to 32nd),
(3) Health (from 63rd to 94th),
(4) Political equality (from 12th to 33rd).

Additionally, there has been a fall in average pay for women from £ 18,000 to £ 15,400[4], making it the lowest result since 2008[5]. Nearly one third of women earn below starting point salary[6]. Disciplines such as politics, sport, culture or business remain underrepresented by women. Seven women a month are murdered by their current or ex partners, which creates a very somber behavioral picture.

It would of course be unwise to claim that all aspects relating to the problem of gender are worsening in UK. Five Nordic countries that occupy the top of results board[7] started at a higher level of gender equality than UK. Yet, they have all introduced further improvements, which cannot be said about England.

The impact of educational attainment of individuals on their chances for intergenerational social mobility has been one of the interests of vast sociological studies. Unfortunately, following Goldthrope (2013) it may be stated that the speed of research in the area seems to be preventing theoretical sociologists from developing an up-to-date theory. Consequently, research results are frequently conflicting and similarly the data gathered can and is often interpreted in various, often contradictory, ways. There is however one aspect majority of researchers agree with – so called OED model also known as the OED three or trinity, where

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[4] Which makes it a fall from 18th place in 2013 to 26th in 2014.

[5] Following the data from European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) found in their report entitled "Recent Developments in the Distribution of Wages in Europe" (sireresearch.eu).

[6] Which stands for 27% women compared to 16% men in a similar situation.

[7] Namely Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark (in that order).

O stands for Origin (i.e. social origin), E for Education and D for Destination (i.e. chosen social migration goal). In other words, experts agree on the complexity of the problem and interconnections between the factors involved.

Regrettably, that is where common views on the problem of educational differences (as well as further professional development and social progression) end. For example, reading Bukodi et al. (2015) we find out that the results based on newly created set of data covering four cohorts and used to analyse social mobility point to social mobility- contrary to common media and politicians' beliefs – not falling at all, and when it comes to women even rising. If we read McNab et al. (2002), we are to find out that using data covering female attainment in tertiary education from 1993, they claim that women would have higher results than men but were less likely to graduate with first degrees. They further point to a lack of evidence to the existence of factors which could prevent females from getting lower results in subjects remaining the domain of men and yet, on average 50% more men than women achieve best diploma results from these disciplines.

The strategies devoted to reading and counting introduced during New Labour government[8] had positive impact on reducing gender gap however, being directed only at boys they were not actually expected to drive down gender gap related discrepancies. If, for example, we take the results in reading, boys are doing better with questions about facts and girls deal better with questions referring to narration. This creates for us an opportunity to work upon curriculum which would cater for both these abilities, creating numerous possibilities for the both sexes to practice and achieve better results. It seems like a more reasonable solution as opposed to focusing purely on simplified solutions based on modifying testing forms so as to create an artificial situation where the results obtain are only seemingly more equal between the sexes. It is a pity it has not been decided to make a better use of the possibility to modify educational process in order to not only improve attainment of one group but both and further think about a more permanent solution allowing to progressively diminish gender gap discrepancies and so lead to a greater professional equality between the sexes.

In 2014 it was reported GCSE attainment gap between boys and girls was the greatest in 11 years. The percentage of girls achieving A*-C

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[8] National Literacy Strategy and National Numeracy Strategy.

grades was 73.1% and of boys 64.3% making it an 8.8 percentage points difference. Despite having received so far the largest number of A grades by boys, they still achieve lower results overall. If we compare that data to a departmental report from 2007, we may find intriguing information referring to (recently having been in the politicians' spotlight) differences with reference to the sciences. Since 2007 it had been indicated girls perform generally better than boys on GCSE level with a few exceptions. First of these would be chemistry, where gender gap would be non-existent. Next, boys would be better than girls at physics and biology by one percentage point, and from other sciences by five percentage points. Yet, newer data from a CEER report show that boys are far better at maths and their performance and attainment levels have been gradually growing since 2009. Boys are also better at biology although girls are not far behind here, and chemistry (yet here, gender gap grows). Girls seem to do better though at physics.

Looking at the GCSE results tables in the CEER database it is striking that in spite of an improvement in both boys' and girls' attainment gender gap between them persists.

Gender based differences in educational results may have various grounds. They may reflect the differences in the types of studied subjects or refer to individual features associated with attainment such a family background, age or marital status (Hoskins et al., 1997; Rudd, 1984). They may also be the result of psychological or biological discrepancies (Mellandy et al., 2000). Or they may be the reflection of gender stereotyping and prejudice amongst men dominated professions (which influences inter alia how students are graded) (Bradley, 1993).

Gender differences in education are particularly important due to the impact they have on attainment and job market position. Studies (Blanded & Machin, 1993; Jones & Makepeace, 1996; McNabb & Wass, 1997) brought empirical proof of the general public's belief in the existence of something like a glass ceiling in the UK that stops women from further progression in management and expert roles. Similarly, the study results prove another common opinion that women earn less. The studies of Battu, Belfreld and Sloane (1999) point to a dependency between earnings and previous results in tertiary education. Bachelor's degree studies (so called level 6 according to The National Qualifications Framework) completed with a distinction transfer to a 9 to 13% rise in earnings 6 years after graduation. To compare, achieving very good instead of distinctive marks guarantees only half that amount a rise in the

same time span. Therefore, the fact that more men than women achieve highest final results is a significant factor later differentiating their earnings. That is yet another reason why unequal students' evaluation is a huge problem potentially leading to enlarging the vicious circle of gender gap.

It is difficult to find studies allowing to analyse the data according to gender gap and in particular gender differences in educational attainment according to psychological or biological factors. Some elements drawing upon this problem may be found in the data covering such aspects like anxiety, exam stress, self-efficacy or willingness to take up risk strategy while preparing for the exams. Yet, these seem not to influence gender gap in terms of educational attainment.

As mentioned before, judging the differences based on gender is far from an easy task. Typically they are attributed to the differences in attainment in English and other subjects based primarily on the abilities of reading and writing. Gender difference with reference to maths and sciences is really small. On the whole, even though gender helps to predict results in particular subjects, it is still believed that social class and background are two more important factors influencing educational inequalities and their explanation. Then again, too strong a focus on only one gender – in case of UK boys – may lead to disregarding the fact that also a considerable number of girls' results are poor. It leads to conclude politicians should focus on this problem having both sexes in mind. It would be further advantageous to look at the way students are taught, the formation of curriculum, and the influence of these on the students' choice of subjects as these later affect long-term results, further educational attainment and choices of professional career. Thinking of creating a modern society we cannot choose few tracks when the country needs a vast (India railway type) network to function efficiently and well.

Previously mentioned WEF analysis shows that UK remains far behind countries where women have greater chances for equality (whether general or educational or health) and it is overtaken by countries like Nicaragua, Bulgaria or Burundi. Such comparison was only possible due to an exceptional data indexing showing any gender gaps or differences in countries regardless of gender and development level. And so less developed countries, as it turns out, are those characterized by highest level of gender equality even if the citizens' earnings are lower, education

access worse and health results poorer. Yet, there is also visible a small increase in the number of women in tertiary education.

The authors of this report claim that (comparing to a report from 2006) medium world gender gap in 2014 with reference to market participation, attainment and health has slowly narrowed (successively by 60%, 94% and 96%). This does not change the fact that no country has achieved gender equality. It is certain there is relation between gender gap in a country and its market. It is logical that since women constitute half the database of talents of that country, it would be reasonable to admit that a country's long-term competitiveness depends on how its women are treated and how their potential is explored in their professional life to secure this country's smooth economic development. And although England seemingly proceeds with progress in mind, it seems to fall far behind when it comes to gender equality. To make matters worse, present position of women in the society looks far worse than during the New Labour government. Thus, it allows us to state that a country's development may be only partial (if not ostensible), which then proves we cannot cease to be alert towards any inequalities if we want to secure better lives for the citizens and society's wellbeing. It is irrelevant which party is currently governing. All that matters is how they deal with problems and whether they have the courage and ability to choose the sort of steps and solutions that may not necessarily follow the beliefs of all their members, all in order to help the economy by directing education to the rails of actual equality.

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Renata Siemieńska

University of Warsaw and Maria Grzegorzewska University (Poland)

Civic Engagement and its Determinants – Cross-Cultural Comparisons

ABSTRACT. Civic engagement is considered to be a crucial element in the process of identifying issues both on the local and national levels, seeking appropriate solutions, legitimising decisions and selecting the ways of their implementation by elective bodies and the executive. This text is concentrated on the following dimensions of civic engagement in a typical democratic society: affiliations with third sector organisations and protest as a form of lobbying for political decisions taken by policy-makers at different levels.

KEYWORDS: civic engagement, civil society, cross-cultural comparisons

The existence of civil society is a key determinant of shaping democracy. Civic engagement is considered to be a crucial element in the process of identifying issues both on the local and national levels, seeking appropriate solutions, legitimising decisions and selecting the ways of their implementation by elective bodies and the executive. For a long time, it has been maintained that the development of democracy will be correlated with the increase in the participation of citizens in conventional forms (see Barnes & Kaase, 1979), and their interest in politics along with competences will increase. At the same time, there was a well-grounded conviction shared by many researchers that state institutions would enjoy citizens' trust, that these citizens would also believe that policy-makers, they are represented by, were able to identify important issues with regard to specific social groups and find and implement appropriate solutions which are accepted by the society. In the 1950s and 60s, it seemed that the relations between trust, value systems, and the evaluation of various institutions and the civic engagement corroborate these assumptions.

Research undertaken afterwards, during the following decades, show that the relationship between these factors undergoes changes in

stable democracies (e.g. Dalton, 2002). Democracies funded on the ruins of undemocratic systems provoke questions about the emerging relationships within them and the pursued version or versions of the democratic system (e.g. Jaquette & Wolchik, 1997; Wolchik & Curry, 2008).

The overthrowing of the communist regime in the Central and East European countries, which occurred 25 years ago, triggered many comments on whether these countries would be able to follow the path of West European democracies, and even if they were, how much such democratisation processes could last. It was numerously remarked that they should opt for a "third way" considering the specific experiential burden of the communist regime which had lasted almost half a century.

Cross-cultural comparative explorations show that relations between the variables under discussion and the form that they assume depend on the context. Moreover, the history of democracy in a given country, the level of economic growth, etc. clearly influence the shape of the political system.

The last 25 years can be perceived as the opportunity to reflect on the differences and similarities in the social reactions, behaviours and values between old and new democracies. Here, I will be most interested in the attitude towards state institutions, civic attitudes and behaviours as a particularly important social capital of democracy conditioning the functioning of political systems and the factors diversifying these attitudes and behaviours.

In this text, I concentrate on the following dimensions of civic engagement in a typical democratic society: affiliations with third sector organisations and protest as a form of lobbying for political decisions taken by policy-makers at different levels.

1. Civic Society: Definition and Functions

Civic engagement tends to be broadly defined as diverse activities filling the gap between the "state" and "economy" (e.g. Habermas, 1984; Young, 1990; Walzer, 1995). They are an effect and a form of self-organisation of the members of a society. These activities differ with regard to the character and function from the ones which are characteristic to the previously mentioned spheres. Moreover, they potentially contribute to limiting the power of institutions and actors functioning within them. They trigger the increase of social justice through identifying social issues characteristic of particular groups, articulating them

and putting pressure on solving them in a particular way. These activities often concern groups which are on the periphery of the attention of institutions which belong to the remaining two spheres. Social activity in the space between the state and the economy, as has been noted by many researchers, fosters democracy. As has been pointed out by Robert Putnam (1993), who looked at the functioning of Italian local and regional communities, their development and level of meeting diverse needs of community members depends on the existence and the type of civil culture. Where it is non-existent, or can be barely noticed, meeting the above-mentioned aims was difficult.

"Success in overcoming dilemma of collective action and the self-defeating opportunism that they spawn depends on the broader social context within which any particular game is played. Voluntary cooperation is easier in a community that has inherited a substantial stock of social capital in the form of norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement. Social capital here refers to features of social organisation, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam, 1993, p. 258). As has been emphasised by many researchers, a number of functions fulfilled by associations existing in contemporary societies with regard to their attitude towards the social system can be distinguished. They fulfil the pivotal role in the process of social integration and representing interests of particular social groups. They also serve an important function as institutions providing all sorts of social assistance in the domain of social services, learning, sport, education, etc. (see Freise & Hallman, 2014). These associations frequently carry out tasks commissioned and financed by administration. When discussing advantages of such solutions, the possibility of more efficient identification and higher chances of reaching target groups are highlighted. Moreover, the costs of carrying out such tasks are often lower. Some researchers point our attention to the fact that some tasks are not completed as expected and that association staff fail to live up to expectations. However, also in this case, as claimed by some, the very fact that they take up certain issues results in the citizens' trust (see Seibel, 1996). These are only a few possible scenarios, though. It also happens that in contexts where there is a low social trust in the government, social institutions, and various politically-related agencies, associations or generally-speaking third-sector institutions enjoy limited trust on the part of citizens who do not see the need for developing them as they deem them to be ineffective and not living

up to their expectations. In such cases, citizens sometimes decide to "take matters in their own hands" and identify questions important for particular local or supralocal groups and lobby for solving them or protest should the authorities impose solutions not accepted by them. Furthermore, as research shows, participation in apolitical organisations of the third sector frequently neither triggers interest in the local or supralocal politics nor does it politicise citizens (e.g. Marody, 2004; Deker, 2014).

The following discussion will be mainly based on analyses concerning selected European countries within the so-called "sixth wave" of World Values Survey (WVS) carries out between 2010 and 2012.

2. Orientation Towards Values

The interest in politics and the types of aims, that according to citizens should be achieved in a given country, depend on the values which are held most important. The basic value structure and the attitudes concerning social order undergo changes in countries at various levels of political and economic development. Ronald Inglehart suggests that societies shift from the value system characteristic of the stage of "modernisation" to that of "postmodernisation" (see Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005). The researcher defines materialist values as the ones which draw importance to the economic and physical safety typical of the modernisation stage. In turn, values oriented towards self-fulfilment and the quality of life, called postmaterialist, are deemed characteristic to the stage of postmodernisation. He contends that postmaterialist values start playing an important role once people have attained materialist values and because they have attained them (see Inglehart, 1997, p. 35). It is, among other things, the presence of the latter values in communist countries that Inglehart (1997) sees as the reason for overthrowing these regimes, as this political system did not create the possibilities of attaining postmaterialist values. Inglehart and Siemieńska (1998) and other authors have pointed out that gaining the sense of security in communist systems, given the objectively low possibilities of meeting other needs, resulted in the increase in orientation towards postmaterialist values. However, the analyses conducted in the following years (on the basis of WVS results at the beginning of the 2000s) show that the unstable political and economic situation after overthrowing communism resulted in the reorientation towards materialist values in the postsocialist countries (see Siemieńska, 2004; Siemieńska, Basanez & More-

no, 2010). This tendency can also be noticed especially among the youngest age groups who had been disillusioned due to their high and unrealistic expectations concerning the expected standard of living.

3. Interest in Politics

According to the commonly assumed model of democratic society, citizens should be interested in politics. This would make them competent when participating in decisions concerning local and supralocal issues and when initiating various types of activities in the public sphere. At the same time, experience tells us that the level of interest in politics differs from country to country and even within one country, and depends on a number of factors. Furthermore, the thesis that members of societies with consolidated democratic systems always pay more attention to, and express more interest in politics when compared to non-democratic countries has not been corroborated. Situations have been noted where members of a given society, dissatisfied with the functioning of the system, get involved in politics with the aim of changing it. Data from the beginning of the ninetis century (WVS, 1990-1993) show, for instance, that in South Korea, South Africa, Lithuania, Bulgaria or Poland, more people declared that politics plays a "very important" or "important" role in their lives than was the case with Switzerland, Austria, France, Italy or Belgium, not to mention Spain and Portugal which are relatively recent democracies. Political mobilisation, which has spanned the majority of the Polish society in the 1980s, ranging from the emergence of the Solidarity movement to the 1989 parliamentary elections that resulted in the change of the political system, is a powerful exemplification of this phenomenon. In the 1990s, the political system change, the feeling that some problems had been solved while other had not (particularly in the economic sphere), resulted in, for example, the decrease in the importance attached to politics. In 1990, 39% of citizens declared that politics play a "very important" role in their lives, while in the period between 1997 and 2000 this number decreased to 31%, later in 2006 to 30%, and in 2012 it was 32% (i.e. 5% of respondents said "very important", while 27% "important").

Late 1990s and the beginning of 2000s saw a smaller interest in politics in post-communist countries when compared with countries with stable democracies. In the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria the declared interest in politics was indicated by choosing

"very interested" and "somewhat interested" answers by 40% of respondents, while in 1995 this number was 58%. In 2006, this number fluctuated between 32% in Romania and 45% in Slovenia (no data for Slovakia). In the same periods this interest was higher in the Western countries. In 1995 it amounted to 65% in the USA, 67% in Norway, 65% in East Germany and 59% in West Germany. In 2006, the level of interest remained the same in the USA, decreased by a few per cent in East Germany and increased in West Germany by the same percentage. Such fluctuation in the level of interest in politics can have different causes. Sometimes they are triggered by an economic and/or political situation (e.g. a crisis), at times however it can also be an element of a long-lasting development of the political culture of particular societies (Inglehart et al., 2010).

4. Trust in Institutions and People

In research conducted in 2012, within the World Values Survey, respondents were asked about their trust in different types of Polish institutions and organisations and selected international institutions. Here, collective measure was applied: number of institutions in which the respondents trusted. The highest percentage of those declaring their trust was noticed among citizens of various political systems (Belarus, Cyprus, Estonia, and Sweden; diagram 1).
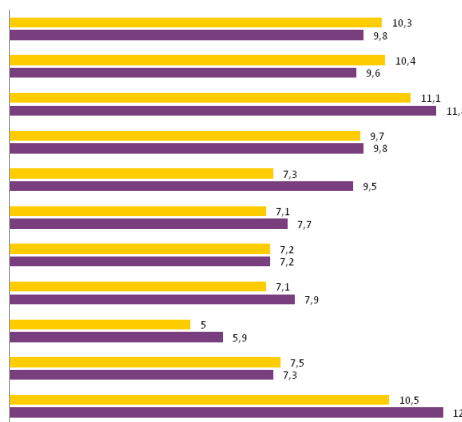
Diagram 1. Number of institutions which the respondents trusted (median) (WVS 2012)

In yellow – respondents without a university degree; in purple – respondents with a university degree. Names of countries in the order in which they appear on the diagram (from top to bottom): Belarus, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

The next group consisted of countries with stable democracies (Germany and the Netherlands). The remainder of the group – with the lowest citizen trust – comprised Central European countries, Russia and Spain. Both respondents with and without a university degree frequently pointed to institutions which they trusted, however university degree holders were more prone to do that, particularly in the Netherlands and Sweden (diagram 2).
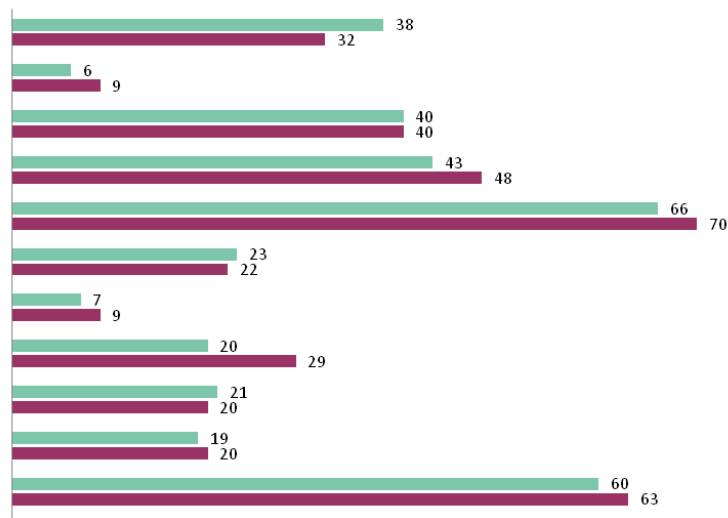
Diagram 2. Most people can be trusted – in percentages (WVS 2012)

In green – females; in purple – males. Names of countries in the order in which they appear on the diagram (from top to bottom): Belarus, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

In the vast majority of countries, men somewhat more frequently than women declared that most people can be trusted. Education was the factor which differentiated trust to other people in all countries under comparison with the exception of countries from the former USSR, i.e. Russia, Belarus, Ukraine as well as Cyprus (outcome of multiple regression analysis). People with university degrees more frequently report that other people can be trusted. Age played a less important role with regard to trust level, while gender and the frequency of religious practice no role at all.

5. Life Satisfaction

It has been repeatedly stated that higher life satisfaction fosters engagement in activities aiming at raising quality of community life and identification with local and supralocal communities. At present, lack of satisfaction on the part of citizens – especially those living in new democracies – has been observed. This might be due to the unrealistic expectations, particularly in the economic domain, accompanied the change of the political system.

In research on stable democracies, citizens more frequently declared their life satisfaction. This observation was closely connected with the level of education, i.e. the better educated were more satisfied. Age, as the differentiating factor, played the second most important role: the younger were more satisfied. These two factors were particularly strongly differentiating the perception of satisfaction in countries with stable democracies. In Poland – as the only country among the ones under comparison – the frequency of religious practices was tightly connected with the perceived life satisfaction: the more frequent practitioners were more frequently dissatisfied.

6. Civic Engagement and its Correlates

The assumption that democracy is based on substantial involvement of community members in civic engagements has always been one of the definitional characteristics of this political system. Research conducted in recent years shows a decrease in the number of involved people in Western countries which is considered to be a worrying phenomenon. It also runs counter to the expectations concerning the development of democratic systems and the lack of possibility of fulfilling certain important functions sustaining the system. Many authors contend that associations serve the purpose of providing citizen skills (see Verba, Schlozman & Brady, 1995), citizen spirit and commitment to the community (see Putnam, 2008, p. 196). However, as put forward by Dietlind Stolle (2010, p. 286): "Participation in social networks and voluntary associations also entails political mobilisation and participation yet not unquestioningly". The ambiguous relation between activity and politicising is also highlighted by other researchers (see Galston, 2001; Seligson, 2002).

Is there, according to the citizens of European countries, a need for organisations functioning in the space between the state and individuals/members of the society? At present, as opposed to previous decades, the conviction that Non Governmental Organisations are needed is met with ambivalent reactions on the part of European Union citizens. In 2013 41% think European citizens do not need these types of organisation and they have other ways of influencing the process of political decision-making (*Europeans' Engagement in Participatory Democracy* 2013, p. 7); the highest numbers were recorded in Romania (55%) and Greece (52%), the lowest, in turn, in Finland (23%), Denmark (27%) and the Netherlands (34%). In Poland 43% of people (as opposed to 50% who had different opinions) considered NGOs as an important tool enabling them to influence political decision-making. This data shows that the conviction about the need of political action via the means of institutions offered by democracy and enjoying a long-lasting tradition in stable democracies, has a limited number of supporters, particularly in new democracies. The numbers of active citizens there is disproportionately lower (*Europeans' Engagement in Participatory Democracy* 2013, p. 33). Generally, the young tend to be less frequently involved in NGOs and their activities.

Do relations between certain attitudes and behaviours considered to be part of model of democracy, a model created on the basis of observations and research on stable democracies, appear with the same force in post-communist new democracies and the countries characterised by a different type of development? Results from research carried out in 2012 within *World Values Survey* will be utilised in the following analyses. The following countries were included in comparisons: 1) countries with stable democracies and a long-lasting history of democracy (Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden); 2) Spain, i.e. a democratic country where fascist dictatorship was replaced with a democratic system after Franco's death (in the 1970s); 3) countries with new democracies which have entered the path of democratic changes after communist regimes were overthrown in Central Europe in 1990s (Poland, Estonia, Romania, Slovenia); 4) countries which emerged on the territory of the former USSR (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus); 5) a country which does not belong to any of these categories, i.e. Cyprus. The choice of countries is driven by the fact that they were researched within WVS in 2012.

7. Activity in the Third Sector Organisations

In countries with stable democracies, the number of people who are not active in third sector organisations is disproportionally lower when compared to new democracies. While in the former case it amounts to 12-26%, the numbers fluctuate between 42% and 78% in the latter (table 1).

Table 1. Number of organisations with which respondents were affiliated (WVS 2012)

	Belarus	Cyprus	Estonia	Germany	the Netherlands	Poland	Romania	Russia	Slovenia	Spain	Sweden	Ukraine
,00	42,2	48,2	56,0	25,8	22,7	58,5	64,3	77,6	43,7	63,9	12,4	67,7
1,00	42,5	21,5	23,7	30,1	29,8	22,5	23,0	14,6	25,4	23,3	20,7	20,9
2,00	10,1	12,7	11,4	23,3	23,4	8,3	6,6	4,1	13,8	6,4	22,5	7,0
3,00	2,8	6,2	5,2	10,9	11,7	4,4	2,1	1,9	7,2	3,4	19,9	2,4
≥4,00	2,4	11,4	3,7	9,9	12,4	6,3	4,0	1,8	9,9	3,0	24,5	2,0

In stable democracies, many people belong to several organisations which is a rare phenomenon in other countries. In almost all countries under comparison, the relative majority declares to be affiliated with religious organisations and/or connected with the church and those dealing with sports and recreation. Belarus is the sole exception, as the highest number of people–disproportionately higher than in other countries – belongs to trade unions while at the same time this number is minimal with regard to memberships in other organisations. However, also in Sweden the involvement in trade unions is also high, as was the case with the other organisations discussed above.

Involvement in third sector organisations is more frequently declared by citizens of countries where the need for NGOs is noticed (see the discussion above). Considering the modest, and with time even insignificant belief in the need for NGOs, a question arises as to how
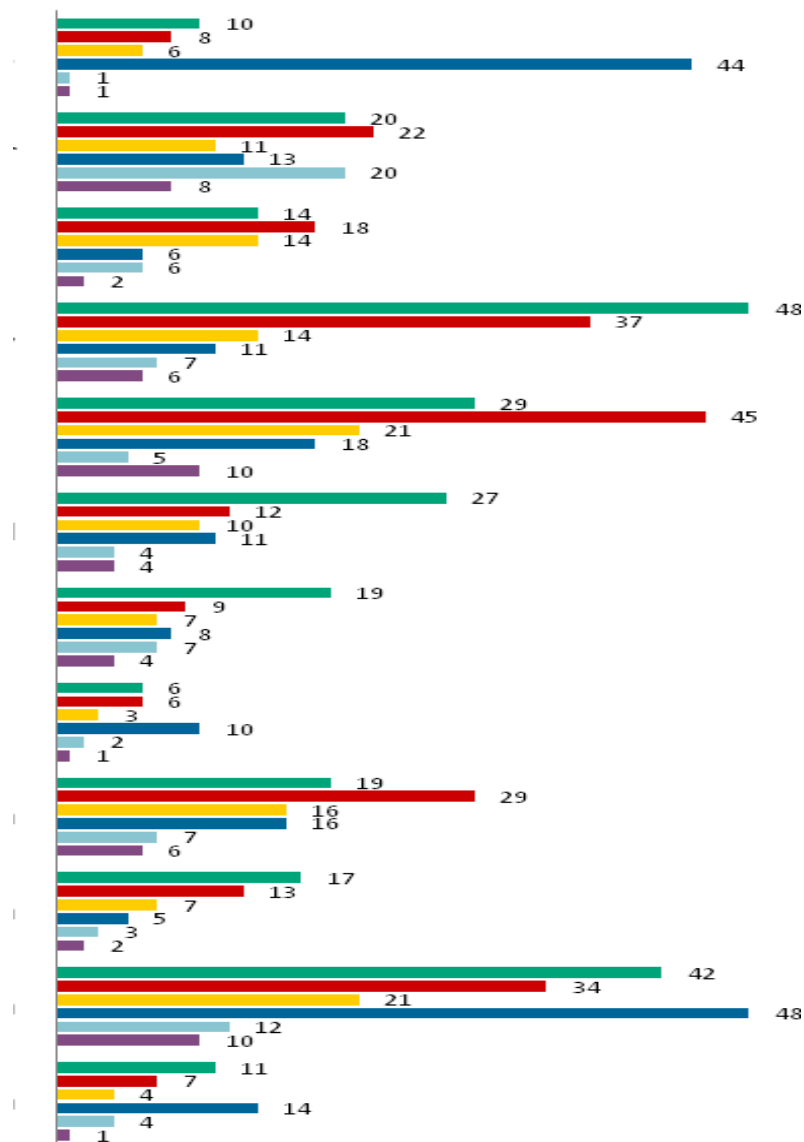
Diagram 3. Membership in organisations – in percentages (WVS 2012)

In green – religious or church organisations; in red – sports and recreation organisations; in yellow – science, arts, music organisations; in blue – trade unions; in cyan – political party; in purple – environment protection organisation. Names of countries in the order in which they appear on the diagram (from top to bottom): Belarus, Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Ukraine.

people strive for exercising influence over achieving aims that they consider important. As civic activity observations in various countries show, the lack of possibility of meeting one's individual or community needs within the existing NGOs coupled with the lack of trust in them results in individual activities which – at times – become a germ of active groups in a long run (e.g. neighbourhood groups which aim at creating a friendlier microenvironment or hobby groups). A specific trajectory of activity began by an individual who – with time – can attract other people in order to achieve a goal has been observed numerous times. For instance, the well-known Warsaw-based MaMa foundation established by a group of young well-educated mothers initially focused on architectural barriers, which were obstacles for the disabled and mothers with prams. Now the foundation is concerned with a broader spectrum of issues. Formalising it paved the way to possibilities of securing funding from the local or supralocal budgets as well as a spectrum of other foundations and institutions. An example in case are some urban movements (e.g. Mergler, Pobłocki & Wudarski, 2013). Also, individual initiatives have been noticed. These cannot be categorised as urban movements, however they strengthen the feeling of subjectivity of initiators and become an example for others who strive to meet their individual needs and the needs of their microenvironment. An example of the forms such activity can take is reaching agreement between owners of two neighbouring shops in the Mokotów district in Warsaw about who was to paint the frontage of the building or the initiative to set up a park in an unmanaged and littered site in the Kabaty district in Warsaw. These examples of initiatives come from the capital but this does not entail that such projects are not taken up in various smaller and bigger local communities.

8. Protests: Their Content and Functions

Observations of contemporary societies also indicate that their members reach out for a more diverse ways of exercising influence in the public sphere, something that was named unconventional back in the 1970s (e.g. Barnes & Kasse, 1979, Inglehart & Welzel, 2005) due to their relative infrequency and the noticeable departure from what was deemed the norm. The recognised form of political participation was

participation in elections, which were treated (and, in fact, are treated as such until now) as fundamental and characteristic of democracy and influencing politics, decisions and a way of replacing political elites. However, elections in numerous countries, including those with long-lasting democratic traditions, arouse less and less interest on the part of citizens who are less eager to take part in them. This is caused by the fact that supporting a given political party does not ensure solving important, from the perspective of particular social groups, issues. The phenomenon of the decrease in interest in elections, relative poor participation of the youth, both in post-communist countries and those with stable democracies, indicates that we are dealing with the change of ideas about the efficiency of the standard mechanisms of the functioning of democratic systems. First of all, it is a result of the disenchantment with the efficiency of such conventional measures; secondly, the increasing level of education already among the young generation fosters the development of the generation-specific conviction that we know what we want to achieve and we do not need any middleman in the form of political class; thirdly, the more and more dominant individualistic orientation especially in the young generation does not incline to become engaged in a collective thought about what is good for the society as a whole.

The reality shows that in the recent decades, citizens more and more often do not agree with the decisions taken by the political elites, and they attempt to persuade them to undertake actions that would take into consideration the needs of diverse social groups. This activity is to cause that the authorities feel the pressure to reconsider modifying the pursued policy and will abandon certain ideas and means of arriving at them in favour of others (this relates to, for instance, the course of roads, construction investments, making public spaces excluded from public use). These direct forms of influencing aim at putting pressure on ruling elites, and for this reason they are often referred to as *elite-challenging.* Various forms of protest, which were used to be considered unconventional (e.g. illegal strikes, building occupation, petition signing, boycott), as shown by cross-cultural research, are more and more often utilised by society members as instruments of lobbying, they also enjoy an increased approval (see Inglehart, 1997; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Putnam, 2008). The main aim behind protesting against certain acts of public authorities or generally the politics they pursue is to put direct

pressure on these authorities so that decisions are altered or made according to the protesters' expectations. Such protests can take the form of one-off campaigns or repeated a number of times; sometimes it becomes a part of the activity of a given type of organisation (e.g. ecological associations).

A protest is a form of social activity which expresses the dissatisfaction with the decisions made by authorities or institutions, disapproval of the ways of disturbing *status quo* or – quite conversely – demands change. What is more, protests in singled out cases often become a prelude to demanding substantive changes (see Tarrow, 1996). Participations in such campaigns have various motivations. In the case of some members, one can talk about being involved in campaigning "for" or "against" a given question. Some persons join movements (or protests) due to the need to fit the environment (see Rucht, 2010). Examples of different motivations of participation can be multiplied *ad infinitum*. In the case of organisers of such movements, the aim might be not only to express their attitude towards a certain issue but to instrumentalise it for the purpose of mobilising the movement and/or building their own support.

Due to its nature, protest provides individuals with the feeling of their subjectivity and the possibility of putting direct pressure on the ruling elites in matters which a specific social group wants to deal with. In the case of elections, the distance between the generally formulated programme of a given political party and the point of decision-making in a given case, and implementing such a decision is considerable, and the relationship far from obvious. Sometimes it happens that a presented programme remains in the sphere of declarations. The frequent lack of trust in the political class is compounded by the lack of belief that elections are a means of achieving the desired solutions. The increase in the citizen educational level predisposes them to take a stance on issues more often than they used to; at the same time they are confident of their qualifications and suggest conceptions about the means *en route* to solutions. Researchers of stable democracies, in the recent decades, emphasise that this process increases, that the younger generations – which received much better education than the generations of their parents – more and more often resort to various modes of protests, and these become a part of their "normal" lives. In turn, in post-communist countries, although – in the case of Poland – protests were random, they gained on

momentum and became mass protests (e.g. the Solidarity movement); mass uprisings in the last decades elevated the protest to the primary method of exercising influence and an effective means of achieving more satisfying goals in a plethora of issues, but particularly in the context of low trust in the existing institutions.

Protest is a mean utilised by various social groups, factory staff, inhabitants. However, upon a comparison of participation in protests across EU states within the last two years, it turns out that the percentage of citizens involved in various types of protests or other ways of expressing their opinion does not diverge from the European average in the case of Poland. Here, we mean such campaigns as expressing one's opinion on public matters via direct contact with local, regional or national politicians, signing petitions, etc. Signing petitions – the most popular form of protest in Poland – was ranked below the European mean, i.e. 29% of Poles sign petitions while the European average is 34% (Flash Eurobarometer 373, *European Engagement in Participatory Democracy*, 2013). Indeed, the differences between countries were significant; for instance, in the UK petitions were signed by 53% while in Cyprus by a mere 7% of citizens within the last two years.

Citizens of countries with stable democracies were more frequently involved in diverse forms of protest when compared to other countries, post-communist ones in particular. Petition signing was the most frequent form of protest followed by participation in demonstrations (diagram 4). In accordance with the observations made above, citizens holding university degrees had a more profound sense of their subjectivity and were more frequently participated in protests. It can be claimed, then, that the forms of civic participation within the framework of democratic systems are more often drawn on by well-educated and better-off citizens when compared to other members of the society. At the same time, it needs to be highlighted that, given the diverse forms stemming from historical experiences of each country which cannot be neglected, certain similar behavioural patterns emerge, yet these are more frequent in countries with stable democracies.

In the construed models of democracies, certain relationships between given demographic and social characteristics, attitudes and behaviours are emphasised as an effect of certain factors or the result of the interaction between numerous variables. It has been repeatedly contended that civic engagement is more significant in contexts where citi-

zens have more trust both in other people and institutions not only of their own state but also the international ones. Robert Putnam (1993) extensively wrote about the relationship between trust and political behaviours in the context of Italian local communities. Thus it seemed legitimate to acknowledge the relationship between old and new democracies amid the above-mentioned variables as crucial in forming civic engagement with regard to the functioning of the democratic system. Analyses of multiple regressions were performed with the view of determining relationships with regard to participation in NGOs activities (the third sector) and participation in protests. To what degree can we talk about the development of the syndrome and strength of relationship among characteristics of the system that emerged in new democracies when compared with countries of stable democracies?
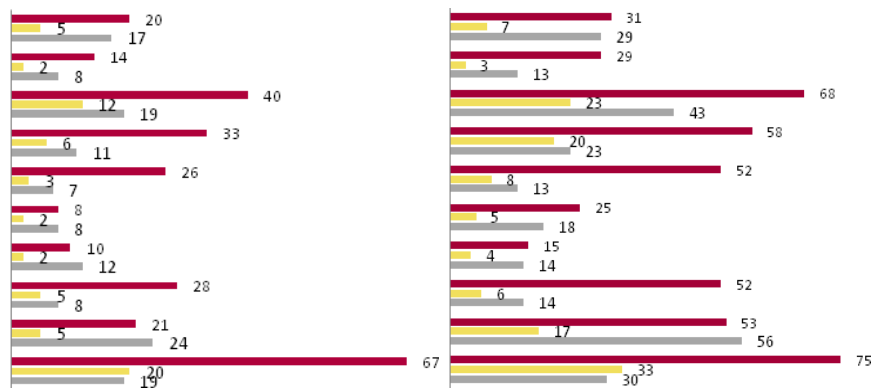
Diagram 4. Participation in various types of protests – in percentages (WVS 2012)

On the left – respondents without higher education; on the right – respondents with higher education. In red – petition; in yellow – boycott; in gray – demonstrations. Names of countries in the order in which they appear on the diagram (from top to bottom): Cyprus, Estonia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

This model includes age, gender, education, and also frequency of religious practices which is considered to be of importance. For instance, Inglehart, Norris and Welzel, who have been long involved in analyses of relationships between these variables, and political behaviours and attitudes, draw our attention to the fact that generations differ between one another due to their upbringing in different historical contexts. The

role of the increasing citizens' educational level has been emphasised repeatedly as influencing individual aspirations within which the need to exert influence over issues concerning individuals exists in a more or less direct way. Two elements of Inglehart's battery measured this in our model, i.e. materialist and postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 1997). These were the political priorities indicated by respondents within the next 10 years: "Seeing that people have more to say about how things are done at their jobs and in their communities", "Giving people more to say in important government decisions" as well as the declaration regarding the level of interest in politics. The sense of freedom, control over one's own life, and the general level of life satisfaction have also been incorporated into the model, as it has been assumed that people with the sense of their own subjectivity will be more active. In turn, the general life satisfaction can also lead to the involvement in organisations, while the lack of thereof can result in participating in protests.

Analyses have indicated that the following are the major predictors of activity in organisations: age, educational level, frequency of religious practices and the interest in politics. This seems to hold true for almost all countries. Gender, in turn, does not seem to be a factor differentiating engagement. This shows that the changing social roles of women, their substantially better education compared with the past, and in the contemporary perspective – level of education better than that of men, make their experiences similar to those of men in many respects. These factors indicate that women behaviour cannot be reduced to gender which in the past "veiled" the othered experiences and civic engagement (see Burns, Schlozman & Verba, 2001). The remaining attitudes and opinions considered to be of significance and characterising citizens in the commonly assumed model of democracy generally play a lesser role when compared with the ones discussed above. At the same time, they are stronger predictors of engagements in NGO activities in old democracy countries (Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden) and in Cyprus which stands in contrast with post-communist countries. The latter ones are less significant or are not related to civic engagement. It is also trust in the already existing institutions and impersonal trust that do not form the capital fostering activity in organisations (table 2).

Table 2. Number of organisations with which respondents are affiliated and actively engaged (WVS 2012) (multiple regression – beta and adjusted R-squared)

	Belarus	Cyprus	Estonia	Germany	the Netherlands	Poland	Romania	Russia	Slovenia	Spain	Sweden	Ukraine
Constant	,000	,050	,000	,000	,002	,005	,000	,000	,000	,001	,002	,000
Age	-,189***	-,036	-,122***	,012	,141***	-,206***	-,083**	-,097***	-,198***	-,031	,071*	-,106***
Gender	-,045	,088**	,007	,027	-,028	,069*	,030	-,023	,053	-,026	-,034	,045*
Education	,048*	,110**	,144***	,183***	,260***	,104**	-,026	,099***	,090*	,140***	,165***	,019
Frequency of religious practices	-,140***	,020	-,274***	-,236***	-,243***	-,038	-,071*	-,140***	-,144***	-,143***	-,189***	-,130***
Number of groups that R trusts	-,020	,083**	,052*	,025	,065**	,012	-,019	-,015	,017	-,035	,081**	,043
Interest in politics	-,025	-,121***	-,081**	-,163***	-,111***	-,005	-,098***	-,073**	-,096**	-,099**	-,133***	-,074**

More influence in workplace and community	,019	,052*	,007	,044**	,016	,058*	,060*	-,035	-,010	,030	,098***	-,010
More influence over governmental decisions	,035	,056*	,007	,053*	,040*	,045	,005	,012	,034	-,033	-,008	,080**
Sense of free choice	,056*	-,073*	,070*	,069**	-,063**	,025	,045	-,027	,021	,071*	,070*	-,036
People want to take advantage	,058*	,125***	,018	,028	,074**	-,059*	,004	,022	,108**	-,024	,025	,012
Life satisfaction	,020	-,026	,079**	,057*	,006	-,049	,054*	,056*	-,048	-,008	,024	,083**
Adjusted R-squared	,068	,083	,152	,161	,191	,063	,023	,051	,078	,047	,141	,044

*p< .100; **p< .010 (in yellow); ***p< .001 (in green)

Education and interest in politics are the predictors of participation in protests, as was the case with the involvement in organisational activities. It indicates that protests against certain activities or action plans on the part of some groups or authorities at different levels are defined by participants as the activity in political sphere where the responsibility for the subject of protests is ascribed to the authorities conceptualised in various ways. It is worth highlighting that the political priorities indicated by respondents within the next 10 years – "more influence in workplace" and community and "more influence over governmental decisions" (indicators of postmaterialist orientation –

Inglehart, 1997) – are statistically more significant predictors in the sta-
ble, old democracy Western countries (Sweden, the Netherlands and
Germany; table 3).

Table 3. Number of forms of protests attended by respondents (WVS 2012) (multiple
regression – beta and adjusted R-squared)

	Cyprus	Estonia	Germany	the Netherlands	Poland	Romania	Russia	Slovenia	Spain	Sweden	Ukraine
Constant	,730	,009	,000	,181	,165	,903	,021	,029	,203	,001	,000
Age	,097**	,020	-,038*	-,018	-,073*	,022	,105***	-,106**	,031	-,058*	,015
Gender	,008	,040	,034	-,030	-,029	,056*	-,039*	-,036	-,048*	-,059*	,044*
Education	,223***	,121***	,224***	,271***	,137***	,182***	,047*	,199***	,253***	,144***	-,014
Frequency of religious practices	,048	-,086**	-,016	,067**	,049	,011	,032	,036	,048	,039	-,002
Number of groups that R trusts	,138***	,016	,046*	,040	,071*	,055*	-,021	,051	,035	,068*	,004
Interest in politics	-,221***	-,211***	-,248***	-,139***	-,148***	-,175***	-,137***	-,122***	-,286***	-,259***	-,189***

More influence in workplace and community	,075*	,069**	,068**	,052*	,067*	,018	,050*	,041	,009	,064*	-,006
More influence over governmental decisions	,061*	,017	,115***	,075**	,069*	,030	,042*	,013	,016	,085**	,058*
Sense of free choice	-,017	-,042	-,003	-,032	,026	-,008	,057*	-,033	,065*	-,009	-,045
People want to take advantage	,010	,000	,005	,027	,066*	-,007	-,027	-,015	,070*	,005	-,020
Life satisfaction	-,047	,077*	-,040*	-,058*	-,040	,010	-,055*	,013	,007	,018	,084**
Adjusted R-squared	,132	,092	,176	,134	,093	,076	,040	,083	,205	,131	,042
Constant	,054	,042	,111	,104	,063	,049	,013	,082	,114	,046	,003

*p< .100; **p< .010 (in yellow); ***p< .001 (in green)

The comparison of predictive roles included in the two models of multiple regression, i.e. "sense of free choice" and "life satisfaction", show that they played a more significant role in the case of engagement in organisation activities than in the participation in protests. It needs to be added that the presented models to a greater degree explain both engagement in organisation activities as well as participation in protests in countries with stable democracies. At the same time, they show much lesser degree of crystallising relationships between the attitudes and

behaviours in new democracies. Moreover, attention needs to be drawn to the fact that multiple regression models, in which only "classical" demographic and social variables (i.e. gender, education and religious practices) are included, determine certain behaviours or strengthen attitudes to a much lesser degree than the models which include selected attitudes to and orientations towards values. These results are in accordance with the conclusions drawn by Zimbardo and Leippe (2004, p. 240), who observe that the consistence of behaviours and attitudes is a rule when (1) the attitude is strong and clear, (2) the attitude relates to the behaviour which is required by a given situation, (3) the attitude and behaviour are intimately connected with yet another element of the attitude system (be it cognitive, or emotional) and (4) the attitude is important for a given person.

9. Conclusions

Many researchers observe changes in the ways of functioning of stable democratic systems (e.g. Dalton, 2002; Nevitte, 1996; Sartori, 1994). New democracies do not follow the footsteps of the model ways of constructing and crystallising democratic systems. Those of the states which wanted to mirror them, seem to somehow start in the middle of that model. Building on their experiences they differ, to some extent, in the choices made in the sphere of attitudes, values and behaviours. The already existing conceptions of civic engagement and their premises are specific to a given context. However, the influence of global cultural and economic processes cause that their divergence from old democracies is not as significant as was maintained in the 1990s, despite the lack of the long-lasting history of constructing democratic systems. As has been emphasised by academics, democratic systems are flexible and have powerful adaptive potentials. They are located, in a way, in the constantly ongoing process of transforming institutions, relationships between elites and the society, means of solving conflicts and, importantly, these systems are not identical with regard to the way of functioning.

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Denice Mena Padilla
California State University, Fullerton (USA)

Melinda R. Pierson
California State University, Fullerton (USA)

The Effectiveness of Social Stories Implemented Through Technology: Is There a Difference in Outcomes between Males and Females?

ABSTRACT. The effectiveness of technologically-based social stories for males and females with autism is explored. An increase in positive behavior responses and improved communication are two outcomes compared to paper-based social stories. Additional research should continue to validate the use of technology supports for males and females with disabilities in the classroom.

KEYWORDS: social stories, technology, males, females

1. Background and Purpose

Autism spectrum disorder presents deficits that target an individual's ability to effectively communicate, and develop socially appropriate behaviors (Sansoti & Powell-Smith, 2008). Among other things, it hinders an individual to fit in society to their fullest potential. Males are more likely to be diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. Yet, many of the males and females who are diagnosed with autism cannot distinguish between the social cues that allow for a more natural form of communication and behavior observable to most individuals without autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (Attwood, 2007). In the last ten years, there has been a rise in children diagnosed with ASD by 173% which puts this disorder as the quickest growing developmental disability within the United States (Sansoti & Powell-Smith, 2008) with a notable increase in males being diagnosed. Because autism varies from person to person, it has been cumbersome trying to find effective ways to combat the deficits

presented by this disorder. Many of the individuals diagnosed with autism suffer ridicule by peers, struggle making and keeping meaningful friendships and often times become ostracized (Richter & Test, 2011).

One method that has been applied as a form of intervention in regards to social and behavioral deficits is the social story, which is a short, concise, and individualized narrative that depicts a corrective and more appropriate response to a social situation (Gray, 2000). The social story was developed for the purpose of responding to the ever growing frustrations with male and female individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). The difficulties they face in regards to understanding social situations by setting forth certain guidelines that provide educators and therapists the opportunity to help all young males and females to understand the social norms of behavior can be overwhelming (Howley & Arnold, 2005). Traditionally, social stories have been delivered through reading a paper version of a story targeting a behavior that an individual needs to acquire, however different approaches have been implemented in the efforts of having a more successful outcome of acquiring the new skill (Sansoti & Powell-Smith, 2008).

Technology has been highly regarded as an engaging form of delivering instruction in the classroom. More and more educators turn to technology to facilitate learning situations for their students especially males. Education specialists are also investigating this option in teaching individuals with autism the social norms needed to function appropriately in society (Richter & Test, 2011). One of these methods includes video modeling. Video modeling is when a recording of the skill being taught is demonstrated to the student having difficulty learning that particular skill (Charlop-Christy, Le & Freeman, 2000). According to Stokes and Baer (1997), video modeling has become increasingly popular due to its increased ability to generalize the skill being taught. Not only has this strategy demonstrated high success rates for teaching males with ASD, it has also demonstrated high success rates in implementation from school to home environments (Schreibman, Whalen & Stahmer, 2000). Other technology-based social stories consist of computer- assisted instruction. This form of delivery has proven quite successful due to the use of computer technology. According to Sansoti & Powell-Smith (2008), children with ASD find electronics, including computers intrinsically motivating (especially males) and, therefore, become more engaged in the skill being acquired. In fact, males with autism learn significantly more when taught by a computer than when taught by an educator

(Heimann, Nelson, Tjus & Gillberg, 1995). Individuals with autism are visual learners; thus, transmitting information through a technologically based social story may enhance the meaning of the skill being taught. This would support the student by engraving the skill into memory and putting it into practice (Grandin, 2006). Due to the verbal and nonverbal deficits these individuals face, more negative behaviors may arise as an outcome which further ostracizes them from their peers and community (Tantam, 2003).

Because individuals with autism have difficulty when trying to effectively communicate during social situations, more engaging and promising interventions need to be developed in order to successfully combat social difficulties that arise for people with ASD.

2. Review of the Literature

Social stories have been a widely used tool in trying to teach individuals, primarily those with autism spectrum disorder, certain skills that allow them to more appropriately function within the social norms. Recently social stories have been implemented not only on children with ASD, but on children displaying undesired behaviors such as off task behavior, or to promote task completion (Leach & Duffy, 2009), In fact, many studies have gone ahead and have turned away from the traditional form of social story where a story is created for the individual and is then simply read, to a more relevant form that focuses on transmitting the social story through technological medias such as ipads, smart boards, video modeling, DVDs, and Powerpoint (Xin & Sutman, 2011). This has been an especially attractive option for males. Social Stories that are presented through digital media promote a more motivating, engaging, experience and also allow for a more positive and receptive intervention not only for children with ASD, but for any child who needs intensive support with a certain skill (Yildirim et al., 2001).

3. Types of Technology-Based Social Stories

Some of the technology based social stories include digital social stories. These stories are transmitted through computer technology and can be embedded within current relevant curriculum. Technology has been proven to be a motivational component for learning and an effec-

tive way to keep individuals engaged for longer periods of time while learning a specific skill (Chen & McGrath, 2003). Digital photography can also be used to capture images of inappropriate and appropriate behaviors to visually demonstrate what certain behaviors should look like. This method is used for generalizing a skill throughout the individual's environment by involving classmates, teachers, family, and community members in the story. It is also a creative way for the individual to explore appropriate skills through a media such as a camera. Other variations of technology-based social stories include multimedia stories through Powerpoint. Through this method, educators are able to transfer a story script targeting a particular student and the skill they are reinforcing. Images are then added to the slides that coincide with the story and a creative alluring background is then added to make it aesthetically engaging and appealing.

Smart Boards have recently become popular in the classroom setting. Social stories transmitted through this type of media become ever more engaging because the individuals are able to interact with the Smart Board through diverse methods. This technology allows more manipulation of whatever is being presented and if social stories are being transmitted through the media, the possibilities and interactions are endless. Male students with autism tend to find more creative uses for Smart Boards and are motivated to improve behaviors with the use of a Smart Board.

3.1. PowerPoint

Social stories have been used primarily on individuals with ASD. However, social stories that are transmitted through reading without a need of interaction have not always been proven to be successful (Partington, 2007). In a study by Xin & Sutman (2011), two special education teachers attempted to make it possible for male sand females with ASD to be able to easily imitate, observe, review and put into practice each of the appropriate behaviors targeted. The target was to encourage the students to vocalize their wants and needs in an appropriate manner (Xin & Sutman, 2011). A PowerPoint presentation was utilized in this study and transmitted to a smart board where the males with ASD were able to actively be involved in their appropriate skill learning by practicing the skill presented. The Smart Board was created by SMART Technologies in 1991, but it was not until recently that it has been fully uti-

lized to support children with ASD (Xin & Sutman, 2011). The researchers were able to touch the screen and mark with their fingers which appropriate behavior they witnessed. In this particular study, a 9 year old boy who had been diagnosed as autistic participated in the Smart Board story experience. The boy had very limited verbal communication abilities and became very easily upset and frustrated. He then began to make sounds or used humming as a form of communication. A 9 year old girl was also a participant of the Smart Board social story study. She too was diagnosed with autism, but unlike her counterpart, her language skills were age appropriate; however, she did not socialize with her peers appropriately. She had a difficult time asking if she could be included in social time or play time. The team of researchers identified the target behaviors and developed appropriate social stories following Gray's (2000) guidelines. The researchers then compiled a program that included a PowerPoint depicting images of appropriate behaviors and videos of students utilizing appropriate communication. The Smart Board was then utilized to allow students to interact with the images, circle correct modeling, and imitate the appropriate behavior. The children participated with this intervention for 13 days and, according to the data, the children's inappropriate behaviors decreased by day 7 and were almost extinct by day 13 (Xin & Sutman, 2011). Although the Smart Board social story was successful for the verbal behaviors, it was not as successful for helping the 9 year old boy learn how to raise his hand without someone prompting him.

3.2. Video Modeling based Social Stories

Video Modeling is another form of technology-based social story which can be utilized to teach individuals with ASD appropriate skills/behaviors. A study conducted by Cihak and Kildare (2012) demonstrated that for three children, two males whom were classified as severely autistic and one male who was moderately autistic, indicated that the off-task behaviors of the three was significantly reduced due to the video modeling intervention. The children in this study were able to access the video of on-task behavior whenever they needed to refer to it time and time again. A second study by the same researchers utilized the same video self-modeling method on a group of two males and two females with ASD. These children displayed aggressive behaviors while

transitioning. They were asked to watch a short video of themselves appropriately walking in the hallway. The results indicated that these children too were able to improve their transitioning skills and maintained proper transitioning for the next 9 weeks (Chiak & Kildare, 2012).

Similarly, a study conducted by Coyle and Cole (2004) looked at video self- modeling and self-monitoring to improve transitioning behaviors of four male elementary students diagnosed with ASD. These four students demonstrated inappropriate behaviors such as aggression, elopement (sitting on the floor and not being able to get them up whenever it was time to transition from one location to the next).

In an additional study conducted by Dorothy Scattone, video modeling was the primary form of intervention used to encourage a 9 year old boy with Asperger's syndrome to effectively socialize with others. Over a period of 15 weeks, different social stories were introduced and taught to the boy. The social stories were acted out and a camera was utilized to video tape the appropriate behaviors. For this case, behaviors such as eye contact, smiling and initiation of a social situation were some of the primary skills taught with success.

3.3. Social Stories through iPhones

Technology-based social stories have also been used for adults with autism such as in a case study conducted by Samuels and Stansfield (2011). The study targeted interactive skills for four males with autism to try and improve social interactive skills in specific situations. IPhones were utilized to transmit social stories utilizing Gray's (2004) guidelines trough text messaging. The story included images, video links, suggested videos, and website guidelines to help the individual learn the skill. Text messages would be sent and then practiced. The findings resulted in significant improvements for the four males in gaining skills to make them more socially appropriate in public situations.

3.4. Computer Aided/Multimedia Social Stories

Computers have allowed social stories to become more relevant and engaging for males and females with autism. The use of a computer allows for the individual to take more control of the learning experience

which can then positively affect motivation as well as increase a positive attitude (Yildrim, 2001). Social stories through this media allows for participants to receive feedback directly from the program which can be then used to better support the individual with autism by correctly learning a skill.

4. Conclusion

Overall, the literature depicts that social stories do contribute to the development of skills necessary to function in social situations. Social stories that are transmitted through technology are proven more successful due to the high engagement rates especially of male students. Students respond better to relevant forms of intervention and in social situations with males and females with autism, technology has been proven to be one key to support student success.

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Marta Kwaśnik
Maria Grzegorzewska University (Poland)

Maciej Karwowski
Maria Grzegorzewska University (Poland)

Please, Mind the Gap. Gender and Computer Science Education

ABSTRACT. Functioning in contemporary reality requires a variety of different skills, but computer skills are among the most prevalent ones. In this article, we review theories and research related to the gender gap in computing and computer science education, as well as provide several possible lines of explanation of this gap, organized around the psychobiosocial model of gender differences. We demonstrate this gap in Poland using different data-based exemplifications, i.e., showing the gender gap among participants of national contests in programming, awardees of prestigious fellowships for young scientists or showing gender differences in scholarly positions. We discuss reasons and consequences of the identified gap in education, but also in society as a whole.

KEYWORDS: computing; computer science, gender gap, biosocial model

Almost two centuries ago, after nine months of work, Ada Lovelace (daughter of Lord Byron), created the first abstract algorithm applicable for a mechanical machine. It came to be known as *Analytical Engine* (Huskey & Huskey, 1980). Since that time, Lovelace is perceived as the first female computer programmer (Gürer, 2002). Interestingly, many still find this positivist rather than romantic story controversial and doubtful (Huskey & Huskey, 1980), which resembles social resentments related to females' creative abilities in computer programming and science in general (Ceci & Williams, 2010).

In this paper we explore the complex and still controversial issue of the relationship between gender and effectiveness of functioning in the wide area of computer science. It goes almost without saying that regardless of the astonishing achievements of women in science and business (Abbate, 2012, but see also Gromkowska-Melosik, 2014), computing is still the 'boys' clubhouse. Successes of Grace Hopper (also known as Holy Grace), Adele Goldberg, Anita Borg (Gürer, 2002), Carly Fiorina,

or Meg Whitman (Yost, 2010) are far less known than those of Steve Jobs, Bill Gates or Marc Zuckerberg. Paradoxically, since the eighties we have observed a systematical falloff of women in computing (Hayes, 2010), and in 2015 girls and women are still out of the computer science loop (Margolis & Fisher, 2002, p. 2). Small and decreasing proportion of women studying and working in computer science raises a lot of concerns (Cohoon, 2011). During the last few decades, researchers, educators, entrepreneurs, and policy makers have considered and examined the possible explanations for this underrepresentation (Dryburgh, 2000; Margolis & Fisher, 2002), and the gender issue in CS has formed a separate area for scientific analysis and public debate (Lagesen, 2007; Roberts, Kassianidou & Irani, 2002). In 2009 and 2010 the National Science Foundation invested around $20m. in research projects aimed at encouraging women to join computer science and other computer-related fields.

Interest in gender-fair issues in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) is being linked to the increasing role of computing technology in contemporary world. Steady progress and powerful potential of information technology (IT) not only develops the global economy, but also influences social interactions and alters forms of education. Personal computers, smartphones, online and mobile services have become an integral part of today's people daily and professional activities. The worldwide Measuring Information Society Report has demonstrated that in 2014 almost 3 billion people around the world used the Internet, and nine out of ten Polish households with a child were connected to World Wide Web.

High-technology development, digital innovations and access to information play crucial role in quality of life and economic growth. 20th century factories have been replaced by IT businesses and start-ups. ICT industry's revenues in Poland increased by one-third between 2009 and 2012, and so did the number of companies and employees in IT and ICT. Explosion and expansion of information technology form new citizens and workers who should "parrot less and think more" (Prensky, 2011, p. 3). As Marc Prensky (2011) argues, such "meta" skills as problem-solving, critical thinking and programming will play a crucial role in the 21-st century, especially that programmers, computer engineers, and computer science educators represent the so-called Super-Creative Core of the creative class (Florida, 2002); the main goal of their work being problem-solving and discovering new solutions. This industry usually

offers not only well-paid and abundant, but reputable and creative jobs as well. Therefore the gender gaps – if observed here – should be considered especially problematic (see also Baer & Kaufman, 2008; Gralewski & Karwowski, 2013; in press or Karwowski, Lebuda, Wiśniewska & Gralewski, 2013 for a more general overview of gender differences in creativity).

Plenty of research from different countries and cultures has documented the role of gender-specific barriers behind females' underrepresentation in computing (Busch, 1995; Cheryan, Plaut, Davies & Steele, 2009; Galpin, 2002; Kodaki & Berdousis, 2015; Lagesen, 2008; Papastergiou, 2008; Shashaani, 1997; Vekiri, 2010). What we provide in this article is a data-driven line of potential explanations of the gender disparity in this field. More specifically, we discuss psychological, educational and social factors standing behind the gender gap in CS. This paper is organized around four sections: we start with a brief overview of the specificity of computer science and its links with cognitive abilities. Then, we review Polish data that reflects the magnitude of women's underrepresentation in computer science. Then, we switch to possible explanations, scaffolded by the psychobiosocial theoretical framework of gender differences (Halpern, Wai & Saw, 2005). Finally, we offer some arguments about several educational and cultural determinants that shape and enhance the gender gap in the field of computing.

1. Specificity of the Computer Science Domain and Programming Proficiency

As we have mentioned above, computing skills drive innovation required for global economic competitiveness (White, 2010). Particularly, however, computing skills may exert powerful influence on learning and functioning in the whole domain of education. In 2006, the European Parliament and Council presented a recommendation concerning eight key competences for lifelong learning. Two of them are especially relevant for our argument: (1) mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology and (2) digital competence, both directly linked to computer science, which is perceived as a strongly math-related field. While today the basic level of computer literacy is usually considered quite an obvious and natural skill (especially for digital citizens; see Prensky, 2011), the burgeoning requirements and expectations of the modern labor market increase creative aspects of using computers and technology. Computer programming is but one example.

For the purpose of this article it is worthwhile to present a short analysis of terminological distinctions regarding the field of computer science (CS), as there are several definitions of the field itself. Association for Computing Machinery (ACM) defines computer science as "an integrated field of study that draws its foundations from mathematics, science, and engineering" (ACM, 2001). In turn, The Computing Sciences Accreditation Board describes CS as a discipline that "involves the understanding and design of computers and computational processes" (CSAB). Combination of mathematics and engineering fields forces computer scientists and IT employees to think computationally, not only mathematically. Almost ten years ago, Jeannette Wing (2006), professor of computer science at Carnegie Mellon University claimed that computer science is the study of computation and proposed the term *computational thinking* (CT) to describe another skill (or set of skills) crucial for contemporary people. Wing strikingly highlights that CS is not only about programming computers, but instead she postulates the idea of computational thinking defined as specific thought process that consists of heuristic reasoning, as well as abstractive and recursive thinking. Computational thinking is hence closely related to insight problem-solving (Bar & Stephenson, 2011) as it is engaged in such different phases, as reformulating the problem or efficiently enhancing solution discovery. Wing's conclusion is that computational thinking " (…) includes a range of mental tools that reflect the breadth of the field of computer science (…) and is a fundamental skill for everyone, not just for computer scientists. To reading, writing, and arithmetic, we should add computational thinking to every child's analytical ability" (Wing, 2006, p. 33). This may be taken even further by positing that such understanding of computational thinking is conceptually close to creative thinking as commonly defined by psychologists (Guilford, 1960; Treffinger, 1985; Torrance, 1972). Despite the complexity of computational thinking and pervasive enthusiasm toward computer science, both are too often simplified. For instance, even in CS computer programming is defined as *coding*. Because coding is *trendy*, there are plenty of such worldwide initiatives as Hour of Code, Code for Life, Made with Code, coding competitions or special coding events. However, programming is not a single coding activity; it is a process that consists of several stages: (1) understanding the problem, (2) designing, (3) coding, and (4) comprehending and debugging (Pea & Kurland, 1983). Noteworthy, the aforementioned "mental tools", i.e. procedural and conditional reasoning, planning, and ana-

logical reasoning are likewise required for programming proficiency. What is more, a reciprocal relationship between cognitive abilities and computer programming skills has been reported, so some 'core cognitive' abilities and styles boost computational thinking and programming competence (Bishop-Clark, 1995), but training in this field proves to be effective in developing such thinking as well (Clements & Gullo, 1984).

Six cognitive factors are usually considered as crucial abilities that influence computer programming. These are: mathematical ability, memory capacity, analogical reasoning skills, conditional reasoning skills, procedural thinking skills, and temporal reasoning skills (Pea & Kurland, 1984). Moreover, the role of mental models (Mayer, 1989), spatial ability (Jones & Burnett, 2008; Webb, 1984), and general intelligence (Ambrosio, da Silva Almeida, Macedo & Franco, 2014) has been examined. Additionally, a positive relationship between field independence and success in programming is well-documented (Bishop-Clark, 1995). Some studies provide convincing evidence for cognitive effects of programming development, with major problem-solving skills and mathematical rigor being among the skills that are developed (Pea & Kurland, 1984).

2. Women's Underrepresentation in Computer Science

Over the last 25 years representation of women in computer science has been diminishing (Charles & Bradley, 2006; Cohoon, 2003; 2011; Dryburgh, 2000; Galpin, 2002; Hayes, 2010; Margolis & Fisher, 2002). Surprisingly, a persistent decline began in mid-1980s when the IT and ICT industries started to increasingly develop and prevail in worldwide economy. Especially in the United States, proportion of female postsecondary students of computer science at all degree levels began to fall. Since 2005 only 12-13 percent of female college students considered computing as their main discipline (Hayes, 2010). Moreover, merely 14-15 percent take the Advanced Placement test for computer science (SAT Data and Reports). Similar trends were observed in colleges and universities: between 1986 and 1996 women's share of bachelor degrees in computer sciences decline from a peak of 42,195 to 24,545 (Hayes, 2010), however this drop was observed only among bachelor female students, not for graduate programs. Hayes (2010) argued that this fluctuation pattern is distinctive for many scientific disciplines, including

social sciences and engineering. However, a decreasing proportion of female representation is typical not for all STEM fields, but is visible merely in computer science. Improving gender balance has been reported in mathematics, physical science, biology and engineering; proportion of women in these STEM fields has been increasing systematically (Hayes, 2010). Some wind of change has been observed mainly in math. Gender similarities in mathematics performance have been reported as a trend for the last 20-years (Lindberg, Hyde, Petersen & Linn, 2010). However, results of this meta-analysis study showed a significant role of age and depth of knowledge tapped by tests as critical predictors for shaping the gender gap in math achievement. Male students from high school performed better in complex problem-solving tasks than female student did, which might serve as hypothetical explanation for the gender imbalance in computer science. Additionally, changes are also revealed on an academic level in the scientific stratosphere. The recent national hiring experiment conducted in United States (Williams & Ceci, 2015) revealed that identically-qualified female applicants for tenure-track assistant professorships from all STEM fields were preferred over male candidates. However, it is worth to note that cultural norms and political correctness might have a strong impact on this effect.

Thus, substantial and persistent falloff in female students' representation seems to be unique to computing. Consequently, female underrepresentation is reported among employees in computer or mathematical occupations. In the U.S. IT and ICT industry gender imbalance has been increasing for years – the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics data show that in 2008 and 2009 only 25 percent of computer and mathematical workforce were women. For the sake of the comparison, in 2000 it was 30 percent. Furthermore, gender imbalance in computing has been observed and analyzed in the global context and these investigations provide evidence for the gender gap in OECD countries as well (Charles & Bradley, 2006). In comparison with women's participation in other fields, women in computer science are underrepresented in every OECD country, though to varying extent. Between 2000 and 2012 in just five OECD countries (the Czech Republic, Germany, Portugal, the Slovak Republic and Switzerland) the proportion of women in life sciences, physical sciences, mathematics and statistics, and computing increased by at least 10 percent. Paradoxically, results from the Program for International Student Assessment consistently showed that, in general, girls reveal higher expectations for their careers than boys, and yet, on average,

across OECD countries, less than 5 percent of girls report pursuing a career in computing and engineering (OECD, 2015). Only in Bulgaria, Indonesia, and Montenegro the number of female students planning their career choices in computer science and engineering outperforms the number of male students.

Hence, there is a well-justified and widespread concern with educational and workforce trends regarding gender differences in computer science. Noteworthy, if computer science is such a significant field for worldwide economy, this underrepresentation may have serious and negative consequences. But are those trends and effects generalizable to Poland as well? Is women underrepresentation also visible in Poland? The main aim of the following exploratory analyses is to review Polish data allowing us to outline a potential gender gap in computing in Poland. To this end, we focus on several sources. First, we demonstrate female student participation in the exam for secondary computer science schools. These data are presented in comparison with the gendered pattern of participation in the National Olympiad in Informatics. Then, we demonstrate how female undergraduates' participation in national contests for master's theses in computer science has evolved over time. Furthermore, we analyze the relationship between the number of female and male scientific advisors and the number of participating and awarded female contestants. Finally, based on data from the Foundation for Polish Science and the Polish Ministry of Science and Higher Education we demonstrate the proportion of female scientists in the STEM fields, with a particular reference to computer science.

Over the last ten years, the Polish exam for the secondary school certificate in computer science at advanced level was passed by 24,336 students. Noteworthy, the exam at its basic level was conducted only for a period of five years: between 2009 and 2014. Our analysis focuses on the advanced exam in computer science, because it contains tasks that test computational thinking and programming skills. Similarly, tasks and challenges at the National Olympiad in Informatics mainly require problem-solving abilities and computer programming competences above the more elementary knowledge and skills. Between 2005 and 2015 female students represented about 5 percent of all exam participants and about 4 percent of all Olympiad contestants! To put it differently, almost all contestants were males. These data are consistent with OECD results regarding female and male students' career choices. Figure 1 depicts participation in the exam and the Olympiad over the last ten years.
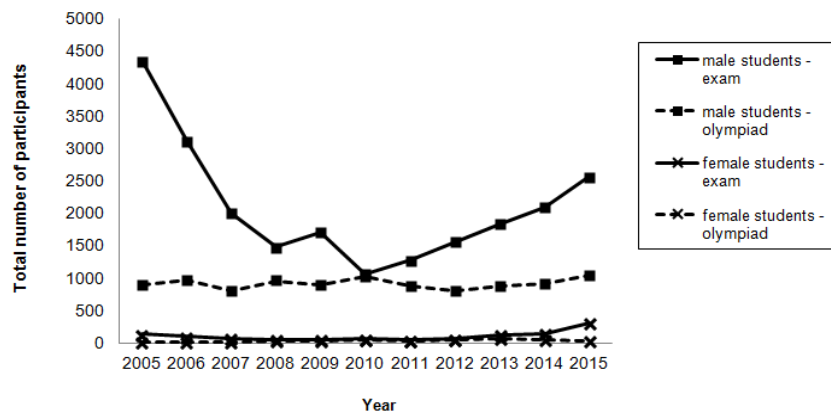
Figure 1. Participation in the exam for the secondary school certificate and the National Olympiad in Informatics, by gender

Source: Authors' analyses based on data obtained from the bureau of the National Olympiad in Informatics in Poland and the Central Examination Commission.

A particular falloff is observed from its peak in 2005, when 4,355 male students participated in the exam to 2010, when 1,074 boys took the exam. This fluctuating trend in the number of male students is worth its own research and explanation; we hypothesize that it stems from changes in the exam procedure on basic and advanced levels as well as demographic changes related to the number of students in each population cohort.

The National Olympiad in Informatics has been conducted since 1993. It is worth to note that, according to the Ministry of Science and Higher Education Report (2013), computer science is the most popular field of study among laureates of all national Olympiads in Poland. 164 laureates choose computer science as their field of study; this number is higher than in the other STEM fields. For instance, mathematics represents 60 and physical science represents 25 laureates respectively.

The last 22 years of the National Olympiad of Informatics show that among 19,776 participants, only 558 were females, which gives only 3 percent. Girls are consistently underrepresented on each level of the Olympiad: in the first round, the second round, and in the strict final. On the other hand, an interesting and a somewhat promising pattern has occurred among female students participating in the final of the National Olympiad in Informatics. In the last two years, the percentage of girls (16% in 2014, 26% in 2015) participating in the final is higher than the

percentage of boys (10% in 2014, 8% in 2015 respectively). It begs to note, though, that until 2006 there were no female students in the finals (figure 2).
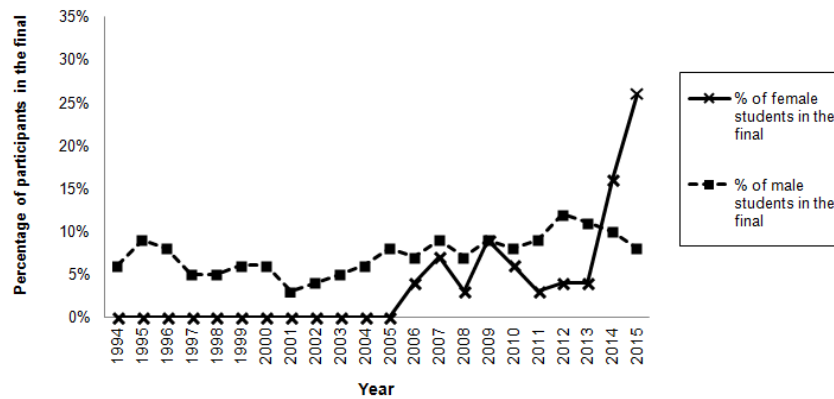
Figure 2. Participation in the Final of the National Olympiad in Informatics, by sex

Source: Authors' analyses based on the data obtained from the bureau of the National Olympiad in Informatics in Poland and the Central Examination Commission.

Gender gap in computer science in Poland is reported not only on the secondary school level, but also in academia. More specifically, unique data from the results of national contests for best master thesis in computer science demonstrate this gap as well. This contest is conducted by the Polish Information Processing Society since 1984. We analyzed data of 980 awardees (12% women) and 478 academic advisors (7% women) in a time-lagged perspective. The most interesting, although exploratory research question, was about the possible predictors of success of female students in this contest. Regression analysis on time-level data (year as a unit of analysis) predicted the total number of female laureates in each year, by three independent variables. Total number of female and male participants and the number of female advisors explained a large portion of variability in year-to-year changes in the number of female laureates (R^2 = .48, adjusted R^2 = .42). Obviously, the more women participated in the contest in the specific year, the more were awarded, but this effect was only marginally significant (β = .29; p = .08), and the higher number of male contestants, the lower chances for females to be awarded (β = -.74; p < .001). Importantly,

however, the number of female scientific advisors in the specific year predicted the total number of females being awarded positively ($\beta = .45$; $p = .03$) (figure 3).
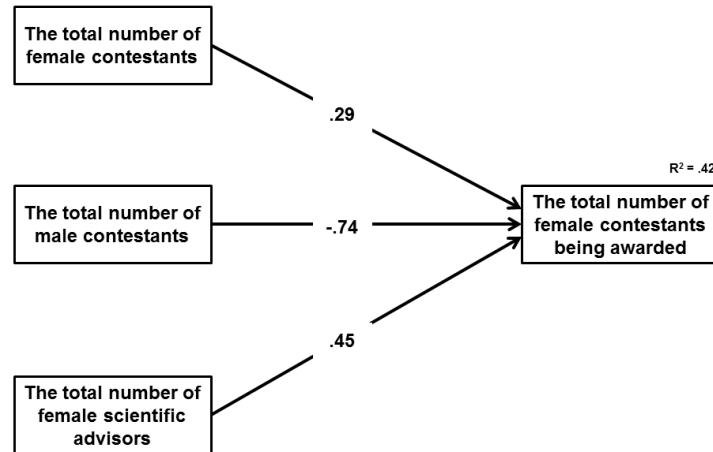
Figure 3. A Summary of the Regression Model Predicting the Number of Females being awarded in the National Olympiad in Informatics

Source: Authors' analyses based on the data obtained from the Foundation for Polish Science.
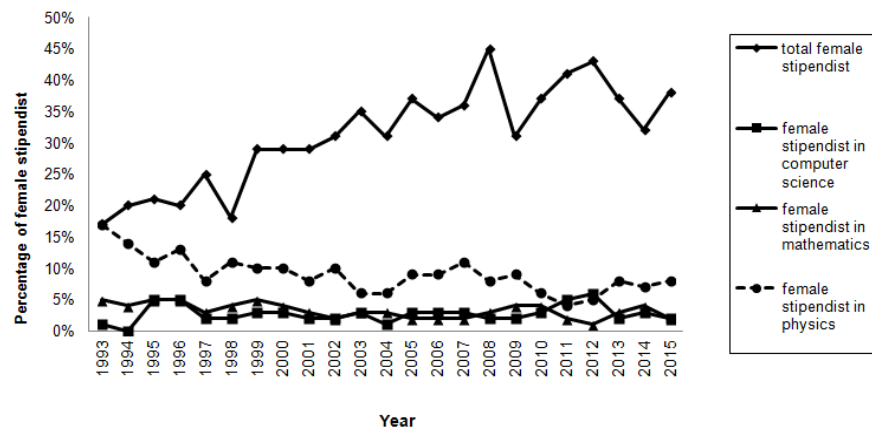
Figure 4. Trends of Females Awarded by the Start Program per field

Source: Authors' analyses based on the data obtained from the Foundation for Polish Science.

Data from the Foundation for Polish Science – the Start program for bright young scholars – provide additional arguments for women's underrepresentation in CS as well. Since 1993, the proportion of females awarded in all fields in the START program has fluctuated between 17 and 45 percent. However, when we focus on the percentage of women awarded in computer science, we found it extremely low, as between 1993 and 2015 it oscillates between 0 and 6 percent. Proportion of women awarded in mathematics and physics is also low, but it is still higher than in the specific case of computer science. These results are quite consistent with the general proportion of female students participating in the National Olympiad in Informatics (figure 4).

Obviously the close-to-the-floor number of females awarded in this contest tells us little about the reasons behind this finding and about the number of women who do apply for this program. Data from the National Information in Processing Institute provide evidence that gender imbalance is clearly visible among scholars in computer science, even when compared to mathematics and physics. Across each of these disciplines, representation of women shrinks as the educational level and position increases. The percentage of women earning PhD degrees in computer science is the lowest – 15% in comparison with mathematics 37% and physics – 29%.
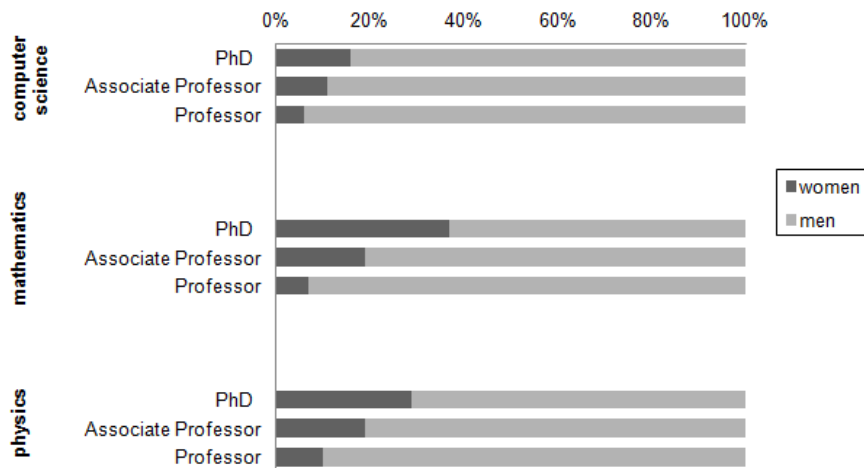
Figure 5. Percentage of female scientists in the STEM fields divided by the position

Source: Authors' analyses based on the data obtained from the National Information in Processing Institute.

3. Toward the Reasons behind the Gender Gap
in Computer Science

What are the reasons and origins behind such a clearly visible female underrepresentation in computer science? Are the results nature-or-nurture based? What is the role played by the abilities and skills? What is caused by social influences, stereotypes or early teaching practices? The psychobiosocial theoretical approach (Halpern et al., 2005) offers a holistic and useful conceptual framework for the analysis of possible reasons behind the observed differences. Originally, this model was used to explain gender differences in math performance. Because computer science particularly draws on and requires mathematical thinking, we adopt Halpern's framework in an attempt to find the possible theoretical explanation of the gender gap observed in CS. The psychobiosocial approach shows how biological and psychosocial factors exert reciprocal effects on each other.

Although several studies have demonstrated differences in the number of males and females engaged in math and math-related fields (Ceci & Williams, 2010; Preckel, Goetz, Pekrun & Kleine, 2010), the review of research regarding gender differences in abilities leads to the conclusion that "males and females are similar on most, but not all, psychological variables" (Hayd, 2005, p. 581). Halpern argued that sometimes the differences promote women and other times they promote men, and pointed that "there is no evidence of a smarter sex" (Halpern, 2005, p. 54). In this section we selectively review findings from studies highlighting the role of spatial ability, psychosocial, and educational factors that bear a strong impact on mathematical and computer science proficiency as well.

Although several biological theories exist that underlie gender differences in math-related disciplines, the most popular biological explanation of sex differences is the so-called 'hormones hypothesis.' Specifically, mediating role of testosterone, estrogen and progesterone for both sexes throughout life span is highlighted. The controversial Geschwind's (1984) theory offers an explanation based on prenatal brain development and implies sex differences (see also Karwowski & Lebuda, 2014; in press). According to this approach, exposure to higher level of prenatal testosterone correlates with right-hemisphere dominance and left-handedness among males. Increased likelihood of being left-handed by men than women was confirmed in several studies. At the heart of

Geschwind's theory is the assumption that men's cognitive ability pattern will be more directly linked with right hemisphere functioning. From this point of view, men's higher scores in spatial tasks are believed to result from exposure to testosterone in the prenatal environment. Regardless of the controversies and some false premises regarding the dichotomization of hemispheric functioning in the presented approach, modern psychology and endocrinology provides evidence that hormones impact gender differences in spatial ability (Hooven, Chabris, Ellison & Kosslyn, 2004). In the deterministic context of biological explanations, it is worth to notice that the level of hormones is not fixed, but it changes during the life span. Furthermore, hormone fluctuations are observed especially in adolescence and over the menstrual cycle among women.

Spatial abilities play a critical role in performance in mathematics and computer science. For more than half a century spatial abilities have been linked to mathematical proficiency (Wai, Lubinski & Benbow, 2009; Wai, Lubinski, Benbow & Steiger, 2010). Lubinski (2010) even argued that the relationship between STEM and spatial ability is a "sleeping giant for talent identification." Although the finding that males hold better spatial abilities than females do is well-established, literature provided evidence for developmental changes of gender differences in this respect. A lack of differences among males and females before adolescence is usually found (Levine, Huttenlocher, Taylor & Langrock, 1999), with children's results being virtually identical: a finding replicated in meta-analysis, which analyzed gender differences on the three dimensions of spatial ability: mental rotation, visual perception, and visualization (Voyer, Voyer & Branden, 1995). Interestingly, the extent of difference in those three aspects was found to increases distinctly with age. Systematically lowest differences were observed among children under 13 years of age, higher among 13 – 18-year-old individuals, and the highest among participants older than 18 years of age. Hence, these results explain little in relation to our main point, i.e. the possible reasons behind gender differences in computer science – presence and successes. Furthermore, there are good reasons to believe that social factors may be equally, or even more, important while forming interest toward the field and differences in achievement in this field. For instance, although there is a lack of difference between boys' and girls' performance in mathematical thinking (TIMSS study) before adolescence, such differences do exist in adolescence (PISA) (Else-Quest, Hyde & Linn, 2010).

According to Halpern's model, biological contributions and psychosocial factors play a critical role in elucidating gender differences in spatial ability. For instance, gender differences in spatial abilities have been tested with regards to Nash's (1979) gender-role mediation hypothesis on cognitive development. A meta-analysis (Signorelli & Jamison 1986) revealed substantial correlation between spatial ability (space perception) and the more masculine traits in self-description, especially among girls in adolescence (r = .47) than women (r = .20). Additionally, a weak but significant correlation was observed between masculine gender identity and mental rotation ability for both men (r = .16) and women (r = .10). Other studies examined gender differences in spatial abilities drawing on two competitive theoretical frameworks (Signorella, Jamison & Krupa, 1989). The first, based on Bem's (1981) theory, examined the mediating function of activity between psychological sex and spatial abilities. Thus, it was assumed that being an individual with more prevalent masculine traits should translate into higher activity in tasks requiring spatial ability, and consequently the level of these abilities should increase. In turn, according to Spence's (1985) theory, the level of spatial abilities is rather a gender attribute than a result of activity. Hence, psychological sex and activity are independent predictors of spatial abilities. Results of Signorella and her colleagues' studies (1986) are in line with Spence's rather than Bem's theory assumptions. Results of the more recent meta-analysis estimated the effectiveness of spatial ability trainings at g = 0.47 (Uttall, Meadow, Tipton, Hand, Alden, Warren & Newcombe, 2013). The authors noticed that trainings bring significant benefits especially for children and people with lower baseline of spatial abilities. Interestingly, no gender differences were noted.

However, to see the 'big picture' of the gender gap it is worthwhile to extend the potential explanations regarding gender differences in math-intensive fields also beyond spatial abilities and to analyze the non-cognitive constructs as well. In debates about gender differences in math-related fields, the impact of psychosocial and non-cognitive factors was neglected by educational researchers and psychologists, while there is clear evidence for several factors shaping the gender imbalance in computing. The most commonly reported "candidate predictors" are: self-efficacy (Bush, 1995; Cassidy & Eachus, 2002; Durndell & Haag, 2002; Saleem, Beaudry & Croteau, 2011), computer anxiety (Hua, Chen & Wong, 1999), and attitudes towards computers (Shashaani, 1997).

On average, girls reveal lower computer self-efficacy, higher level of computer anxiety and – in comparison with boys – negative rather than positive attitudes towards computers. A meta-analysis of gender differences in computer-related attitudes and behaviors (Whitley, 1997) demonstrated significant differences in sex-role stereotypes, self-efficacy, and affective responses. Interestingly, students' age was one of the crucial moderators. The increasing effect size of gender differences with age suggests that attitudes towards computers are shaped during socialization.

The concept of self-efficacy, defined as people's beliefs about their abilities to execute a particular behaviour successfully, seems to be among the crucial factors that stand behind gender differences in computer science. According to Bandura's social cognitive theory (1977; 1986; 1997), mastery experiences, vicarious experiences (observing others' successes and failures), social persuasion, and physiological experiences are four major sources of self-efficacy. It has been demonstrated that lack of previous experience with computer programming negatively translates into female students' motivation (Papastergiou, 2007; Margolis & Fisher, 2002; Saleem, Baudry & Croteau, 2011), while prior experience and encouragement has been revealed as a significant predictor of attitudes towards computers; male students reported higher degree of experience in programming compared with female students (Busch, 1998). Basing on the results of more than 230 interviews with female and male students of computer science at Carnegie Mellon University from 1995 to 1999, Margolis and Fisher (2002) suggested that experience with computers at home, the impact of peers, parents or teachers, and the presence of positive role models play a critical role for future career choices and pathways. In accordance with the value-expectancy theory (Eccles, 1994), parents and teachers might have a positive impact on youths' abilities and value beliefs in computer science. The following are but a few examples of teachers' strategies that may build students' sense of the importance of the field of computers: providing learning opportunities, encouraging engagement in computer science activities, expressing positive expectations and positive values about the importance, usefulness and appropriateness of computing, and by modelling computer and technology use. However, still little is known about students' classroom experiences and the role of their teachers. Results from various studies are inconsistent. For instance, while Shashaani (1993) showed that female students perceived gender-

stereotyped views in their teachers' behaviors, Young (2000) reported that female students felt encouraged to computing by teachers. Vekiri (2010) investigated relationships between female and male students' value and efficacy beliefs about computers and computer science, and the perceived parental support and teachers' expectations. As hypothesized, teachers' expectations predicted especially girls' self-efficacy. Interestingly, this finding is consistent with recent evidence that students' gender may moderate the relationship between teachers' ratings of students' potential (i.e., creativity) and students' domain-specific self-efficacy (Karwowski, Gralewski & Szumski, 2015). The teachers' effect was significantly stronger for female than male students. Gender difference in the self-concept of computer and math abilities has been examined in the longitudinal design among Spanish secondary school students (Sáinz & Eccles, 2012). A higher self-concept of computer ability was observed among male students and it increases across time, while among females, the self-concept decreased. Importantly, male students have had higher self-concept of math ability, despite the absence of gender differences in math achievements. Self-concepts of computer ability was a relevant predictor of the intention to pursue ICT-related studies and a mediator between gender and the intention to future career choices in ICT.

Finally, domain specificity of computer science and its links with both math and technology, exposes females to negative stereotypes with regard to their competences and cognitive abilities in these domains. In turn, negative stereotypes about female mathematical and computing abilities reflect in their performance, achievements, and aspirations. Even very subtle priming, i.e., being exposed to an object stereotypically and conceptually close to computing (e.g., Star Trek poster in the classroom) translated into lower interest in computer science among females (Cheryan, Plaut, Davies & Steele, 2009). In turn, women's awareness and conviction of being marked as "poor in math and computer science" may bear a substantial negative impact on their cognitive functioning and behavior. Interestingly, Nguyen and Ryan (2008) showed that even girls who were convinced that they were good in math revealed strong identification with this field, and finally were good in math, were still at risk of the stereotype threat (Spencer, Steele & Queen, 1999). A study conducted among Australian senior high school students revealed that aversion to computers and perceiving advanced computing subjects as boring was a major factor that discouraged female students from computer

science (Anderson, Lankshear, Timms & Courtney, 2008). A survey of 462 middle and high school students examining the role of major factors on gender differences in attitudes toward computers (Young, 2000) showed that the higher level of confidence in being "technological savvy" among male students was linked with their computer skills. These results are consistent with data from the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS), which indicate that girls reveal lower confidence than boys in their competence regarding such advanced tasks as building a webpage or programming a computer. Moreover, in Young's study male students strongly agreed with the opinion that the field of computer science is male-dominated. Indeed, computer science is perceived as gendered-stereotyped, male-dominated field in the area of public consciousness, mass media, and advertising as well (see Tympas, Konsta, Lekkas & Karras, 2010, for a review). Perception of computer science as "guy stuff" and male "geek culture" of computing strongly influence girls' future career choices (Margolis & Fisher, 2002). Finally, Cohoon (2006) noticed that culture and social structure are major factors that develop the gender gap. According to Kopciewicz (2013), in the scientific discussion about the gender issue of being 'poor at math' and likely also in other math-intensive fields, the context of a "critical filter" associated with unequal access to higher education and employment, should be taken under consideration.

Cultural beliefs about gender and computing differ between countries. For instance, gender balance in computer science emerged in Malaysia, where computing is perceived as a good career pathway for females (Lagesen, 2008) or in Turkey, where women are poorly represented on the higher education level. Shashaani and Khalili (2001) provided evidence that Iranian female students believed more strongly in equal gender ability and digital literacy, but reported low confidence in their own ability. Moreover, both male and female students believed equally in the positive effects of computers on individuals and society. Regardless of cultural differences in females' attitudes, self-efficacy and career choices in computer science, the image of a male computer nerd is still popular in the media. Although between WWII and mid-1980s women played a significant and positive role in the history and industry of computing (Abbate, 2012), contemporary public consciousness has it that females in IT are perceived as a weird minority. Still, computer science is perceived as an archetypical example of a technoscience that has excluded women (Lagesen, 2007).

4. Discussion

We opened this paper with anecdotal evidence of the great achievement of Ada Lovelace – in several respects "the founding mother" of contemporary computer science. However, despite Ada's discoveries, the whole field of programming, computing, and creating with the use of computers is not only perceived as "the males' world," but there are indeed reasons to believe that the gender gap in this respect is growing rather than declining. Data from different sources we were able to use, i.e., those showing differences in the number of males and females getting the informatics exam at the end of the high school, those participating and being awarded in the "National Informatics Olympiad," those who win the fellowship in the prestigious Start stipend from the Foundation of the Polish Science, and finally – those who take university positions in computer science, show the very same story: indeed, not only there is a deep gap, but also we have very little arguments to believe this gap may be easily filled.

Hence, our overview and discussion focused mainly on the possible reasons behind those differences. We perceived the psychobiosocial model (Halpern et al., 2005) as useful while organizing our arguments. Starting with this model we briefly analysed the role of biological, psychological, and social factors in gender differences in the presence and successes of both genders in computer science. Although some arguments about the possible biological underpinnings of spatial abilities should not be ignored – especially keeping in mind the role spatial abilities play in math and computing, our overview rather highlight the complex role of self-beliefs (i.e., self-efficacy) and social factors forming those beliefs as potential explanatory variables. There are empirical arguments that even the gender gap in spatial abilities may be effectively reduced during quite an informal training, e.g., by playing action video games (Feng, Spence & Pratt, 2007). However, in real-life conditions, playing such games is much more typical for boys than girls.

According to the theories of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), self-perception of one's abilities is crucial for initiation of an activity, motivation to continue in face of failures, and eventually – in explaining variability in achievement. There are also convincing arguments that at least four different sources shape our self-efficacy. These are: (1) mastery experiences – previous successes interpreted as personally meaningful,

(2) vicarious experiences – the role of modelling and observation of others, (3) social persuasion – i.e. the role of significant others, like parents, teachers or peers, in shaping the level of self-efficacy and (4) physiological experiences – arousal and affective reactions related to activity in a certain field. All these four wide groups of predictors play a role in understanding why there are so few women in science in general, and in computing in particular. Due to the less intensive activity in computing or even playing computer games, girls have fewer opportunities for mastery experiences – a crucial factor in the process of forming self-efficacy. As their friends are rarely engaged in that sphere as well, this factor also gives them restricted opportunities to observe, compare, and being modelled by highly skilled women-programmers. The social persuasion factor, i.e., emotional and rational arguments about the importance of the field provided by teachers, parents or peers also may exert a rather limited influence, while the level of their computer anxiety, i.e., negative physiological experiences, is usually higher (Gilroy & Desai, 1986). Consequently, all these building-blocks of computer self-efficacy seem rather to hinder than to strengthen it among females. And going further, low level of self-efficacy may explain why girls and young women rarely choose the high-school or university courses related to programming, and then think about career related to this field.

Re-analysis of the data obtained from the Polish National Informatics Olympiad demonstrated an interesting pattern: while the number of females awarded in this contest was clearly predicted by the number of participating females (positively) and males (negatively), the significant and strong predictor of women's successes was the number of female scientific advisors. When interpreting this finding consistently with self-efficacy theory, one may say that such advisors very likely serve as role models and show on their own example how to effectively function in the programming world, so strongly dominated by males.

To conclude, we should get back to our introductory arguments highlighting the growing role of computer science in contemporary world and the risk of missing opportunities that stem from women's underrepresentation here. To put it simply: to have enriching solutions in the field of computer science, more differentiated perspectives are necessary. Women programmers may obviously enrich this perspective.

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Paweł Topol

Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan (Poland)
LanguageLab, School of English in Second Life (Virtual World)

Shaping Behaviors in Virtual Worlds – Gender, Culture, Education. Teacher's Reflections from Second Life

ABSTRACT. The article focuses on the phenomenon of how human behaviors are shaped in the environments of three-dimensional virtual worlds. The so-called serious virtual worlds are taken into consideration. They are sometimes defined in the literature as social environments. The largest ones – like Second Life which has several millions of user accounts – are indeed multi-national and multi-cultural in character. Users, or residents, take part in social, cultural, artistic events or just explore the virtual space for their own reasons. The total area of Second Life is comparable to several Manhattans, so the opportunities to find new interesting spots or to meet new people seem endless. Some key questions covered in the article are: How do people – through their avatars – perform in the three-dimensional virtual world in communicative situations? Do they copy their physical world behaviors onto the virtual? Do they adopt behaviors from other people/avatars, or maybe they reshape their own? The final question is what possible implications for pedagogy and education are –with reference to learning and teaching practice in 3D environments. Examples from author's experience in virtual worlds will be given.

KEYWORDS: virtual worlds, Second Life, social behavior, performance, education

1. Introduction

The dynamic growth of Web 2.0 at the beginning of the 21st century gave rise to the development of interactive online tools and applications. The role of the internet user changed radically – from a passive receiver of the WWW content into an active performer. Another characteristic feature of the new web was that users were able to add content. Hence, they became performers and creators. They were consumers of technology as well as producers. They became so-called prosumers. The term *prosumer* was coined in early 1970's (McLuhan & Nevitt, 1972) with reference to electric technologies in general, however, it became widely used in the age of efficient ICT. According to Oxford Dictionary, a prosu-

mer is "a consumer who becomes involved with designing or customiz-ing products for their own needs." A contemporary internet consumer customizes and designs web content. Being an active performer, the user may shape own behavior(s) in different ways.

Some of the most rapidly evolving Web 2.0 virtual environments were WWW-based social portals. One was able to build one's virtual pro-file within a large community of users. Now, such communities may in-volve millions of members. People build their virtual identities and communicate with others. That virtual social life has become very popu-lar, especially among young people. The development of mobile technol-ogies enhanced that process for two main reasons: (1) modern smart-phones have quite efficient internet access, and (2) some social portals have developed special viewers designed for mobile operating systems, i.e. the user receives a dedicated, functional application.

The Web 2.0 era brought another tool/environment that evolved ra-pidly, i.e. three-dimensional virtual worlds, which were technologically based on efficient 3D graphics available online. Majority of them were not accessed via WWW, one needed a special viewer to install locally. The contents and resources of such a world, however, were spread among servers around the globe. The local application connected with the servers. Some of the worlds were designed for gaming entirely. One of the largest 3D online games nowadays is *The World of War craft*.

Some other worlds had no pre-designed infrastructure and all their content was and still is created by their users who are often called *resi-dents*. Residents rent land and are free to create content. They build houses, gardens, streets, parks, cottages, lakes, beaches, forests, hills and mountains, ponds and streams… all possible builds one can imagine are present in such worlds. They are called *serious virtual worlds* in the lite-rature. Residents exist there for their own reasons, whichever they are: for entertainment, fun, social reasons, trade, marketing, education, poli-tics, sex, religion. There are pubs where people meet, talk and dance, and there are religious builds where people seek spiritual sensations. There are replicas of famous places in our physical world, and there are fabul-ous, fairy-tale constructions.

Second Life was and still is the largest serious virtual world nowa-days. Many universities and schools have their virtual campuses in Second Life. There are schools of business, management, artistic institu-tions, medical centers, schools of languages, and many others (Topol, 2015). They either give classes to their own students in the physical

school, or offer education to external candidates. Some are commercial institutions and require fees, others are free of charge (Molka-Danielsen & Deutschmann, 2009).

Most likely, people perform and shape behaviors differently in virtual games and in *serious* virtual environments. This article focuses entirely on the latter. Thus, the terms *virtual worlds* and *three-dimensional virtual worlds* will be used interchangeably. The examples that will be given come from author's experience and insight in virtual worlds.

2. Interpersonal Behaviors from the Physical World

Castronova (2005) calls virtual worlds synthetic as well as social worlds. Tom Boellstorff, an American anthropologist, perceives Second Life as an anthropological, ethnographic and cultural space (Boellstorff, 2008). Indeed, some features or functions in worlds like Second Life or OpenSim are quite similar to those of social portals based on WWW. Groups of interest, for example – there are hundreds of them in Second Life. Anyone can create one's own group(s) and invite an unlimited number of guests. Group members may announce public messages or send individual messages (so-called instant messages) to one or many members. Group members may have live chats – either in text or voice (Topol, 2015). The two main communication channels are text and voice, however, virtual worlds are three-dimensional environments where 3D animated avatars perform, or people rather perform by moving or animating their avatars. Those 'bodily' or 'physical' avatar behaviors are equally important in our discussion.

To a certain extent, a virtual world like Second Life bears the hallmarks of *second reality* or *parallel reality* to the 'first life', also in terms of behavioral manners. Copying everyday behavioral patterns from the physical onto the virtual world is a common phenomenon. All in all, meetings, get-togethers or other social events in Second Life do gather real people behind their avatars. Let me give an example from my own experience, from my first steps in Second Life back in 2008. Whichever meeting I took part in, I was invited to take a seat. Indeed, there were objects like chairs, benches, logs, stones around. But why did they want me to sit? Why did it bother anyone that I was standing – or rather my avatar was? That seemed a little bizarre to me, and it took me some time till I realized a possible reason. Do we not behave the same way in phys-

ical life? When we get together for a chat, we also prefer sitting to stand-
ing. It would be even impolite to keep one standing while the others are
sitting (see picture 1: a teachers meeting in LanguageLab School of Eng-
lish in Second Life).

Picture 1. A weekly faculty meeting in LanguageLab, the largest school of English in
Second Life. We are sitting at a table and discussing some current issues and school
events. The round table is organized in a specific way. There is always one seat vacant. If
a newcomer takes it, a new vacant seat is produced automatically. This way, all possible
newcomers will find a place to sit and participate. In the background, there is a table of
teachers currently available (online) in Second Life

Source: picture taken by author.

On the other hand, the reason of the above behavior may be purely
technical. Virtual world viewers are complex applications. The user of-
ten performs multiple operations at the same time, which include: mak-
ing the avatar move (walk, run, change directions, fly, teleport, etc.);
zooming the avatar's camera in and out in order to have a closer look at
objects or a broader view from the distance; interacting with virtual ob-
jects; controlling the voice channel and the text chat. Such multitasking
may be difficult to cope with for an un experienced user. It is easier to

manage different functions of the viewer when the avatar is immobile, e.g. when it is seated. The avatar will not move by itself – there is a special button to press to make it stand up and walk again. The user can avoid uncontrolled or unintentional avatar moves this way, and focus on other actions in the meantime.

The learning curve in mastering technical-operational skills in virtual worlds like Second Life is rather steep and the technical and competency threshold is very high. The same applies to leading classes in virtual worlds (Peachey et al., 2010; Warburton, 2008). Users gain experience gradually with time and finally do not need to immobilize the avatar in order to perform multiple technical operations within the viewer program. However, the custom of sitting and inviting others to take a seat preserves. It may indicate that the main reason is more likely of a social-habitual or interpersonal nature rather than of technical.

The next example refers in a way to sex and gender, or to be more specific, to courtesy or good manners in male-female mutual relationships. It was one of many teacher meetings in Second Life where we gathered and shared experiences. People were pouring in and at a certain moment all the sitting places were taken. We started our discussion on teaching methods and techniques in 3D virtual worlds. After a few minutes another person appeared. It was our friend(Second Life name: Gwen Gwasi), a female teacher from Germany who also dealt with language education. She – her avatar – was standing close by as there was no place to sit. Suddenly, one of the male participants (SL name: Wlodek Barbosa) stood up and offered her a place to sit. That gesture raised general applause. Heike said, "Oh, thank you, Wlodek, it is so nice of you." The other people (mostly women) commented: "that was very polite", "a real gentleman", "wow, how courteous you are", etc.

I could observe many other similar social behaviors that were taken directly from the physical life into the virtual. Example one: a small group of people are standing at an elevator that will take us to the upper floors of a building. When the elevator door opens, someone says to the women-avatars, "Ladies first, please." Example two: a group of avatars are walking and suddenly one brushes against another one. The immediate reaction from that person was: "Woops, sorry" or "Beg your pardon", or "Sorry for pushing"... By the way, there are spots in Second Life where pushing another avatars is strictly forbidden. Those who do not obey that rule may be banned from that island temporarily or permanently.

The final example, this time about female-male relationship, was during a meeting in Second Life where we celebrated Guy Fawkes Day on November 5th. The place where we planned our party needed to be arranged and decorated. We met in a group of about 6-7 people and started the arrangements. Among others, we had some objects with animated huge fireworks. They had to be moved from one side of the place to the other. Then, one of our female colleagues said, "Maybe one of our gentlemen will take care of that…?" She was not serious rather, she said it with a smile. We laughed but all agreed. Indeed one of us – men – relocated the objects. Needless to say, the objects were only potentially dangerous because even the hugest fires can do no harm to any avatar. The situation was rather funny, however, the fact that she did say it and the others approved was symptomatic.

3. Cultural Behaviors from the Physical World

There are many builds in Second Life where the land owners create certain codes of behavior for others visiting their spot. In educational places, where group meetings, lectures or regular classes take place, those rules refer usually to 'proper' students' or teacher's behavior that will avoid possible disturbances in the lesson scenario.

The following is an example of how cultural behaviors are cultivated in virtual worlds (see: Topol, 2013, p. 46). On one of our field trips within a certified course in teaching methods in 3D environments, we visited the On Islam Island in Second Life in 2011,where we walked around virtual Mecca – a full-size replica of the real place in Saudi Arabia. We gathered at the landing point and waited for our friend, a teacher from Turkey (SL name: Daffodil Fargis), who was supposed to show us around. When she appeared, she lead us to the main entrance where we could see a large information board. It listed numerous rules to obey and restrictions when entering virtual Mecca (see: picture 2).

Some of the rules need further explanation:

• *No weapons*. Avatars must not have any kind of weapons on them, despite whether they are intended to be used or not.

• *No giant attachments*. It is possible to attach any object to one's avatar. Giant attachments are perceived as *griefing* in virtual worlds (*griefing* is defined as any kind of abusive, intrusive and unwanted behavior). The same applies to the "No Abusive Behavior" icon.

Picture 2. The entrance to virtual Mecca in Second Life. Information board containing the rules to obey and restrictions while visiting the place

Source: picture taken by author.

- *No music or dancing*. Playing music by avatars and dancing is forbidden.
- *No immodesty*, i.e. no nudity, or wearing provocative clothes.
- *No Nationalism, Racism or Political Affiliation*.
- *No Vice*, i.e. no debauchery or any other actions of criminal character.
- *No Vampire or Other Role Play*. Avatars can change their appearance within seconds. There are people in Second Life who intentionally make their avatars look somehow different from regular humans: dragons, monsters, animals, or practically any other way. Any odd looking is forbidden.

Imposing the above rules and restrictions seems rational. Mecca is a religious place so some code of unwanted behavior should not surprise. However, the board itself and the other information signs around the place did not mention anything about wanted or expected behaviors. To my surprise, Daffodil asked all of us to take off our virtual shoes (if anyone was wearing shoes at the moment). She also gave all the ladies in the group virtual headscarves to wear before we entered Mecca.

I had known Daffodil for two years before she arranged the trip to virtual Mecca. I met her in person on my visit to Anadolu University in Turkey in 2009. I knew she was Muslim and she was a religious person. She wore traditional clothes and headscarves on a regular basis. She did cultivate Muslim traditions and behaviors, e.g. she never shook hands with men. However, I know she is an open-minded person and by no means a religious fanatic. The above Mecca experience made me think of how informative it can be to learn in virtual worlds about habits, customs and behaviors typical for other cultures.

4. Implications for Pedagogy and Education – Learning and Teaching Practice

Picture 3 shows a board placed in the landing place at Cypris Chat Island (known also as Cypris Village). Cypris is a place in Second Life where one can learn English for free. It is run by some educators enthusiasts and volunteers who do not get paid for their teaching (see: Topol, 2013, p. 210-211). The island is quite large with many different builds where English classes take place: a few buildings, a park, places to rest, a bonfire with several seats around, a corner with board games, and many others. The picture below presents the Four Principles at the island which are addressed to potential or present students. This is a certain code of behaviors in the virtual class, which are supposed to both encourage the students and facilitate learning.

The full principles are as follows:

– *Principle 1: SHARE. After joining our family, members should find ways to share what they have learned or done in Second Life. Tell us where you have been, what you have seen. Show us your safe toys, clothes, avatars and gadgets. Sharing promotes communication.*

Picture 3. Cypris Chat Island in Second Life. Students gather at the board of Four Principles – general rules of how to behave or perform during English classes

Source: picture taken by author.

– *Principle 2: RESPECT. Second Life is very different from real life, but it is real for many of us. We all come from different cultures, different backgrounds and with different reasons for spending time in Second Life. We might not understand each other but we both have the same goal, to learn or teach.*
– *Principle 3: RESPOND. Share your opinions about Cypris. Let us know what you think. Help us make this community a better place for you. Your feedback is what makes Cypris so great. Your opinion matters the most. Help each other with learner/teacher feedback. Communicate mistakes and successes.*
– *Principle 4: BE ACTIVE. Speak. Talk. Ask questions. Say something. We are not passive learners, we are active! In order to improve, we must practice. To practice we must participate. To participate we must SPEAK! Less text chat and more voice chat. We are here to help you improve.*

I shall comment on the above very shortly. Second Life is a huge world. Its total area is estimated about 600 square miles, which corresponds to almost 20 Manhattans in New York. Getting new experiences by exploring the virtual world and interacting with other people is highly approved according to Principle 1. Respecting cultural differences and learning each other's cultures is emphasized in Principle 2. Indeed, I could see while visiting Cypris many times that it was not only the language but also cultures that the students shared. Feedback about Cypris in Principle 3 is crucial for the owners and educators. Students are encouraged to communicate mistakes and successes both in terms of language learning and interpersonal behaviors. It is not only the linguistic success that matters but also the organization of learning, the way the classes are planned and student activities are performed. Principle 4 emphasizes the need of being active by using the language, most preferably in speech. However, the above is not only about speaking. I have observed at Cypris that students are often involved in kinesthetic forms of language learning, e.g. quests or scavenger hunts. They interact behaviorally with the objects in the virtual environment as well as with other avatars.

5. Conclusion from LanguageLab

Residents of virtual worlds tend to copy their behaviors in communicative situations in physical life. Research shows that they also respect spatial social behavior (Friedman et al., 2007), according to which people keep different distance between each other when talking face to face. Hall (1966) distinguished four such distances or spaces: intimate space – for touching (up to 1.5 feet), personal space – for interaction among friends (1.5–4 feet), social space (4–12 feet), and public space (over 12 feet). Avatars in virtual worlds behave similarly.

To conclude with, I would like to bring back the example of LanguageLab, the largest commercial school of English in Second Life (with headquarters in London, Great Britain). I had a pleasure and privilege to teach in LanguageLab for more than two years (see: Topol, 2012, p. 312-315). The students were international, they came from different walks of life and from all over the physical world. Learning the language was always put in a behavioral context. The classes were rarely 'talking heads' alike. The students were most often involved in active learning. They

had to move/walking the virtual environment and interact both with the objects around and with the other avatars. They had to speak as well as 'behave' accordingly in natural communicative situations. Many of my students admitted that a language course in a 3D virtual environment is not only about language learning but also about culture and behavioral learning. They learned cultures of English-speaking countries, of course, but not only that. They learned from each other about customs, traditions or just everyday behaviors in their own countries/cultures.

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Vita L. Jones
California State University, Fullerton (USA)

Carissa McCray
Walden University (USA)

Shaping the Course of African American Preschool Males in Educational Settings

ABSTRACT. The state of African American males in the United States is one of crisis. Educational settings are the ideal settings to address this social dilemma. The issue must be addressed early and often. Research examining how African American males fare in preschool settings is a critical first step in offsetting the adverse situations experienced by this population. Investigation of strategies to engage African American males is the warranted to make education equitable for all.

KEYWORDS: preschool, males, educational settings

1. Background and Purpose

An alarming phenomenon is occurring in the field of early childhood development. Overwhelmingly, more male students of color are suspended or expelled from the classroom setting (Davis, 2003). Early childhood programs are not state mandated for young children so their attendance is up to their families and administration of the school. The impact of these gender practices affect students throughout their lifetime. These tendencies merit investigation and consideration within the educational system. The U.S. Departments of Health and Human Services and Education created a policy statement to address these occurrences. The 2014 report states the expulsion and suspension of young students of color is problematic and occurs with regularity. These drastic racial and gender inequalities play a pivotal role in the future trajectory of male students of color. As a country, we are responsible for starting a dialogue that will culminate in a set of reforms to address this issue. The early years of a child's life are critical to building foundational learning and holistic wellness. When young students of color experience the

negative carnages they may often suffer from a lack of sense of fit in the school environment. By expelling and suspending young males of color we set them on a precarious course that may result is a negative lifestyle. Male students of color are often marginalized and have a record of adverse experiences before entering kindergarten. As this may be a student's first experience away from home, preschool programs are designed to support social-emotional development.

2. Review of the Literature

It is well documented in literature that African American males have a difficult time in school. These difficulties often originate in the primary school years but have far-reaching implications. These students have lower scores in math, reading, vocabulary and other scholastic endeavors (Davis, 2003). What is more intriguing is the cause of this dilemma and what can be done to rectify it. Starting out in school, African American males lag behind their counterparts in the academic setting especially in math and reading. Reading scores are often indicators of future success for African American males. Young African American males score in the 20th percentile on standardized tests but are on par with their White counterparts in recognizing letters and counting to 20 (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). The lack of reading skills is attributed to a lack of vocabulary development prior to school attendance (Barbarin, 1993). Preschool is the ideal place in addition to the home for incorporating literacy skills. While by entrance to kindergarten most of these skills are developed, young African American males required extensive exposure to literacy building strategies. African American achievement gaps in middle school and high school are directly correlated to preschool math and reading scores (Duncan & Murnane, 2011). This consistent underachievement contributes to social problems in later life and often-negative outcomes.

3. Shaping the Educational Trajectory of Preschool Males of Color

Across the gender lines, female students often excel in reading competence in the primary years. This literacy acquisition requires prerequisite skills such as letter identification, and sound awareness all of

which appear to be more evident in young females. Educational discrepancies in preschool aptitude are striking in terms of the African American male. African American males are at a one percent proficiency level in addition and subtraction at the start of kindergarten and an eight percent proficiency level at the end of kindergarten (Prager, 2011). White males are at a five percent level in addition and subtraction in kindergarten and a twenty-two percent level by the end of kindergarten (Prager, 2011). When looking at these statistics, researchers must consider both ethnicity and gender, as these deficits are causal factors for later academic problems.

4. Preschool and the Development of Social Emotional Skills

The preschool setting is the ideal for the development of social skills and the regulation of self. These necessary characteristics are best taught early and often. Preschoolers learn to communicate their needs, follow directions, solve problems, take turns, and wait their turn. Issues such as aggression, disobedience, inattention, and hyperactivity all impede student progress in social development. Low socio-economic status is a determinant of young African American male progress in school settings (Reid & Kagan, 2015). Low socio-economic status influences the quality of life, family dynamics, and later school outcomes (Reid & Kagan, 2015). Problems with behavior and emotional stability often manifest in the early years of life. Social-emotional competence is crucial for school success, and is a predictor of school hardiness. When surveyed, mothers of African American males note their sons often display more symptoms of inattention, restlessness, disruptiveness, and misbehavior than their female siblings. These characteristics habitually lead to more parental and teacher disapproval and punishments. African American males internalize this treatment and it hinders a healthy sense of self and depression. A focused sustained effort must be initiated to support the change necessary for African American males' success in the classroom. Academic and social skills are acquired in a sequential manner and students require support from adults. In California, one-half of African American students live in low-income households. In addition, African American, who students make up six percent of California, account for twenty-two percent in the foster care system (Edelman, 2006). Because of these inequities by age two, students from low-income neigh-

borhoods are six months behind their counterparts (Reid & Kagan, 2015). By age five they are more than two years behind (Reid & Kagan, 2015). One notable finding is that African American students are less likely to be read to than their White peers (Lewis-McCoy, 2012). Limited access to preschool settings is another issue to examine when considering the educational trajectory of African American students (Reid & Kagan, 2015).

5. Engaging Preschoolers in the Academic Setting

When African American students are enrolled in high quality preschool programs, they have multiple opportunities to gain valuable skills to remediate the achievement gap. Research also shows that access to high-quality preschool programs provides the foundation of social, academic, and behavioral proficiency as well as later school achievement, high school graduation, earning ability, and lower rates of arrest (Davis, 2003). Parents of students in preschool programs are more involved in the educational process. The Children's Defense Fund (2015) determined that early childhood programs provide a healthy foundation for young children. These programs add a secure dimension to the lives of young males of color by instilling structure and procedures that build resiliency and stability. In these contexts, young males of color learn personal accountability, autonomy, and self-efficacy.

6. Supporting Males of Color in Preschool Settings

In a national report by the Foundation for Child Development (2010), preschool programs with an 8:1 teacher ratio have less expulsions or suspensions. Also noted are the half day programs are more successful in keeping students engaged in school activities. Teachers reporting a high job stress level often expelled students at a higher rate, 14.9% who identified their jobs as stressful compared to 4.9% with low levels of job stress (Foundation for Child Development, 2010).

7. Children's Defense Fund

Founded over forty years ago, the Children's Defense Fund (CDF) was established as an advocacy organization to support the needs of marginalized children. In collaboration with community partners, the

CDF runs a Freedom Schools program to support preschool students in school readiness activities such as literacy, social emotional readiness, school preparedness, and motivation (CDF, 2015). The Freedom Summer Project began in 1964 during the Civil Rights era (CDF, 2015). It was designed to engage African American and White students in academic advancement. This program was instituted as a model for social justice. The program expanded to other cities and since 1995, over 125,000 preschoolers have attended the CDF Freedom Schools Program (CDF, 2015). College students are trained in the philosophy and teach in the summer program. The greatest program gains, when evaluated were African American boys. The following characteristics included increased reading ability, positive character development, and increased level of parental involvement (Edelman, 2006).

8. Harlem Children's Zone

Harlem Children's Zone (HCZ) in New York supports young males of color in preschool settings by providing wrap around services that meet the entire needs of family. These services include family literacy, meal preparation, and exercise and fitness programs (HCZ, 2015). In addition to these and other programs, HCZ hires teachers interested in working with marginalized populations (HCZ, 2015). The administrators have an expectation that teachers will meet the social-emotional challenges with support and understanding as well as the use of effective strategies. Beginning with "The Baby College" HCZ prepares parents for the delivery of their child with prenatal support followed with a 0-3 curriculum that includes a nine-week course of brain development, communication, and nutrition advisement (HCZ, 2015). When families are unable to attend classes a home program is initiated to meet the needs of the community. In addition to HCZs Baby College, an eighteen-month program called the three-year-old journey is offered (HCZ, 2015). This program lays out the developmental needs of young students. Each Saturday morning at the local elementary school, educators and families gather to learn about social skills, literacy, discipline, and age appropriate activities that support academic success (HCZ, 2015). These young students play in learn and play centers with trained staff members (HCZ, 2015). The culminating program for young males of color along with their female counterparts is the Harlem's Gems. These strategies enhance the academic

achievement of young males of color. This six-week summer program prepares students to attend kindergarten by having a 5:1 teacher student ratio and focusing on early literacy skills (HCZ, 2015). Families are required to participate by implementing classroom activities. Of the 2015 Gem students, 99% of tested kindergarten school ready on assessment measures (HCZ, 2015).

9. Comer School Development Program

The Yale Child Study Center opened the School Development Program (SDP) in 1968. The program focused on building relationships that stabilize student ability to learn from teachers. James Comer, Ph.D. (2012) examined the tenets of success for marginalized students and explored the way students learn. The Yale University professor created experiences based on six developmental pathways required for school success: social-interactive, psycho-emotional, ethical, cognitive, linguistic, and physical acquisition (Comer, Giordano & Brown, 2012). Comer constructed the *Curriculum Skills Curriculum for Inner-City Children* (Comer et al., 2012). Comers' research emphasized addressing the needs of the child holistically; mind, and body (Comer et al., 2012). Research and evaluation of the program has shown noted improvement in school readiness skills in African American student as in the United States as well as Trinidad, Tobago, South Africa, England and Ireland (Comer et al., 2012).

10. Promoting African American Male Success in School

R. L'Heureux Lewis-McCoy (2012) reports that young African American males benefit from summer and after school programs. The lazy, fun days of summer often take a toll on young African American males' academic progress especially math and reading scores. Structured summer and after school programs are crucial in building scholastic foundational principles for young African American males. Another strategy is close, clear communication with teachers especially in the beginning of the school year. Because teachers are trained in understanding the developmental markers needed to meet curriculum demands they can provide needed information for parents. Building a string relationship with educators enhances the educational experience for young African Amer-

ican males. Early researchers, Graham-Bermann, Coupet, Eglar, Mattis & Banyard (1996) state that it is important for educators to support young African American males' self-identity by the use of activities and games that enhance self-worth and confidence. One educator noted the use of hand-held mirrors throughout the day as well as activities that focus on personal characteristics and traits. The use of curiosity about race, skin tones, and language should be openly discussed. The incorporation of developmentally appropriate practices and child-initiated practices is a key component to engaging young African American male learners. When the student has a choice in what activities to participate in and what materials to play with they build autonomy and self-determination. These two resilient characteristics foster strong self-efficacy and self-respect in young African American males. Single gender learning communities show promise for learning in preschool for African American males. Often, when separated from females, African American males experience less pressure in the academic setting (Foundation for Child Development).

In one study, African American boys when interviewed stated that they fared better in separate settings (Gurian, Stevens & King, 2006). The South Carolina office of Public School Choice offers over twenty gender specific program focusing on African American males that highlight three major practices: increased teacher training to determine the gender difference and its impact on education, analyzing data on the impact of gender specific education, input from parents on the gender specific programming (South Carolina Department of Education, 2015).

11. Conclusion

African American males' suspension and expulsion rates are a problematic issue in education. When one segment of the population is failing to gain educational prowess, the future generations are impacted. Moreover, when African American males early school trajectory is riddled with problems their self-esteem suffers. The later outcomes for African American males who are not successful in preschool often include a high dropout rate, less engagement in school, high incarceration rates, and an overall decline in positive social capital. A concerted, intentional effort is warranted to offset these adverse conditions. As educators engage in a dialogue, they will discover policies, and efforts required to support this vulnerable societal group.

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Ngozi N. Iheanacho
University of Port Harcourt (Nigeria)

Traditional Religion and Socio-Anthropological Factors Sustaining Widowhood Configurations of Violence on Nigerian Women

ABSTRACT. The article is an ethnographic research report in response to Nigerian women's agitation for advancement and appreciation of their value in the family and society. And also, taking cue from the United Nations clarion call on regular research on customs and traditions that promote women indignities and underdevelopment indices which build up from the family, the paper directs its spotlight on widowhood institution which is characterized by configurations of violence and concomitants of women exploitation and underdevelopment. The practices of the institution are carried out in the pre and post burial phases. They have continued to resist extinction strategies. Not even surrendering to the long struggle and gains of women liberation ideas and policies that abound the world and Nigeria in particular. In the thrust of the report, the paper identifies the sustaining factors of the practices as mainly rooted in traditional religion and socio-anthropological issues, namely: the people's worldview and concept of sacred phenomenon, the people's concept of death and ancestorship; the widow's social and psychological concern for the dead; the people's idea of marriage and family system; the people's conformity to the paradigm of myth and sacred history and; the quest for re-union and group cohesion. Among other strategies, formulation of local Christian theologies and legally backed social policies would help to rescue the women from the clutches of the institution.

KEYWORDS: widowhood, women, violence, advancement

1. Introduction

In recent times, earlier conceptualization of what development and underdevelopment are: their causes and conditions have been modified. This is sequel to the failure of many development theories which aim at bringing about even development. Hence, disparity in levels of development looms large in world systems and cultures. Existing theories of development have shown weakness in addressing African underdevelopment conditions (Naamen, 1994, p. 16). Again, Anikpo, puts it succinctly that theories of development are in crisis (Anikpo, 1996, p. 6). This is

more so in the application of their principles and variables in African societies. While this crisis persist "development debate now emphasize sustainability and human-centred and gender-responsive development" (United Nations, 1995). After decades of struggle to advance the course of women, for improved conditions of living, bizarre practices of human underdevelopment, devaluation and indignities still loom large in the life of the 21st century Nigerian cultural systems.

Our method is ethnographic, with an outlay which include review of women's encounter and experience along the path of advancement; the lived experience of women under the violent practices of widowhood institution – constituting serious negation and clog in women's wheel of advancement and stability of the family after demise of their husbands. Next is the thrust of our finding – the factors which sustain the practices. Finally, we offer suggestions for handling the situation for both Christians and non Christian faithfuls – stressing the importance of local theology of widowhood as a strategy. In the main, our contribution is anchored on the quest for quality women development. The emphasis is on identifying and analyzing the socio-anthropological factors for the persistence of widowhood practices, as a cultural configuration, frost with variables of underdevelopment in Nigerian communities and families.

2. United Nation's Roadmap and Nigerian Women's Long Walk on the Lane of Advancement

This section of the study is a literature review to trace the history of women's quest for fair treatment and quality life. The aim is to further advance the rationale behind this paper's effort to bring to limelight the factors regenerating and sustaining widowhood practices in the present time. Women have come a long way in the struggle to asserting their humanity and agitation for fair treatment and improvement of their lot. Understanding Nigerian women's perspective requires tracing the struggle from the global trend and source. Hence what obtains in Nigeria is a derivative and adaptations from the global framework. It has been a mixed experience of exploitation, silence, conformity, resistance and even payment of supreme prize.

It was about the early 15th century, through the debate and writing of the French woman, Courtier, Christine de Pizan (1365-1430), that the lives of women in the world, beginning from Europe started to receive

transformation, for good. Christine's arguments received the support of some other European women like Marguerite de Navarre, Marie de Gournay and Anne Marie van Schurman. In the New World, the Mexican nun, Juana Ines de la Cruz (1651-1695) joined the crusade for improving the social location and status of women in the world. Cruz specifically focused attention at attacking men's misogyny, while advocating the education of women. About the end of the seventeenth century, women (especially the educated), began to experience improved recognition and better treatment (Okoh, 2012, p. 32-36).

Women's struggle for advancement and improved existence continued in the 18th century. After the 1789 Declaration of "the Rights of Man and the Citizen" in France, women activists sought similar rights for the female gender. They even explored the spirit of the French Revolution to inspire all women to shun unjust tradition and conditions that concerns them (Anderson & Zinssor, 1990, p. 351). The agitation continued rising in popularity, geographical scope and tempo, to the 1902 meeting of Governments in the Hague where issues concerning marriage, divorce, trafficking in women and children were discussed. In 1923 the Pan American Union meeting in Santiago agreed to discuss on the way to eliminate legal and constitutional impediments to the exercise of women's political and civil rights. Meeting at Havana in 1928, the Inter-American Commission of Women, examined the status of women in Latin America in preparation for advocacy of equality for women in civil and political activities. The Inter-America Commission's work led to the adoption in 1933 of the first International Treaty to proclaim the equality of the sexes in matters of nationality. The League of Nations endorsed the Montevideo Resolution (United Nations, 1995, p. 9-10).

The UN Charter signed on 26 June, 1945, among other things set out to protect the fundamental human rights and freedom of everybody, as well as the equal rights of men and women and outlaw sex as a basis for discrimination. Between 1945 and 1962 was the period for establishing legal frame works for promoting equality of sexes. From 1963-1975 was the period of recognizing women's role in development, leading to the proclamation of 1975 as International Women's Year and an International Conference on women affairs. The Mexico City Conference defined a society in which women would participate in a real and full sense in all ramifications of life. Sequel to the recommendations of the Mexico City Conference, United Nations designated the years 1976-1985 as the Decade for Women. Among other highlights of the Decade was the

attraction of greater attention to women affairs. In 1979 was the Covenant on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Again, there was a refocused conception that development in human history is a holistic activity which cannot be realized without the full participation of women. "The under valuation of women was identified as both a cause and an effect of underdevelopment" (United Nations, 1995, p. 35). Accordingly, Governments (including Nigeria), were directed to ensure pragmatically that women were not discriminated in any form towards guaranteeing, exercising and enjoying human rights and fundamental freedoms on equal basis with men, both in political and legal spheres, marriage, the home and family life, or in private or public life. United Nations also adds that governments may be responsible for acts of violence on women, if they fail to act with due diligence to prevent violation of rights, or to investigate and punish acts of violence and provide compensation. That custom, tradition or religious beliefs should not be invoked as a basis for obligation to acts of violence. The issue was further emphasized in the 1993 Vienna Declaration. Put succinctly, the Vienna Declaration advocates for the eradication of any conflict which may arise between the rights of women and the harmful effects of certain traditional or customary practices, cultural prejudices and religious extremism (United Nations, 1995, p. 56). It is against this backdrop that one becomes worried over the persistence of violent traditional practices of widowhood institution in the 21st century Nigeria, especially as the country is a signatory to the UN Conventions, covenants and policies towards improving the lot of women and the family system.

The 1995 Beijing Conference focused on how to advance women's course through empowerment, against the backdrop on strengthening and actualizing the resolutions of the earlier conferences. The Conference aimed at proffering strategies to eradicating obstacles to women opportunities. But years after the Conference, in which Nigerian women featured prominently, obstacles like widowhood practices continue to hamper women empowerment and development, like a chronic pathology, especially as threatens the stability of the modern family of the death of the man. Again, since 1996 the emphasis of United Nations and the world has shifted to gender mainstreaming – a strategy which is aimed at integrating the aspirations of men and women into one grand design for human development, devoid of inequality against any sex. Accordingly, the gender mainstreaming project adopted the strategy of identifying areas where gender constitutes a risk, for a violation or abuse of human

rights: "mainstreaming gender in the human rights system requires the system to revisit not only institutional practices but also cultural views and beliefs" (OHCHR, 2000, p. 5). Here lies the justification for our study – the need to identify sustaining factors of widowhood social pathology on women advancement from the source.

No doubt, the efforts of United Nations and member countries like Nigeria on women advancement have impacted positively in many dimensions of life. However, experience and records show that much still need understanding, towards finding the strategies to handling cultural configurations of underdevelopment which affect the women and the modern family. Thus, there is still a yeaning gap between what should be according to law, treaties, covenants, declarations and policy statements on the one hand, and what is observed, on the other hand. According to Zanden "A. 1993 United Nations Human Development Report reveals that there still is no nation that treats its women as well as its men" (Zanden, 1996, p. 231). All over the world, different cases of ill-treatment, violation of rights and gross injustice are meted out on women, especially on their rights in the family.

In Nigeria, in spite of the establishments and policies put in place to herald and realize the world's advocacy on women, customs and cultural configurations, such as widowhood practices provide platform for women's ill-treatment and underdevelopment tendencies. For over two decades now, discussion on the plight of women under the institution of widowhood practices has been featuring prominently in gender workshops, conferences and government reports, etc. For instance, during the era of the military government of Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, it was the subject of investigation by the office of the First Lady, Mariam Babangida, under the Better Life Programme for Rural women. This was followed up by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. Even with the increasing voice of women in the affairs of the society and, occupation of more public offices through the 35% Gender Affirmation project and agitation of Nigerian women widowhood practices are still enforced in Nigerian communities and families. Why have widowhood practices in Nigeria resisted the modern onslaught on it? This is a question to be addressed herein. The Better Life report outlined a number of strategies to end the practices and the violence on women and the modern family. The report and clarion call for end of the practices is also promoted by many churches, NGO's, CBO, academics, etc. (Osuji & Kanu, 1990; Osakwe et al., 1995) Yet, bizarre and violent widowhood practices still persist.

3. Widowhood Practices and Negation of Gender Responsive Development in the Family System

According to Webster, a widow is a woman who has outlived the man she married; especially when such a woman has not remarried (Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of English Language). In Nigerian communities and families, this situation subjects the widow to a myriad of practices, which include rituals; restrictions; denial and violation of rights and privileges based on custom and patriarchal structures. Widowhood practices in Nigerian communities and families come in two phases of pre-burial and post-burial practices. Some of the pre-burial practices include the following: wearing of tattered dress, sitting on the bare floor beside the corpse lying in state, and or being secluded and locked-up in a room or fenced barn. The widow remains completely mute, till her husband is buried. She is not allowed to eat until interment of the corpse, while the women ritual actors eat sumptuously at her expense. But in some cultures the widow is served with light refreshment in discarded plates. The widow is conceived to be unclean and defiled hence she is ostracized from her siblings, relations, children and groups. For every ritual item and practice, the widow pays heavily to the women responsible for the particular ritual. Yet, the women ritual executionists act treacherously in their dealings with the widow, accusing her of having contrived her husband's death. The impression often is, if the wife served her husband faithfully and satisfactorily, why should he die prematurely? This popular taunting question leads to trial by ordeal. Worse still, the widow is never given a chance of defence (Iheanacho, 2004).

The post-burial practices include ritual shaving of hairs on the head and the pubic region. In some cases, the women responsible for this practice use blunt razor blade or broken bottle for the ritual. There is also ritual washing of hands and ritual bathe. The widow's movement remains restricted, while she must continue to wail loudly and hysterically throughout the period of one year mourning. Concerning this practice of compulsory wailing in parts of Africa, Nasimiyu (1990, p. 190), reports that: "In some communities, the widow has to shave her head in weeping and wailing ritual. The widow wails twice a day, morning and evening from eight days to six months. She must accompany one who comes wailing: even if she is eating she must stop eating and wail".

Again, the widow must abstain from sex until her levirate husband is decided by her husband's kinsmen and women, towards the end of her

one year mourning. During the period of the mourning, the deceased's assets are declared and dispossessed of the widow.

The widow is virtually stripped-off her human worth, debased and obsessed with bizarre rituals and, contemptuously dispossessed and disempowered of her potentials and family properties:
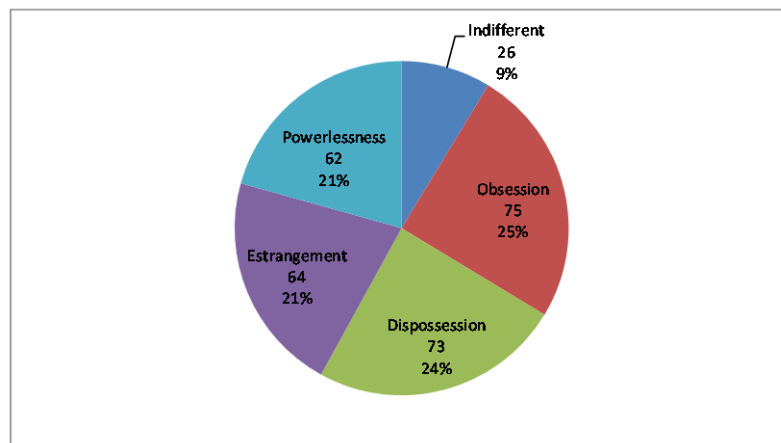

Figure 1. (%) of disempowerment in widowhood practices

Source: The Pie Chart is adapted from my doctoral dissertation in Sociology. University of Port Harcourt. The dissertation is unpublished.

The above chart summarize women's experience in the institution of widowhood. The human underdevelopment implication is family instability, as the widow finds it difficult to take over from where the husband stopped.

Why do widowhood practices persist at this point in history, in spite of its human underdevelopment variables in the family and society at large? This is more worrisome considering the enormous efforts of the United Nations towards women development currently at the stage of gender mainstreaming. What is more? The institution poses a more surprising tendency when we acknowledge the fact that the main catalysts and principal actors of the practices are women themselves. Women in serious grief and agony perform the rituals and practices amidst difficulties. It is even more puzzling that the same women who eulogize the crusade for renascent feminism, women advancement, empowerment and gender equality are involved. This is a paradox considering the centrality of the status of women in the twenty-first century human development

vision. This is pathology of development, hence it has often been repeated that the status of women is the measure and taste of any civilization (Iwe, 1979, p. 175).

The main summation of scholars is that harmful practices of widowhood institution constitute violence against women and the family system (Bolaji & Ahonsi, 1997). That the institution also promote inequality and discrimination against women (Akintunde, 1998; Olaosabikan, 1998; Chukwuma, 2004). Ironically, some widows who have the opportunity of evading the practices do not do so. This incongruity with modern gender principles and the lived experience of widows call for urgent investigation. Therefore, an indepth understanding of the socio-anthropological factors which hold women sway and perpetuate human relics and indignities of widowhood practices in the contemporary time require exposure, through indepth analyses. The task of filling this academic lacuna is the contribution of this paper. This is necessary because the Declaration of MONDIACULT UNESCO World Conference on Cultural Policies, emphasize that development programmes and policies, should be strategized and designed to be rooted in socio-cultural realities (Salim, 1994, p. 13). Thus, our study will provide a baseline data for articulating synergy between modern development and widowhood practices and for the formulation of local theology for the Christian folk amongst the people. Thus, effective treatment of a pathology require accurate diagnosis.

4. Factors Sustaining Widowhood Configurations of Violence Against Women and the Family

4.1. Sacred Phenomenon

We acknowledge that in Nigerian cultures, the strands of religion permeat and influence all dimensions of life. In addition to this, religious phenomenon loom large in such practices as widowhood institution. Writing on religion in African cultures, Wilhelm Dupre, underscores this finding, noting that: "There is no African tribe whose life is not surrounded and penetrated by rites and rituals. Such events as birth and death are freighted with symbolism, finding visible expression in the accompanying cults and customs" (Dupre, 1975, p. 68).

Also, in line with this rightful assertion, Ekarika further makes it succinct that: "What is constant in all rituals as religious phenomena is

a relationship to the gods, spirits, deified ancestors, as sacred objects. An object becomes sacred by virtue of the special relationship which an individual or group exhibits towards that object" (Ekarika & Edet, 1984).

The widowhood institution, with its cohort practices is a sacred phenomenon which find express support in the expositions of Gennep, that mourning is characterized by an aggregate of taboos and practices that separate the mourners from the society and put them in a complex phenomenon of sacred, impure state (Arnold, 1960). This may sound ridiculous to fanatical faithfuls of other religions. But suffice it to say that such thoughts would be erroneous and misleading, if we concede that what constitutes the distinguishing feature and aura of religion, especially symbols and meanings of religious ideas, depend on the human mind and the cultural context. It is in the light of allowing the traditional religion to speak for itself that one can honestly concede that widowhood practices in Nigerian communities and other African societies are sacred practices which manifest the people's faithfulness to a part of their religious wisdom and cosmology. This underscores the reasons why the practices are jealously guarded in the aura of awe and reverence. The figure below captures the people's worldview and conception of the widow's status in human existence.
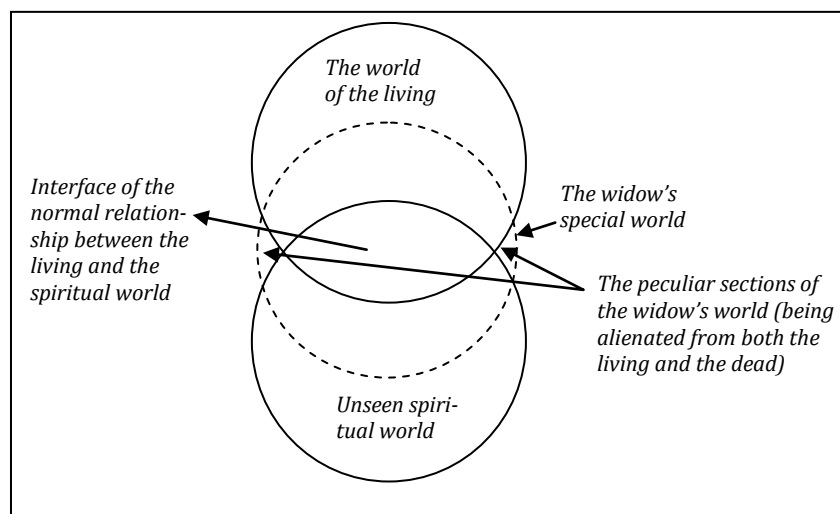

Figure 2. Widowhood worldview

Source: The figure is crafted from my ethnographic field data. It is used to illustrate the Etche and other Nigerian cultures' traditional religious worldview and conception of widows in their mourning period.

Widowhood institution and its associated practices are obviously the peoples' way of concretizing symbols and meanings, which in the words of Mircea Eliade, are the *hierophanies*, that is, manifestations of the sacred (Eliade, 1959, p. 7). The sacred manifestations of the rituals of widowhood institution in the ideological frame of Otto, open the bridge delineating life and death on the one hand and between the reality of the world and its beginning and end on the other. Yet, while it opens a gap, it also fills it by touching and fascinating the human mind as its only true centre (Otto, 1964, p. 8).

4.2. The Concept of Death and Ancestorship

To Nigerian peoples, death is not the end of one's 'existence' and interaction with his family and relations. Rather, death is a process of change to 'another being' in the spirit world, different from the world of the living. The unseen spiritual world and the physical world of the living immerse into and link each other in a web of sacred, social and cultural interactions. At death, Nigerians say that one 'has gone back home' or departed, hence he is thereafter 'practically' felt by his survivors. This is the people's background of the idea of ancestorship. Since the 'dead' can still participate in the affairs of the living, the people show concern and strive towards establishing cordial relationship with them. Here lies the manifest function of some of the widowhood practices.

The burial and funeral rites of a departed (mainly the responsibility of his family, the widow and his children), must be completed before ancestorship is guaranteed. Until this is done, the ghost of the departed is believed to hover around his family and farm lands. It is therefore unsafe to encounter it, as it could instantly harm any person, especially his survivors, of which the widow stands at a higher level of vulnerability. This lends further credence to the functional essence of the practices, especially as it underscores the need for the liberating rituals like the ritual washing of hands, bathe and severance of conjugal relations. Hence, the ancestors are both loved and feared in the people's tradition and family system. To mitigate this fear for the widow, all the practices of the institution required of her are conceived functional, to send-off and, settle the spirit of the departed among the legion of ancestral spirits.

On another perspective, there is the belief that at death, one goes to the spirit world with his level of affluence or poverty, hence the unseen world is also conceived to be stratified. Marriage is considered to be part

of wealth and, one way of manifesting this after a man's death is through his widow's commitment to carrying out all the practices required of her. This is to grace and dignify the departed as a married man who should be honoured, respected and placed at a high stratum in the spirit world. This manifest function of widowhood practice is linked with the widow's formal and earthly social and psychological concern for her departed husband.

4.3. Social and Psychological Concern for the Dead

Our findings is that some of the widowhood practices are done for the manifest function of symbolic or practical representation of the widow's psychological feeling and social concern for her death-separated husband. For example, the psychological concern is demonstrated by the wailing rituals and the entire mourning activities. Socially, the society would want the widow to create the impression that she was really in a loving marriage relationship with her 'dead' husband and, indeed, it is a part of the deceased's honour. The only way the widow can prove this, according to the people's understanding is by performing all the widowhood practices, conceived to be a continuation of matrimonial responsibility to her husband, especially as it mattered most in resettling him in the hereafter. Anything contrary to this, is interpreted as a betrayal of marriage love and concern. Again, it would adversely affect the widow's future relationship with her extended family members and relations in-law. United Nations (1995, p. 23), indirectly captures the situation as it reports that: "In many traditions, concepts of honour are linked to a woman's sexuality. Violence against women is often justified by the argument that honour has been violated by a woman's sexual behaviour. Such concepts of honour also find collective expression in many societies. In this context, violence against women also is seen as being the property of the males in a rival social group becomes a means of defiling the honour of that social group. Female sexuality has been a battle ground in feudal and in modern vendettas where male prestige and honour are challenged".

In many cases, recalcitrant widows are considered to be wicked and, that they must have contributed to their husband's death. In short, widowhood practices bring a widow to unfair public test. Her failure would mean much to her husband's kinsmen and indicative of the way her marriage contract would be re-aligned in the family.

4.4. The People's idea of Marriage and Family System

In Nigeria and other African cultures, marriage is conceived as the concern of the whole extended family and community. A woman is conceived as married to the entire lineage of her husband. Ndu captures the wisdom in levirate marriage in Africa. He asserts that: "The result is that the obligation and relationship entwining a woman and her children with her husband's lineage do not cease automatically with his physical death. Indeed, she is able to continue in the lineage as a functioning wife through the ministration of her brothers-in law in a levirate union" (Ndu, 1995, p. 17).

This rightful assertion is the sociological reason and manifest function of levirate marriage practice in widowhood in Nigerian cultures. It is also worthy to report that one of the primary purposes for marriage in Africa vis-à-vis levirate marriage is procreation, to keep afloat the floodgate of incarnation and reincarnation. The liberating and cleansing rituals are therefore necessary to forestall imminent danger for the levirate suitor and the union itself. The report of Kirwen, concerning the resistance of Tanzanian widows to embracing the Catholic Church's position against levirate union underscore our finding (Kirwen, 1979, p. 9-10).

4.5. Conformity to the Paradigm of Myth and Sacred History

Nigerians are firm believers of what has happened in the past – sacred history or what Eliade (1959, p. 55), calls the happenings at *initia* or the *illo-tempora* (i.e. happenings at pre-history). There is the desire to recreate the origin and reality of things before history, when things were developed and set in order. The widowhood practices are conceived to be profound subjects and activities which must be observed according to the paradigms set by their sacred histories. The sacred history of widowhood cultural configuration and its allied practices in Nigerian communities is not an individual's affair, but the heritage and experience of the people. Eliade (1959, p. 55) would further want us to understand that anything that lacks an explanatory model is 'meaningless' hence it has no reality.

Writing on the "Nri Myth and Igbo Life" Uzukwu, explains that the ritual attitude towards spiritual entities, recognized and established by the forebears is an agreement. And, that, this ensures a healthy continu-

ity with the primordial act of the founding ancestors to all the possibilities for life hidden in any situation (Uzukwu, 1988, p. 94-96). It therefore becomes absurd, if not impossible for a widow or group of women to disengage themselves from the founding creative act which sacred history describes as its life without being anathematized by the society. This accounts for the curiosity of the widow to complete all her traditionally required practices, to recreate the sacred history's paradigm that instituted them. This is why corporate identity and community spirit are major factors for social cohesion in traditional African cultures and, more so in Nigerian families and communities.

4.6. The People's Concept of Community

Nigerian traditional societies are very conscious of corporate life and identity. The people live and depart from the physical world in the company of others. The individual does not exist alone, but is only guaranteed by his membership of the wider group. The type of community relationship that is referred to here, is lucid in the words of Mbiti (1969, p. 108-109); thus: "Only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being... Whatever happens to the individual happens to the group, and whatever happens to the group happens to the individual. The individual can only say; I am, because we are, and since we are therefore, I am".

It is because of the primacy of the extended family and community plight that Chinua Achebe asserts that among the Igbo of Nigeria, "no man however great can win judgement against the clan" (Achebe, 1958, p. 139). Nigerians place more emphasis on the solidarity of the group and on the communion of the members than on the autonomy and interest of the individual. This idea of communal solidarity prevails both in moments of joy and of sorrow. The web of the extended family and community tie does not exclude the departed ancestors and other spiritual beings, including God and the unborn. This means that the corporate existence of any of the people's cultural aggregation (groups and social formation), has ontological inclination and link. Thus, the rituals and practices of widowhood are necessary to restore harmony of the bipolar world's interaction and to ensure the stability of the "spiritual republic" (Onyewuenyi, 1978, p. 252) or the "ontological equilibrium" (Echema, 1995, p. 63).

Death and its elaborate rituals concern every member of the family and kin group. There is therefore the need to perform the widowhood practices, especially those that deal directly with the deceased's rites. The denial of these rites to the departed, which implies denying him entrance into the ancestral pedigree and stratum in the people's web of interaction, is believed to arouse the anger of the spirits against the world of the living. Therefore, any action to stop the widowhood practices aimed at settling and averting the wrath of the spirit world on the given community is matched with sanction and ostracism. The punishment is a living death; such that reminds and equate with the punishment of outlawry in feudal England. No widow would want such situation that would estrange her like a planet off its orbit (Onyewuenyi, 1978, p. 252). This is the essence and justification for the peoples consciousness to overseeing the proper execution of rituals and sanctions, including those of widowhood institution. Concerning ritual practices among the Igbo, Ilogu posits that: "it is due not to sadism or urge to torture their fellow human being, but to the genuine belief that unless proper rituals and punishments are enforced, all the people would suffer as unbearable evil would befall the community" (Ilogu, 1974, p. 127).

This purported wisdom fits into the context under study. In Nigerian communities, an individual woman cannot detach herself from the societal web or corporate existence. Denying the traditional dictates of the community is denial of life itself. Furthermore, the force of corporate identity in ensuring the continuity of widowhood practices is also substantiated by Eliade, when he says that it is not possible for someone to dissociate from the sacred events upon which his community exists (Eliade, 1959).

4.7. Re-Union and Group Cohesion

The death of a man brings his kinsmen and women together. In such gathering, dialogue is possible. The negotiations and bargaining for widowhood ritual charges and practices facilitate increased interaction among the living. Again, the living join voices together to talk to the departed. The interaction is necessary because the living recall for the departed, memorable events and experiences shared with his widow and sanction him to remain benevolent to her as an ancestor. This is but one functional essence.

Again, the blood of the animal victims of the ritual practices are symbolic bonds which reaffirm the widow and other kinsmen and women's commitment to the deceased and for the maintenance of the values of the group and lineage. This also provides the widow opportunity for the renewal of her marriage contract. To the kinsmen of the departed, sharing the flesh of the ritual victims (animals) is like being fed by one mother with one dish and spoon (Iheanacho, 2004).

This finding is similar to the views of Emile Durkheim, that, ceremony and rituals are essential to binding the members of a group together. This is why rituals are found not only in regular situations of worship, but in the various life crises at which major social transitions are experienced, for example birth, marriage and death. In virtually all Nigerian traditional societies, rituals and ceremonial procedures are observed on such occasions. Collective ceremonials reaffirm group solidarity at a time when people are forced to adjust to major changes in their lives. Funeral rituals demonstrate that the values of the group outlive the passing of particular individuals and, so provides a means for the bereaved people to adjust to their altered circumstances. Mourning is not the spontaneous expression of grief, it is only so for those personally affected by the death. Mourning is a duty imposed by the group (Giddens, 2000, p. 443).

Considering the force of group solidarity, ontological stability and renewal of covenants as major reasons and functional essence underscoring the perpetuity of the configuration of widowhood institution, we tend to subscribe to the assertion credited to Smith that "religion ensures the preservation and welfare of society" (Durkheim, 1976). But inspite of these cultural values, widowhood practices stand in contradistinction to the values of contemporary Nigerian family and women. The family system has changed. Therefore enforcement of the traditional and pristine practices of the widowhood institution is a negation and violence on womanhood and the family stability.

5. The Imperative of Christian Local Theology of Widowhood

The thrust of local theology is Christians' reflection on the gospel from their own purview, circumstance and cultural gabbage, towards addressing how the inherent conditions, values and circumstances influence the people's response to the gospel (Schreiter, 2003, p. 1). Local

theology study people's culture, bringing indigenous customs into synergy with church tradition and individual Christian identity. It also seek effective pastoral lee-ways to the sway and influence of indigenous worldviews and popular religious convictions.

In line with the aim of bringing the people's worldview into synergy with the realities of the present time, spiritual leaders especially in the Christian dominated cultural areas of Nigeria should articulate heart touching local theologies of the widowhood institution. This will help to sustain the faith of Christian widows and other Christian women. In some places like Owerri (Igbo culture areas), Christian women use white clothing instead of all black attire during the mourning period, use the Rosary to scratch their body instead of stick, use 'Holy water' and olive oil to wash their hands, instead of the traditional pattern of the rituals. During the early period of the mourning, the Christian women groups gather around their bereaved member to keep her company, thereby reducing the unfriendly attitude of the traditional women activists of the practices. Therefore, a sound local theology of widowhood institution rooted in the indigenous cultures of Nigeria's extended family system and communities would further spur the women to take to Christian alternatives to the practices.

6. Conclusion: Towards a Synergy between Widowhood Culture and Social Change

Today, societies are undergoing processes of rapid change. New ideologies, scientific and technological innovations and demographic changes have emerged and infused into our social system. This means modifications in the way Nigerians relate, interact and seek their goals in life; hence the social structures in society are perpetually dynamic. Against this backdrop of social change and on the concept of women development as topically crystallized, the persistence of violent widowhood practices suggest a paradox and indeed a human development pathology which yearn for urgent attention.

Therefore, giving that widowhood practices hold Nigerian women sway; in planning and implementing women development programmes and projects, attention should first be paid to studying and understanding the particular culture's heritage and values, to ensure a broad based

acceptance and integration in the people's social system. Thus, "a people does not fully commit itself to a development undertaking unless that undertaking corresponds to its deeply felt needs" (Serageldin & Taboroff, 1994, p. 10).

To ameliorate the effect of widowhood practices on Nigerian women and stability of the family, we proffer the following strategies: mass education should be encouraged amongst the people, especially for rural women. This is to enhance critical thinking in handling the challenge of violent cultural configurations and the quest for sustainable human development in the contemporary time. In other words, qualitative education would enhance women and men's better conception and thought pattern, for a more humane approach to widowhood practices towards women empowerment, self-confidence and bridging the inequality gap. We also advocate for aggressive enlightenment campaign towards mass awareness of the human underdevelopment and family instability implications of the institution. This strategy would among other things, enable women become conscious of their dignity, the dangers of the practices, their inalienable rights and, how to seek redress when such rights are violated. The various women associations in Nigeria should form surveillance groups that would be on alert to identify ill-treatment of women under the institution. This is necessary because, in the situation of sorrow and mourning, widows are disempowered of the wit and spirit of speaking-out in protest, hence they need external help. To put this strategy in motion Ministry of Women Affairs, related, Government Agencies, Office of First Ladies, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBO) can be very useful. Again, Nigerian women should equally remain dogged (no matter the opposition), in their agitation for the reconsideration of the cultural relics which subject them to indignities and dehumanization. Finally, given that widowhood practices are more intense among the rural poor families, we suggest that the various levels of government in Nigeria should plan effective poverty alleviation programmes.

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Ulrich Paetzold

Brandenburg University of Technology Cottbus-Senftenberg (Germany)

The Free, Childlike Play and the Strengthening of the Parent-Child Relationship: A Report from the Linkage of University Teaching and Practice

ABSTRACT. The basic works on the importance of play for children's development emphasize the holistic and comprehensive importance for all areas of development. As part of the various approaches of pedagogy these effects were harnessed in recent decades and functionalized for different societal and social goals. Though the original meaning of children's play is increasingly faded in professional circles and is seen in its possibilities rather mainly in performance-oriented goals. Most likely the client-centered play therapy still pursues the original sense of the play, focusing on the actual needs of the child in its totality and individuality. As part of a project at the the BTU Cottbus students of Social Work / Social Pedagogy meet families for weekly play visits, to exemplary encourage the parents to play with their children themselves. The low-threshold project aims to have a preventive effect and to strengthen the parent-child relationship.

KEYWORDS: original meaning of children's play, client-centered play therapy, a preventive project for educational support of families through weekly play visits

1. The Original Meaning of Children's Play and its Change over Time

The positive relevance of playing for children's development is uncontroversial now for a long time and through different theoretical approaches different meaning priorities have been set. Huizinga with his phenomenological-anthropological based theory of play described it as a fundamental human activity, as a basis (and precondition) for each cultural development (Einsiedler, 1999). Similarly comprising Damon describes the play. It is "a unique part of human behavior, which fulfills crucial and irreplaceable functions in the social life and personal development" (Damon, 1989, p. 153). Overall it is impressive how many

different theories and directions have argued with the play itself and different facets of it. Buhler stresses the child inherent drive, the desire for the activity per se, which in particular promotes the motor development of the child (Baumgärtel, 1982). In the psychoanalytic approaches, such as Erikson's, the emotional aspects of children's play (keywords: pleasure principle, anxiety defense) are stronger taken into account (Renner, 1995). The constructivist theory of Piaget accesses the development and learning opportunities for children in their various fields through the play and also takes the wholeness and totality of the child into consideration (Einsiedler, 1999). Most approaches stress the experience of autonomy and freedom in the child by the end in itself and the purposelessness of the play, the (playful) appropriation of various skills, the stimulation of imagination activity and many other positive consequences (Mogel, 1994). The pedagogy in its various facets has consequently taken up this wealth of positive learning opportunities for children and in some cases developed very elaborated handouts in the recent decades to show how the play as method can be used for various goals, different age groups or different settings (Höke, 2011).

This implies that these pedagogic use is driven by interests, which is a value in itself. This pedagogic sense is the intention to help the child to cope with his current life problems or developmental tasks in the confrontation with his everyday world so that it better and better becomes able to independently solve its problems and tasks, and independently live his life under the rapidly changing living conditions (Spanhel, 2009). In the field of pedagogy there have been and still are times when the free, childlike play with respect to the goals of school preparation, performance or educational orientation had to take a back seat. Through various social changes the play experienced even greater importance. By rapid technological changes step by step computer games have become considerably more important in the world of children (and teenagers). In family life they are now occupy an important place and limit the time of playing, parents spend together with their children. At the same time the economy has recognized the play and toys for children and adults as an important economic factor. Most of them are rule games or predetermined game scenarios that have little in common with the original, free and self-motivated childlike play. The crucial difference between the free, childlike and self-motivated play and the use of the play by pedagogy or economy lies in the intention and goals of different adults who want to achieve something for the child or also seek a specific benefit for

themselves. The view turns away from the needs and motives of the children and focuses on social, cultural, economic or educational norms. In retrospect it is surprising that the original, childish play in its freedom – which was essentially emphasized in the basic works – is hardly seen in its real meaning and also finds little attention in pedagogy, especially since it brings no measurable, controllable "benefit". This note can be sharpened: Considering the increasingly heteronomous everyday lives of children, you have to ask the question whether in future there still will be a temporal space for this self-determined play at all. Professionally controversial and unclear is the role of the new, electronic gaming possibilities. One might raise the provocative question of whether these new ways to play perhaps create a "more" of self-determination for the individual players. If the original meaning of the play was correctly seen in its entirety, two questions arise: Where is this meaning still most visible and represented, and how could this meaning potentially be strengthened again for the benefit of the child (and his parents and the relationship between both)?

2. Play Therapy and the Freedom of the Child in a Self-Determined Role

Play therapy has a long tradition. For instance one may recall the outstanding approaches by Anna Freud, Melanie Klein, Zulliger from Switzerland or the individual case reports of Axline that could appeal to a wide audience (Goetze, 2002). In my opinion the play therapy with children is rooted in the origins of the play and therefore seize them. She is very different from more fragmented, to certain areas of development of the child oriented training measures or support programs that want to develop specific areas of the child, starting from expectations of adults or societal norms and requirements. Taking the theories and models for childlike play seriously, the most important factors are the holistic view of the child (with all its senses and body sensations, with its perceptions, feelings, thoughts and experiences) and its active and self-constructing role. In contrast to e.g. support programs, thus, the needs and motives of the child are centered to take them up and accompany them in the context of play therapy. In this way the intrinsic motivation is addressed – one of the key points of the play. And due to the simultaneous relationship with the child, which builds up through the regular, joint playing,

the holistic growth of the child can succeed. Thus, it is not a problem, technique, a method or societal expectations that are the center, but only the child in its entirety. Further advantages of the play therapy and the intrinsically motivated play are obvious: Language is not essential, so that smaller children as well as children from other cultural backgrounds with limited language skills can be addressed. Also the child with his fantasies and actions is in an active and self-formative role (as a therapist you always follow the child) and this makes it more and more possible to understand the inner world of the child. Especially the aspect of self-determination, which is an essential point across all theories in the basic works, is a crucial factor for the efficacy of the play therapy. In summary, the basic principles of play therapy after Axline illustrate the approach very well: The principle of unconditional acceptance, the principle of establishing a climate of permission, the principle of respect for the child, the principle of letting the child lead the way, the principle of non-acceleration, the principle of shaping the relationship, the principle of recognizing and reflecting the children's feelings and the principle of limiting (Goetze, 2002). In my opinion the centrality of the child and its successful development is the actual impact factor and also the actual difference to other, external motivated approaches of playing. In retrospective it is surprising that these fundamental insights are increasingly faded and barely picked up from a professional perspective. Only in recent years concepts for playing-based therapy with chronically traumatized children could be positioned more professionally (Steinkopf, 2011).

3. The Project "Playing at Home" as a Place of Learning in Higher Education and as a Chance of Preventive Education Support for Families (Paetzold, 2013)

Originally the project "Playing at home" was developed and established in the 90s in the Netherlands. Back then it was used as a way of integrate immigrant families and hence started with migrant children. For over 15 years now the project is a constant and integral part of higher education in Cottbus (first at the University of Applied Sciences, now at the University) and firmly anchored in the curriculum of Social Work / Social Pedagogy. With the establishment in Cottbus the project has

been opened with regard to contents for all families and another basic idea was put at the center: The original idea of the play is brought into the families by the children, with the claim and the goal to preventively strengthen the educational competence of the parents. Through weekly play visits with the families in their homes, over a period of 20 weeks in the presence of at least one parent, the parents (exemplary) should be encouraged to more engage in the play of their own children. At the same time a learning opportunity is provided for the students to test themselves in the method of playing in direct contact with children and their parents.

The implementation of the project requires certain structural conditions:

- Establishment in the curriculum as a project opportunity over one year with a time share (for students) of about four hours a week. A limitation of the number of participants is reasonable to guarantee that an intensive and content-related monitoring can take place.
- A limited social area (district, city), so that students can manage the play visits in the families without long and time-consuming ways.
- A good networking with all institutions that have to do with children (kindergartens, schools, family centers, health department, pediatricians, etc.) so that interested families can be obtained.
- An easily accessible room (in Cottbus e.g. at the University) with a variety of play materials for different age groups, from which the students can take the materials as needed.

To concretize the procedure, I would like to briefly describe the implementation in Cottbus. Before the start of the semester an application process is conducted, so that preferably motivated students can be obtained. The selected students will than pass through a two-day bloc seminar, amongst others dealing with topics like the significance of the play, the play at different ages and cultures, preparation and follow-up of play visits, the use of different materials, how to interview parents and children and managing critical situations. Thereafter, students start weekly play visits, each with one family for 20 weeks. Every single visit is followed up together with a tutor. About once a month a supervision is carried out with the whole course. At the end of the 20 weeks a final report has to be written. The selection of the families is carried out before the first students visit by a project manager, who visits the interested

families and conducts a preliminary interview, so that the parents do not develop false expectations. The primary goal is, to encourage the parents to become involved specifically in the play with their own children. Therefore, the play visits only take place if at least one parent is present. The age group of children lies between three and twelve years. Thus, each student attends two families within a year.

As general aims of the project can be named: The preventive promotion of education in the family, socio-educational intervention prior to the manifestation of behavioral problems of children in preschool and primary school age, resource-oriented strengthening of parents in their parenting skills and parent-child relationships, promoting the integration of children from emigrant families and families of asylum seekers, evaluation of the effects of the approach through scientific monitoring.

The advantages and strengths of the project as opposed to a specific, professional assistance are obvious. It forms a (cost-efficient) supplementation of the existing regional aid structure and so is used as an offer, if no specific problem situation even arose, ergo no special service is already required. By networking with various facilities, in case of need, further help for parents can be arranged quick and uncomplicated. It is an extremely low-threshold and early access for parents and children, hence eliciting to no defensive reaction. This impression is further enhanced by the fact that the offer is made by a university or college of higher education, what opposed to state institutions triggers little fears.

At first glance, the claim to the students seems to be simple ("a little playing with children"). However, considering the action and the process in more detail, the complexity and the demand becomes clear. The learning goals can be assigned to different levels.

On the theoretical-cognitive level: Knowledge of the method of play, child development as well as stimulation of various areas of development and prevention. In addition this content is completed through teaching of intercultural approaches of education support.

On the level of action: Strategies for observation and assessment of child behavior / development, the use of different methods of play, leading conversations with parents, networking and cooperating with other institutions, reflecting one's own behavior, dealing with resistance, the development of an action strategy comprising the steps of observation, goal planning, implementation, evaluation.

Overall the students become acquainted with preventive socio-educational interventions for children, they acquire social skills in con-

tact with children and their parents and learn the strategic planning of targeted action and problem solutions, as well as action strategies in dealing with different cultures and observation expertise in child development. Considering the complexity of the requirements, it is also clear that this project cannot be realized on honorary basis, because one's own actions has to be under permanent reflection. Single attempts to integrate (older) volunteers in the project regularly failed, because they seemed to be a much stronger education competition for the parents as the younger students. And also they inclined much more often to an attitude that they themselves know the best how to play with the children.

At first glance, the development of such a project for a university seminar may seem very time-consuming. The time required and the number of arrangements with the practice are actually really high in the first years. However, they reduce rapidly, if it is possible to select experienced student tutors from the first year of training courses in the project, for the weekly visit reviews with the new students. From this group of experienced tutors in turn, a project manager can be chosen, which carries out the selection interviews with the families and extends the networking with other practice facilities. Ideally, it is possible to recruit an experienced professional that is exempted from work by his or her institution for some hours to take over the management tasks. Then the project will become – like in Cottbus for now 15 years – a "self-runner".

4. Critical Review and Future Development of the Project

The project is very popular with students, as it is offering an – apparently – simple and clear learning situation, while providing intensive supervision. And also in the families it predominantly is experienced as a great enrichment. Intuitively one can also assume that the play with the kids certainly promotes development. However, on closer examination there are also some critical aspects that need to be considered. An unsolved problem is the process or quality measurement, i.e. which development steps the child / children could learn through the project and in addition, how sustainable e.g. parental behavior changes. Currently and in the past few years we at least were able to develop standards for the participating students, in what form a family visit has to be evaluated and what aspects have to be considered in this evaluation. And even if

this is indeed reflected additionally in the joint evaluation of the visits with the tutors, it still remains dependent on the subjective impression of a single student. On the issue of quality measurement we entangle in fundamental questions of developmental diagnosis, because the different spheres of influence (impulses from kindergarten or school, influences of friends, changes in parental behavior) cannot be separated. Also the question of medium- or long-term effects on the parental behavior remains mostly unanswered, since follow-up interviews were conducted only sporadically (for lack of time). Even with a regular follow-up interrogation of the parents (e.g. after one year), this would not be objective or meaningful enough, because too many different factors would influence the perception and the statements of the parents. Another critical aspect can be found in the motivation of the students. Is their intention for a visit the general promotion of the childish play or do they have specific support and development goals for the child as a motive? That means, each family visit is located on the border between the intention to stimulate the passion for playing and an educational support, which does not want to be the core purpose of this project. Perhaps in these matter there lies the answer to the question "Why it is so hard for approaches with the method of play to take a proper place in professional circles?" We currently experimenting with our partner SOS Kinderdorf e.V. Cottbus in expanding the project to other locations in Germany. Another further development by a colleague (Prof. Dr. Jost) refers to the age group of one to three-year-old children and the inclusion of video recordings during the play visits, to maybe get a new form of process analysis.

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BOOK REVIEWS

EFA Global Monitoring Report, *Gender and EFA 2000–2015: Achievements and Challenges*, France 2015: United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization, pp. 50

Presented report has been released by EFA Movement[1] as an another attempt of summing up changes that had been achieved on the way to gender parity and equality in education. The World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal) in 2000 mandated UNESCO[2] to coordinate work of 164 governments, development agencies, civil society and the private sector in order to accomplish mentioned aim. EFA determined six goals to reach by the year 2015. Its Global Monitoring Report is published annually to follow the progress of attainment of those goals and to identify remaining global challenges. Discussed paper is a part of 2015 publication.

The work contains five uneven sections: an introduction and key messages, a submission of the progress towards gender parity and equality, a note relating to WIDE (World Inequality Database on Education), indications of challenges and policy solutions to accomplish the aim post-2015 and last but not least, recommendations.

In the first part of the introduction researchers emphasize significance of the report considering its concentration on achieved changes and remaining challenges after fifteen years of undertaken operations. The importance of reducing gender inequalities is highly underlined. Further, the reader is informed that the paper also includes description of policies, programmes, informal and formal laws, social norms and practices that influence gender parity in education.

"Key Messages" is a section where authors located the most important results of their work. The reader do not have to acquaint the whole report to know roughly what it is about. Main thoughts have been bolded and followed by their short explanation written with smaller font, so the entire text is transparent. Presented section has been divided into three parts. The first relates to three meaningful changes that have been accomplished since 2000: the number of girls for every 100 boys has risen in primary and secondary education causing these amounts almost even, 26 more countries achieved gender parity in those two mentioned education levels, 84 million

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[1] Education For All Movement.

[2] United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization.

children and adolescents who had been previously out of school began attending it. The second one features remaining challenges which are connected to: girls' and the poorest disadvantageous situation in access to school system, gender disparities on every level of education in many participating countries, gender gaps in literacy, high threat of boys' drop out of upper secondary education. The third part of "Key Messages" discloses conditions impeding satisfying girls' participation in school system. The authors also consider boys as a group that can be exposed to negative impact of social and gender norms as e.g. forcible employment at a young age.

The chapter entitled "Global progress towards gender parity and equality 2000 – 2015" opens part of the report with relevant analysis of collected data. It is composed of three sub-chapters from which the last one is the most extensive and divided into many smaller sections. In the first sub-chapter the researchers described shortly the process of setting the 6 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and 12 strategies defining how to achieve them. Three of MDGs were designed to resolutely emphasise gender parity: access for all children, particularly girls, to compulsory and free education (the second goal), improvement of adult literacy, especially among women, and access to basic and continuing education for all adults (the fourth goal), elimination of gender disparities and inequalities with a focus on ensuring girls' full access to education of a good quality (the fifth goal). The analysis consists of data from fifteen years of research. The report concentrates intimately on differences between girls' and boys' education judging the first mentioned group as disadvantaged.

The second sub-chapter unveils four trends that can be seen after analysing and interpreting collected material. The researchers highlight that gender parity in primary and secondary education is on a higher level than ithadever been before. Nevertheless, there is still lack of improvement of the social and economic position of women – that point is also connected to the second trend which relates to increasing awareness of barriers that prevent children from enrolling and succeeding at school. Those obstacles are conditioned by gender. As a third trend the authors point the importance of good quality education taking into consideration not only teachers' attitude and knowledge but also conditions of school buildings. The last trend is connected to difference between achieving gender parity and gender equality. The researchers explain these meanings underlining that accomplishing the first one is simpler than the second because of its social and cultural ingraining.

The final sub-chapter concentrates on detailed presentation of assembled data. It includes transparent tables with world's regions or countries as main indicators and tables' descriptions. The content of this part of the report starts with an introduction which compares gender disparities in enrolment from 1999 to 2012. Such a comparison provides the reader an overall inspection of achieved changes. Remaining content of that sub-

chapter is divided into six sections. Four of them focus on accomplished gender parity in each level of education: pre-primary, primary, secondary, tertiary. Another two show issues connected to learning outcomes and literacy. There are sub-titles in the text that provide the reader the prime thought of following content. The researchers described each section with carefulness giving information what had been done well and what still need to be improved. Each premise is supported by indicator in the table. It is underlined that not only enrolment is a determinant of gender parity in education, but also school achievements are. The authors believe that educational accomplishments should not be conditioned by gender, but they still do not have enough data to analyse that issue.

The third section of the entire report acquaints the reader with WIDE which is the Internet platform allowing to compare plenty of indicators in order to learn about inequality in education on many levels of man's life, also relating to gender. This section gives brief information about the WIDE, to get to know more the reader is redirected to the website[3].

"Challenges and policy solutions to achieve gender quality post-2015" is a chapter that opens the forth part of the report.It includes three sub-chapters each divided into shorter sections. The first one deepens the information contained in "Key Messages" in its third part. The authors discussed causes of difficulties in achieving gender equality in education by determining their sources. The description focuses on barriers such as: children's domestic labour and employment, school-related gender-based violence which is connected to discriminating social norms, early marriage among girls and their adolescent pregnancy. The researchers not only featured the barriers but also during analysing them, they invoked to international, local and social norms and policies.

The second sub-chapter relates to the key strategies and policies that should help gaining parity and equality in education. The reader receives information about manners helping to achieve that aim which could be gathered into two groups – those connected to promoting gender equality by campaigns and those that accomplish the same purpose by changes in schooling system organization. The first mention group consists of data of: international organizations involved in promoting desirable attitudes, gender mainstreaming policy, civil society and community mobilization and antiviolence policies. Educational changes are connected to: costs of schooling, schools' infrastructure, recruiting female teachers and gender-sensitive staff in general, promoting gender equality through teaching and learning materials, learning outcomes and alternative education opportunities. The content is deepened by references of policies and actions that have been introduced in particular countries.

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[3] www.education-inequalities.org

The last sub-chapter of this part of the report provides a brief summary of the entire content emphasising the need of men's and women's association in the way of opposition to gender inequalities and disparities.

As the final page of the paper, researchers once again featured recommendations that have been already vastly described in previous chapter.

In conclusion, the report has a transparent structure. Included information is divided into thematic groups. Data is extensively presented in main chapters. The reader can also find a summary of each part of the paper – it significantly helps to remind processed information. The language used in the report is rather for professional readers.

The only drawback of the paper is that the authors do not feature methods of gathering and analysing the data. On UNESCO's website there is just a brief information that its Institute for Statistics is responsible for collecting the material.

Presented report should be a benchmark for anybody who conducts research with reference to gender inequalities and disparities. The paper shows the scale of their existence in area that is remarkably important in human multidimensional development – in education. Analysed data not only underline already known issues that participation in school system is conditioned by economics, culture and social norms, but also provide knowledge of achieved changes in these areas and remaining challenges. What is more, the reader is informed about interesting phenomenon connected to the drop out. The report shows that although it is much more difficult for girls to enroll, if they do they are more likely to graduate than boys who are often expelled in secondary school. Boys' drop out is shortly explained in the report, the authors feature few causes of that issue (p. 27), so I believe the research on that case should be deepened. Another astonishing finding is that in tertiary education there are more women than men. That result can also be a benchmark to national and local analyses.

EFA's mission is to promote education as a fundamental human right. That is why Global Monitoring Reports are mainly focused on problems of developing countries. It is important for organizations and researchers from all over the world to have knowledge of phenomena occurring in these regions, but also in highly-developed countries in order to replicate good practices and prevent emerging risks.

Marta Piksa
University of Silesia (Poland)

Anna Odrowąż-Coates, *Fata Morgana of the Saudi women's cultural space*, **Kraków 2015: Impuls Publishing House, pp. 302**

The book by Anna Odrowąż-Coates is a unique work in the current Polish discourse about the situation of women in the modern world. The author introduces the Polish reader into the foreign world, exotic and known only fragmentarily. The reader's knowledge is based more on fiction or journalistic narratives in books and film than on science reflection – the world of Islamic women. It is a pioneer analysis in Polish literature, which includes such in-depth information of the socio-cultural situation of women living in Saudi Arabia – a specific country of the Middle East. The analyses conducted in the book are very well embedded in the net of various socio-logical, anthropological, cultural and pedagogic scientific opinions, concepts and conceptual constructs. This makes the socio-cultural depiction of the Saudi women's world – described in vivid tones and enchanting by almost literary, journalistic form – in fact a serious scientific work, a thought-out view on the topic. Very seldom one comes across such a thoughtful and per-ceptive analysis, moreover based on original research of the Saudis, con-ducted in natural conditions – in the culture characterized by specific social relations regarding the religious saturation as well as the prism of gender. The author used the opportunity to carry out such original study in a re-markable way while staying in the depicted world of Islamic women for a longer period of time. Thanks to the ethnographic approach and with the use of participant observation and interviews, the character of the investiga-tor seems to continue good traditions of researchers revealing hidden cul-tures, such as Bronisław Malinowski does. The reader will find the book to be an extremely pleasing experience, even an educating adventure. The book contains a great amount of knowledge and understanding of the life and situation of the Islamic women. Moreover, the Islamic women's pers-pective, their sense of freedom and their limitations as well as the meanings they give to everyday errands is highlighted, along with the attributes of their functioning and the usual activities of common life. The book presents the world of socio-cultural space of the women and the mechanisms of its creation and maintenance, at the same time showing elements which modify that space, connected to the civilization progress and a slow process of opening Saudi Arabia to the world and to the changes currently observed in the previously strict traditional norms and life standards. The Fata Morgana mentioned in the title is an accurately chosen metaphor about fluidity of the socio-educational reality of Saudi women, that refers to the duality of the world that is being described and discovered, as the Author writes: "Their being and non-being", a metaphor of being and concurrent invisibility in many social aspects, beyond the walls of their houses. Thanks to the author, the reader faces a picture drenched with fluidity of the women's ways of

functioning and thinking – both in individual and collective perspective. Reading the book resembles taking a journey through the world of Islamic women that is unknown and misunderstood by the Europeans, immersing in their everyday life, customs, values, longings and limitations. It is a journey into the world marked by women's conflict between the dominant system of values imposed by the general culture of the country and education beyond the system, along with global opportunities that are being shown to Saudi women through the "digital window". The reader gets to know the world in which the fundamental adaptive mechanism is expressed mimicry; the woman, in order to survive, to "be", must "not be". For the reader, it is, without a doubt, an exclusive journey, because the only way to take it is with the author as a guide, who courteously rings up the curtain to reveal the common life of Saudi women, something kept well-hidden beyond a veil of uniformed dress-code and places that stay forbidden to the foreigners.

The scientific value of the book can be perceived in many dimensions. Firstly, it impresses with a very rich theoretical background of the conducted research. It draws attention to the vastness of references to concepts and theoretical approaches, to researchers and authors, to begin with such iconic persons in social and humanist sciences, as Durkheim, Mead, Bourdieu, Collins, Bauman, Goffman, Parsons, Kohlberg, Erickson, Luhman, Bernstein, through an array of feminist authors, to the lesser-known names in Poland, as British and American researchers and others. Familiarizing the reader with less famous authors is a particular added value of this book. An aspect that cannot be missed are the reconstructions of thematic discourses aiming to justify the use of particular trends and concepts to her own needs. In addition to these great reconstructions, many reflections can be found – the original ones and ones deriving from observation, presenting the Islamic women's situation in a reality full of paradoxes and fluidity of the habitus and behaviour. One might be impressed by an enormous amount of literature reference incorporated in the book, in a big part consisting of foreign works (mostly in English), whose presentation and quoting are by itself incredibly beneficial to the reader – especially to the "searching" one.

Secondly, the huge advantage of the book when it comes to its scientific value is the methodology. Both the selection, and the implementation of ambitious and interesting, ethnography-based research procedure and its competent representation and justification on the background of contemporary methodological approaches, are another value that the book offers. In a clear and objective manner, Anna Odrowąż-Coates shows the details of the conduction of the study, its location, duration, subject matter and circumstances. In a narrative that is detailed, yet interesting, one can find the nuances of her research work, the difficulties related to the limitations deriving from strict cultural and moral values that apply to Saudi Arabic women and to foreigners. The detailed methodological choices include the participant observation and interviewing (unstructured in-depth inter-

views) and the analysis of autobiographical messages (women of different origins: Saudi women, Muslim women, Somali and Australians). These methods combined create a very interesting methodological approach.

The analysis of the study results included in the second part of the book is a great find for the reader, especially for the one, who is unfamiliar with the oriental world of the Middle East. The author reveals to us what is hidden behind the veil – the world of Muslim women, first introducing the historico-political and cultural-religious background of the land that is the focus of her research. It is in fact a fascinating story about the Arab world, the Islam world shown through the prism of gender, the story that brings the reader into the nuances of Islam religion and political, social and cultural repercussions. In subsequent chapters, the author presents the results of the research by constructing a picture of the socio-cultural space of Saudi women. First, she shows their world and the meaning of its the visible attributes and symbols. The analyses contained in this part of the book revolve around several issues: the public image of women against the custom/ obligation to comply to uniformed dress-code, the women's attitude towards their bodies, their sexuality, but also daily activities, habits and circumstances (including e.g. the ban on women driving), religious practices, forms of women's education and its components, the limitations of it that affect the Saudi women, and other types of barriers in different vital areas of life - their access to media and digital communication or their employment. The presented analyses are attractively illustrated with the responses of interviewed women and men and the fragments of ethnographic diary kept by the researcher.

The next chapters reveal the picture of the female Arabia, based on the accounts of "the outsiders" and from the perspective of the foreign, "strange" women living in the Kingdom, showing how that particular area is strongly influenced by discriminatory practices. Section 7.2 might be found especially interesting – the author speaks about upbringing and socialization in the social and cultural conditions of the Saudi Kingdom, by synthesizing the previous reflections, she presents the goals and the indoctrinative sense of them in a thorough way. This passage might offer some sort of a summary of observations and discussions carried out previously in the book. The author constructs the accurate statements about the importance of implementing an endemic upbringing in the world she describes, where the basic mechanism of the socio-cultural reproduction assures the functioning of socio-political system as a whole, guarantees the sustainability of the philosophy of community and the existing apotheosis of own religious and cultural values. The book ends with a very well written, factual conclusion, which presents the final outcome of the research, emotionally charged, where the author ultimately states that the creation and the persistence of gender and class differences based on the reality that she investigates. The conclusions are actually based on a process of social programming of child-

ren and is conducted in the form of purposeful and intense institutionalized indoctrination of cultural and religious kind. Religion, as the author concludes, is the most important factor in regulating and determining the position and the socio-cultural space of Saudi women.

The work is a good read book because of the style, which is abundant in details that create a suggestive picture and enrich the narrative with a vivid tone. The book as a whole gives an impression of a journalistic form. Enchanting for the reader, who in the course of reading immerses himself in the picture of "gender apartheid" and discovers the details of life that are secret and sometimes shocking for Western culture. The reader also discovers the importance of the secrets in the perspective of understanding the world and the Saudi women's situation.

Ewa Jarosz
University of Silesia (Poland)

Marcin Gierczyk
University of Silesia (Poland)

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