Sexism in schools and society essay examples

Technology, Development

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Sexism in Schools and Society

Introduction

In schools, students perceive as natural the gender identity of being a girl or being a guy, based on their belonging to feminine or masculine gender. Alongside this perception of what is biologically, not socially normal (Hackman in Adams & Blumenfeld, 2010), the students also absorb the socially served definitions about femininity and masculinity and the social gender constructs that dress these concepts. As such, they are considering (some of them consciously, other unconsciously) that men are associated with attributes such as toughness and superiority, while women are viewed as weak and inferior. This places men and women in a binary opposition, wherein each of them are in separated, opposed poles. At the strong pole is placed the man and at the weak one is situated the woman.

Constituent Paragraphs

The man is considered to be the pillar of the family, meant to go to work and to be able to support his wife and his children, and to be active in the public space. On the contrary, the woman is the caregiver, she is active in the

private, domestic space and she dedicates herself to her children, her man, and her household duties: cooking, washing, sawing, etc. (Hackman in Adams & Blumenfeld, 2010).

These are social norms built within a patriarchal society to welcome the superiority of man over woman. Nevertheless, they are traditional representations about the gender roles in the society and the perpetuation of a traditional thinking about gender roles is taught at home and transmitted from generation to generation.

The modernization of various societies (mostly the western world) has led to major advancement in changing the traditional gender roles perceptions. While the patriarchal conceptions still persist and while men still have the biggest economic, political and decisional power, women's power is emerging in all social fields. Nowadays women are competing with men for the same professional positions and they became more active in the public space. This has led to another phenomenon – the slowly separation of woman from the domestic space. This is not to say that women are not still caregivers. Some women are the embodiment of the " superwoman", and they are capable of being competitive at work, developing their career, while still dedicating themselves to their families and nurturing their children. However, not all women are applying the concept of the " Superwoman" and some of them are solely focusing on their career growth. Moreover, as they are competing with men, and sometimes for positions traditionally considered as dedicated to men (in the navy, military force, construction sites or the managerial levels), they are accumulating masculine features, because they consider that they cannot impose themselves as women, with

their feminine characteristics, in the specific working environments. As a consequence, many women tend to lose their femininity, into acting and becoming more like men, to demonstrate that they can be just as good (Worell, 2001).

Nevertheless, femininity is yet another concept constructed by the society, based on traditional norms. According to this concept, women should be pretty, attractive, neat, delicate, to dress elegant, to be in style and to " act like a lady" (Hackman in Adams & Blumenfeld, 2010, p. 316), while men should be tough, in control of the situations they are in, not asking for directions, not crying, " acting like men" (Hackman in Adams & Blumenfeld, 2010, p. 16).

Therefore, the concepts of femininity and masculinity are also social constructs that serve as receipts for how the representatives of each gender should act like.

Jennifer Coates observes that there is a gender representation in language also, which adds to the social acceptance of the gender roles. As such, the gender difference and the sexist appreciations are perpetuated thru linguistic appreciations that define their belonging to a certain gender: " master/mistress", " bachelor/spinster" or " hussy", " dame", referring to women (Coates, 1986).

Coates observes that in the classroom context boys tend to dominate the communication, as a result of their communicative competences, enabled by their active approach to language, shouting, screaming, being noisy and even untempered in language. On the contrary, girls take on the passive approach to language, as they were toughed that arguing, being noisy and

challenging others thru their shouting is not a conduct suited for a girl. As an outcome, attitudes such as politeness, quietness, shyness, and " well – raised" are associated with girls, while the others, on the opposite pole, which reflect a bad behavior, unsteadiness, challenging behavior, spontaneity and even rudeness are associated with boys (Coates, 1987). These are gender prescribed attitudes that are encouraged from an early age and upon which society builds and enforces other traditionalist perceptions about how girls and boys, respectively how women and men (in a more advanced age) should act like.

However, being quiet and talking only when asked and in a totally polite manner, and accepting all the views presented, without sustaining one's own ideas in order not to offend the other, determines a passive learning, which implies a total acceptance with everything that is being presented, without having a personal opinion and this leads to a mechanical repetition, reformulation of the notions though and a reproduction of what was already said. Such an assertive attitude, although it has positive aspects, leads not an unsustainable development of thought, which people have been searching since ever.

For this aspect, Coates indicates that a solution for reducing this passive learning would be, obviously, to encourage active learning in schools, by letting the children express themselves, both girls and boys, by stimulating them to be creative and discovering a communication line thru which they can best express their intellectual abilities and develop them.

Banks and McGee Banks present other stereotypes of feminine and masculine " acting like" in schools, based on boys' and girls' general

attitudes in schools. The authors observe that the male students are associated with fighting, poor grades, low discipline, fear of homophobia and shyness in showing their emotions and the female students are the prototypes of gossiping, inability to trust friends, acting dumb to attract boys and popularity around them. The authors suggest that it is the teachers' responsibility, as well as students' need for involvement into acting against these stereotypes thru educations (2010).

Studies reflect the perceptions that girls have upon themselves, upon women. In a recent report, developed upon a study which assessed the views of girls (grades 3 - 12) regarding their future, more than a third stated that " people think that the most important thing for girls is to get married and have children" (Girls, Inc., 2006, in Banks & McGee Banks, 2010, p. 140).

The researchers identify that for girls the school is a space that threatens their self-esteem and in consequence, the scores at their tests and the importance of their academic results have a smaller significance compared to their popularity rate (Banks & McGee Banks, 2010).

For combating the sexism and discrimination in the school, business or any other socio – economic or political environment, there are various organizations that fight for women's rights at a global level. As outcomes, there were directed programmatic documents that militate for gender equality and equal treatment, equal salaries for the same work or the eradication of the abusive behavior against women. To enumerate few of the most relevant documents there should be mentioned:

Beijing Platform for Action (setting strategic objectives to eradicate poverty

and malnutrition and reach social development thru gender equality) (un, " Fourth World Conference on Women");

Millennium Developmental Goals (number 3 " Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women" and 5 " Improve Maternal Health" out of its 8 goals refer to women) (unmillenium project, " About MDGs");

There must be also mentioned the efforts of the European Union's to reach equal opportunities and equal economic outcomes thru its programs " The Women's Charter" or " Women on the Board Pledge for Europe", aiming at reaching 40% of women in the boardrooms of the companies listed at the stock market by 2015 (ec. europa, " Gender Balance in Decision – Making Positions", 2012).

Besides these valuable programmatic documents and actions, the society must become more involved into promoting gender equality, for reaching a more rapid social growth, improved living conditions, eradicate poverty and stop the violence and the oppression against women.

For reaching these desiderates, there must be applied a social change, within all social structures and the inception should be at the familial level. Families should be determined not to teach and to promote to their children the traditional, patriarchal roles of the man and woman in the society, keeping them away from developing stereotypes at an early age. Moreover, education should contribute to this aspect and the educators should promote equal ways of expression between boys and girls and let them feel free to choose the way they want to behave, without setting principles like girls should be shy and more disciplined or that boys should be loud and undisciplined.

Playful spirit is yet a very important component of determining stereotypes, setting the roles of the males and of females, constructing the masculine and the feminine, and telling the children how men should act like and how women should act like. As such, girls play with dolls or little animals, which are mostly pink or red and determine the sensibility, weakness and a coquette style. Boys usually play with cars, trucks, robots, guns and so on, which are blue, black and other dark nuances, as a symbol of power, toughness and rigidity.

These social constructs are now challenged thru various actions, meant to determine the children to feel free to choose the toys that best fit them, to let the girls know that they can play with trucks, not solely with pink dolls and tea cups and also, make the boys aware that they can play with dolls, if they want to, not sticking them to a truck or not letting them develop an aggressive behavior (Dupont, 2012).

Moreover, as specialists remark, children tend to copy, to imitate the attitudes, behaviors and identity of their parents. This is why they should work together with their children and their educators for eliminating their gender biases, as a project developed in a nursery from Paris demonstrates (Dupont, 2012).

Conclusion

Gender identity is a social construct that proposes receipts for what is feminine and what is masculine. This leads towards a thinking according to which men are strong, tough and unemotional (which makes them hide their emotions, becoming aggressive) and that women are weak, sensitive and emotional (which makes them the vulnerable sex, exposed to oppressive and

violent conduct towards them). Moreover, because of this binary opposition, women have fewer opportunities than men and they become disadvantaged, starting with the school context and continuing like this throughout their lives.

Actions such as the unisex toys model, presented above, should be adjusted to various situations, within the teenagers' or adults' environments and throughout society, in order to make people aware of their biases and determine them to change their preconceived opinions about gender identity and about how women should act like, versus how men should act like. This should enable a less discriminative society, wherein women are treated equal to men and where oppression or violent behaviors against women are concepts of the past.

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