

Nadja Furlan

Prejudices, Stereotypes and Gender

Lippmann:
Prejudices are emotionally charged negative stereotypes.

- *"In the great blooming, buzzing confusion of the outer world we pick out what our culture has already defined for us, and we tend to perceive that which we have picked out in the form stereotyped for us by our culture."*

(W. Lippmann, *Public Opinion*, NuVision Publications, 2007, 50.)

- Stereotype: *"a picture in our heads,"* a picture that an individual forms of himself and of others.

Typical of a stereotype is that it is based on unverified facts and messages about an event, person, object, etc.

Stereotypes and prejudices lead to discrimination and consequently to violence.

"it is easier to split the atom than to break a prejudice"

Deaux and Lawis

have established that the contents of gender stereotypes refer to:

- appearance, behavioural roles, personal traits and occupational roles.
- The masculine forms of these components are more characteristic of men.
- The feminine ones of women - though not exclusively.
- Familiarity with one component of the gender stereotype implies the existence of other components in accordance with gender stereotypes, with appearance having the greatest influence of all.

Ashmore and Del Boca

analysed the contents of gender stereotypes and identified three categories of characteristics:

- the **defining** (primary sexual characteristics)
 - the **identifying** (secondary sexual characteristics – appearance)
 - the **ascribed** (personality traits)
- Moving from the defining attributes to the ascribed, the overlapping between a stereotypical woman and stereotypical man increases.
- The most powerful component of gender stereotypes, however, refers to personality traits.
- In today's "media-defined" society, which is perhaps already obsessed with the body and appearance, identifying gender stereotypes should not be overlooked.

Gender stereotypes about masculine and feminine personality traits

- feminine traits attributes:
tender, emotional, warm, considerate, and talkative
- masculine traits attributes:
rational, influential, dominant, cold, and brave

The ecclesiastical document
*On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church
and in the World* also speaks about:

(man and woman's "likeness to God.")

"It is appropriate however to recall that the feminine values mentioned here are above all human values:

the human condition of man and woman created in the image of God is one and indivisible.

It is only because women are more immediately attuned to these values that they are the reminder and the privileged sign of such values.

But, in the final analysis, every human being, man or woman, is destined to be 'for the other.'

In this perspective, that which is called 'femininity' is more than simply an attribute of the female sex...

Therefore, the promotion of women within society must be understood and desired as a humanization accomplished through those values, rediscovered thanks to women."

**Nevertheless, gender stereotypes
about masculine and feminine
personality traits are still very much
present in the everyday world.**

Personality traits more characteristically

masculine

can in terms of contents be denoted as "agency" traits or traits referring to **action** and thus be related to **power**.

- The "agency" dimension comprises **controlling tendencies**
- (aggressiveness, ambition, dominance, efficiency, leadership behaviour)
- independence from other people (independence, self-reliance, self-sufficiency, individualism)

Some additional "agency" attributes refer to personal efficiency (e.g., self-confidence, feeling of superiority, decisiveness) and aspects of personal style (e.g., straightforwardness, adventurousness, perseverance)

feminine

can be in terms of contents to which they refer defined as **"communions."**

- The "communion" dimension primarily refers to the **concern for the well-being of others**
- (devotion, complete dedication to others, desire to appease, willingness to help, kindness, compassion, love of children)

Some of the typically feminine traits refer to personal sensitivity and emotional expressivity as well as aspects of personal style (e.g., tender, soft-spoken).

Stereotypical Religion-Determined Pattern of Femininity and Masculinity

Old negative stereotypical gender definitions of the woman:

- “an imperfect man,”
- “devil’s temptress,”
- sinner,
- inferior servant
- “forth-bringing uterus”
- ...

We say that old habits die hard; the same is true of gender stereotypes – once they are formed, they are very difficult to get rid of.

Feminist theology, feminist hermeneutics to be precise, put into question the negative interpretations of Genesis and passages referring to women elsewhere in the Bible.

- Christianity, through its example of respect for gender equality can contribute considerably to the formation of a better co-existence in today's world.
- Numerous women in Christianity are waking up, experiencing a transformation and looking for the new image that would free them of all patriarchal forms of entrapment in prejudices and stereotypical gender representations that have long threatened and oppressed women and their potential.
- By painting a different picture of femininity, women are liberating themselves and growing into free subjects, proud of their gender identity.
- In this sense we can say that social gender is retreating before "theological gender," which is an expression of men and women's likeness to God, and which in its transcendence surpasses the merely biological and social conditionality of the sexes.

- While women are slowly freeing, men within the Church are facing the consequences of these changes.
- While a new concept of femininity is rising, a new image of masculinity is forming as well.
- Women's liberation is also men's liberation from the rigid hold of patriarchal stereotypes and prejudices.

- The transformation of the view of the other sex in the spirit of equality entails radical changes.
- It is necessary for both women and men to face the transformation in themselves.
- For the majority of people, regardless of their sex, this appears to be too difficult a task; so they prefer going back to the old, seemingly safer and tested patterns, escalating them for even greater safety to the extreme point of fundamentalism.

Pope John Paul II

speaks about the path that women had to cover to reach their liberation:

- *Women's dignity has often been unacknowledged and their prerogatives misrepresented; they have often been relegated to the margins of society and even reduced to servitude.*
- *This has prevented women from truly being themselves and it has resulted in a spiritual impoverishment of humanity*

- Fundamental Christian teaching, or Jesus' example, stresses the importance of the equality of the sexes, which are equal in their likeness to God, yet different from one another.

Currently, the Church and society are being confronted again with the fundamental evangelical message of living according to the principle of love and a markedly egalitarian inspiration of gender equality on the one hand, as well as the strong imperative for gender equality in the light of human dignity expressed in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)*, on the other.

Gender Equality and the Bible

Old Testament

Gender equality:

“So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them”

(Gen:1:27)

Gender inequality:

“And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made he a woman, and brought her unto the man”

(Gen:2:22)

The New Testament

The inprint of the Patriarchal contemporary secular society
(Gender inequality:)

First example

➤ *“But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man. For the man is not of the woman: but the woman of the man. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels”*

(1 Cor 11:5-10)

The New Testament

The inprint of the Patriarchal contemporary secular society
(Gender inequality:)

Second example:

- *“Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law. And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church”*

(1 Cor 14:34-35)

The New Testament

The inprint of the Patriarchal contemporary secular society
(Gender inequality)

Third example:

- *“Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself.”*

(Eph 5:22-28)

The New Testament

(Gender equality)

First example:

- *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

(Gal 3:28)

The New Testament

(Gender equality:)

Second example:

- *“I commend unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also. Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: Who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute my well-beloved Epaenetus, who is the first fruits of Achaia unto Christ. Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.”*

(Rom 16:1-6)

Throughout the Biblical texts Old and New Testament two views coexist:

- the patriarchal
- gender equality

“Catholic Feminism” and the Transformation of Stereotypical Gender-Related Images

Janne Haaland Matlaray:

(provides a much more integral concept of gender)

- , *“This Christian anthropology of the sexes, is far more profound than the simple biological reductionism advanced by some or the social constructivism asserted by many.”*

The Christian anthropology of gender emphasises the equality of man and woman in human dignity and personhood, while pointing out that the differences between them surpasses the merely biological aspect.

➤ Secular feminism:

The logic of such feminism is the logic of power or predominance of power. Stresses the equality of the sexes, “family and children are an obstacle to women’s self-fulfilment”.

Such a feminism is looking “through the lens of power”, with the man still taken as the norm that the woman is supposedly trying to meet by adopting male principles of action.

A male model is established for the woman.

Underlying this model of feminism is the premise that the woman, in order to become successful and incisive, has to masculinise herself.

➤ Catholic feminism:

Brings to the fore principles of being serving others. This principle is the basis for all activities and efforts.

In the light of service to the other, everything acquires a new meaning, and hierarchy turns into cooperation. “A capacity for the other,” which is according to the document ‘On the Collaboration of Men and Women in the Church and in the World’, “a fundamental [value] linked to women’s actual lives”, has precedence over serving one’s own selfish interests. The second principle derives from the premise that man and woman are equal in their personhood and are thereby in parity, but the difference between them, which surpasses those suggested by biological determinism, is essential.

The Pope John Paul II:

(Importance of the new image of women ,her positive “femininity”,is going to contribute considerably to a better, more humane and ethical world)

- *“Certainly, much remains to be done to prevent discrimination against those who have chosen to be wives and mothers. As far as personal rights are concerned, there is an urgent need to achieve real equality in every area: equal pay for equal work, protection for working mothers, fairness in career advancements, equality of spouses with regard to family rights and the recognition of everything that is part of the rights and duties of citizens in a democratic state. This is a matter of justice but also of necessity. Women will increasingly play a part in the solution of the serious problems of the future: leisure time, the quality of life, migration, social services...In all these areas a greater presence of women in society will prove most valuable, for it will help to manifest the contradictions present when society is organized solely according to the criteria of efficiency and productivity, and it will force systems to be redesigned in a way which favours the processes of humanization which mark the 'civilization of love'.”*

He invites all women and men to critically assess such roles and following the example of Jesus rise “above” these culturally conditioned and time-dependent prejudices and roles which have through history, especially for women, represented an obstacle for a full integration into the social or public life.