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GENDER REPRESENTATIONS IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION: FASHION OR NECESSITY

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Abstract

This paper deals with the problems of gender representation that we define as the re-identification and correction of social and gender roles. The globalisation of all domains of social life encourages development and entrenchment of gender representation practices of a natural biological sex by means of communications technologies. The feminine and the masculine have become transformable characteristics of a modern human. The phenomenon of gender representation crosses the borders of different social groups and becomes a mass phenomenon. Various types of communications technologies and virtualisation of all spheres of social life strongly support trends of gender representation transformations. The process of episodic gender transformations satisfying immediate personal needs actively develops in the global network environment. The global communicative environment strongly simplifies the shift from partial and temporal gender alterations towards permanent transformations of gender. It must be noted that gender representations may be positive or negative. The positive outcomes of gender representations are free gender identification, creative lifestyle, and the ability for quick response for social and cultural changes. The latter must be considered as an extremely flexible adaptive strategy. The negative outcomes of gender representations are the loss of biologically determined gender functions, the growth of mental disorders and deviant behaviours, and the emergence of new marginal social groups that may cause social instability. Therefore, we conclude that in the age of globalisation, humanity faces the dilemma to unify all gender, ethnic, and cultural traits or to leave each person to pursue hers or his individual way of living.

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Keywords: Masculinity, femininity, identity, social roles, multigender.



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1. Introduction

Whatever sphere of reality, social group, or community we consider, the first question to come into mind is to define the gender identity of its subjects. Although Pilcher and Whelehan (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2004) point out that academic research of gender has a short history, they managed to distinguish 50 key concepts in gender investigation in their comprehensive study. At the same time, recent years prove that this topic will have a continued interest (Ferrebe & Tolan, 2012). Taking into account the mentioned-above monographs, we assume that it is possible to use a well-known definition of gender and gender terminology by the World Health Organization, where gender “refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women” (World Health Organization , 2018). Russian philosopher O.A. Voronina, who was one of the first researchers to address social and philosophical aspects of sex and gender, defines gender as “a social and cultural construct which society superstructs over physiological reality. After all, social and cultural norms rather than biological sex determine psychological features, behavior patterns, types of activities, and occupations of men and women” (Voronina, 1998, p. 395).

In social and philosophical discourse, gender is defined as a socially constructed sex which is represented in various ways in social reality. In fact, presentation of biologically defined sex is carried out directly at a child's birth or, if required, by demonstrating primary sexual characteristics. Gender representation means defining and constructing physiological reality through signs and symbols without explicit manifestation of the biological sex. It is more common to represent an actual biological sex, however, a variety of objective conditions and factors of real life as well as subjective preferences can result in representations of other than biologically, socially or physiologically assigned characteristics of people and their communication to the social reality. The essence of such gender representation is the possibility of identity choice and, as a consequence, chosen gender identity. Thus, this article deals with the concept of gender representation in terms of distinguishing and interpreting predetermined biological reality and socially represented gender constructed on the basis of chosen identity.

2. Problem Statement

Representation as a problem arises when a long-represented gender ceases to be in demand and evident; instead, something new, self-sustained, not dependent on existential basis starts constructing themselves. Yet, any such representation appears to be possible only when there is a possibility of identity choice. Gender representation is problematized when there are the following two conditions: lack of demand for conventionally represented gender and possibility of gender identity choice provided by the modern society. While identity is still in demand, undisputed, and the totality of both external and internal factors does not require its transition, a different representation is not needed. Gender representation happens to be relevant because the social actor does not want just to demonstrate non-real identity, but there exist objective and subjective conditions and needs for such new representation (Vinogradova & Leontyeva, 2014). Therefore, new gender representation shows identity choice which is not equivalent to entity in the modern world. Having replaced “true entity”, representations have a no less impact on the society.

Reality and modern society frequently require no completely new representation but slightly milder representation, modification of gender due to higher demand for qualities and features of other social gender

behavior, i.e. the change or conventional gender modification caused by social circumstances. This new representation is expressed in acceptance and approval of feminine characteristics for men and masculine characteristics for women.

The classical era considered social entity of actors to be inextricably linked to their biological entity while the postmodern era considers it to be contextual and multiple. Gender representation essentially based on subjective and role multiple and elective identity claims to be considered true entity which seems to reflect the global trend toward ongoing changes and transformations.

It is necessary to mention that the concept of representation stems from the concept of presentation. Presentation is demonstration of an object or phenomenon as it is, basically, its introduction. Being a part of social communication, representations are activated by subjective qualities and objective needs. The more widespread definitions of representation date back to semiotic and philosophical theory of Ch. Peirce who introduces the definition of representation as unlimited semiosis and as interpretation: “The idea of the representation itself excites in the mind another idea and in order that it may do this it is necessary that some principle of association between the two ideas should already be established in that mind” (Peirce, 1986, p.65-66). Peirce describes representation as a process of “mediation and substitution (of object by interpretant)”.

In addition to Ch. Peirce’s theory of representation, there are other less popular theories in social and philosophical schools of thought. It should be noted that they can be classified into two groups: the first group considers representation as “speaking for” or “on behalf of somebody” which is frequently used in political sphere (Arendt, 2004); the second considers representation as “re-presentation” which is reflected in art. According to S. Žižek “representation fills out the void of the lost object” (Žižek, 1989, p.160). We consider representation similar to Ch. Peirce (Peirce, 1986) as sign and symbol manifestation of a real-life object or phenomenon, its specific social interpretation in various constructs. From this perspective, gender representation is considered as substitution of a social actor’s biological entity by its communicative interpretation by another social actor on the basis of signs and symbols sent to the social reality.

This position is justified by the fact that in the modern world besides traditional gender attitudes various signs and symbols streamed through information and communication channels are becoming particularly important because they can repeatedly re-represent gender while changing its salience. For instance, in the global information network Internet, via mobile technology, etc. Moreover, the modern world provides an opportunity to visually change biological characteristics of sex allowing representing any desirable gender. The possibility of anatomical sex change is more complicated and frequently related to psychological and physiological reasons. However, this case is rather an issue of medical practice so we are not going to address its underlying reasons.

3. Research Questions

In the modern society, gender is repeatedly represented and is frequently used as a disguise of a social actor which phenomenon can be generally characterized as formation of gender simulation. It should be noted that gender simulation can vary depending on representative and non-representative models of application (Kemerov, 2006). The representative model is characterized by the idea that a copy shares resemblance with idea while simulation gives a semblance of the copy. The non-representative model is

based on inherent embedding of an object and its copy in the structure of social reality. Yet, whichever model we considered, the decisive factor was the presence of another actor, the actor-observer. According to G. Deleuze, it is at observation points that there can be deformation and mutation (Deleuze & Guattari, 2010). Otherwise, gender simulation reveals itself in existence only during its reading and interpretation in the process of communicative interaction.

This applies fully to gender representation resulting in the course of communication in creation of simulation aiming at constructing some seeming social reality. It is not uncommon that in favour of some situation socially, situationally and communicatively constructed gender representations force one to represent another gender, change traditional and conventional gender attitudes.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this paper is to analyse the phenomenon of gender representation in rapidly changing global society from the socio-philosophical point of view. Fulfilling this purpose, we have given the authorial interpretation of gender representation. This is the result of the study of the co-influence of modern communications technologies on gender attitudes of a person and vice versa. Analysing the reasons of gender transformations in the global society, we have discovered some positive and negative tendencies and outlined some consequences of gender representations changes. Exploring the potential of globalisation to provoke gender representations transformations, we have made some prognoses of the development of this process and its influence upon social life.

5. Research Methods

The methodology of the study of gender representation in the age of globalisation relies on historical-philosophical criticism, historical comparative and concept analysis, the principle of philosophical generalisation. Analysing gender transformations, we implemented materialistic philosophy and interactionist approaches, structural and functional methods, as well as modern theories of gender employing such concepts as “social communication” and “inter-subjectivity”. In order to make comprehensive study of gender representations in the contemporary globalising world, we have used the following categories: “identity”, “gender”, “the feminine”, “the masculine”, “social interaction”, “I and Another”, which became the basis of social-philosophical interpretation of this phenomenon. It must be noted that the paper focuses on the inter-subjective, classical, and sociocultural doctrines of gender representation, which elucidate in our view the reasons of gender transformations emergence in the beginning of the third millennium.

6. Findings

The situation is critically changing in the communications that occur through the global Internet network. There has appeared a phenomenon of a virtual representation, based on multiple identities and implemented through information communication environment. As noted by E.I. Goroshko, the social space of network allows for the implementation of more flexible gender schemes and, on the whole, changes our perceptions of gender – gender mask and gender-performative put on one’s virtual “Self”, which affects the processes associated with the social identity of a person, including gender identity. And it affects quite

ambiguously, breaking a certain established offline balance in the identity structure" (Goroshko, 2009, 104-105) Communicating in social networks, lots of people take on completely different roles and behaviors. A person can come up with another story and biography, vary gender, addictions and habits, can communicate as a person of another profession and confession. In other words, in virtuality, a virtual identity is constructed, entailing virtual representations. An individual entering into a communicative relationship does not have a rigid binding to either the space or time of physical location.

The creation of a representation network significantly differs from representation in a real social space. There are several reasons for the evolving phenomenon of virtual representation. First, it is dissatisfaction with habitual and real identity, and, second, the desire to try another identity (curiosity), expand the boundaries of the identity experience and probably get what cannot be achieved in real life, that is, to compensate for the missing in reality. Next, there may be purely biological or psychophysiological reasons, i.e. latent homosexuality of an individual, transsexualism or schizophrenia with its gravitation toward multiple identities. Finally, it may simply be the desire to expand the communicative experience, acquire more "friends", thereby increasing self-esteem or strengthening the influence on others. In this way, the compensatory function of the Internet technologies is realized which allows an individual to realize those personal characteristics, which for one reason or another cannot be translated into real life.

In other words, in the social communication of physical being, social actors can both represent and re-represent themselves, their gender identities with the help of a more or less stable system of social signs and symbols. For representation in mediated traditional communication, the following official identification characteristics are used: name, sex, age and social status, belonging to a language and territorial group, social relations (family, relatives, friends and surrounding community), ethnic and race membership and to some extent cultural, spiritual and material preferences. Both a personnel record card and a sign on the door of an office can serve as examples of representation in mediated communication. Such personal characteristics as the diminutive name, social role and sexual preferences realized in interpersonal interactions (friends, mates, colleagues and family), political and economic beliefs and axiological orientations serve to represent a social actor in face-to-face communication. On the assumption of these signs and symbols, through the ongoing direct and indirect communication activities of an individual with Another individual or an aggregate of Others (society), the identity is formed, and in particular, the gender identity, which serves as a basis for gender representations. The sign-symbolic codes of representation together with individual projects of personality become the basis for social communication of a person in the physical time and space of society.

The physical space of sociality rigidly sets a gender representation system of a social actor, and far from everybody risks withdrawing from it. However, the social actor is multiple; the constancy and identity of his or her representative identity is an illusion imposed by the traditions and laws of the social system. It is the information society that generates new opportunities for gender identification and the subject representation associated. The following questions arise: What changes in the information society? Why is the society able to create conditions for gender representations? Are these representations equivalent due to the fact that in some cases they are carried out in traditional society? Obviously, the most effective mechanism capable of creating broad opportunities for gender representations is the virtual space created by social networks with the help of the global Internet.

M. Castells considers the principle of the society formation by the communicative flows. "Such a society is a seamless web of communication networks that are increasingly globalized due to information technologies that transform social relations in the spheres of production relations, authorities and personal experience of an individual" (Castells, 1999, p.304). On the one hand, M. Castells obviously came to the idea of network organization of society that causes the globalization, and, on the other hand, directly connects personal experience of an individual with information technologies. "The new power lies in the codes of information and in the images of representation around which societies organize their institutions and people build their lives, and decide their behavior" (Castells, 1999, p.305).

In the ideas of M. Castells, the tendency of the sign-symbolic doctrine of the information society and its construction according to the "images of representation", including the gender ones, is evidently traced. Markers of a new sociality begin to organize the life not only of society as a whole, the society as an abstract social mass, but of every concrete person with his or her subjective views and unique interpretations of the real world. The information society and information and communication technologies are becoming an objective reality for people. The social actor now no longer simply passively perceives the information reality, but becomes its active creator, supports its development and functioning; this is largely promoted by the global network organization of the Internet.

The Internet as a new media form and a new organization form of the communicative order actively influences and transforms gender representations of social actors. First of all, the content side significantly expands due to the availability of information. But the more significant factor is the very existence of a new information-communicative form, which is one of the common formal factors that transform the representations of social actors. The information and communication space of the Internet contributes to relativizing the physical space and time. The social and communicative landscape, speed of the communication flows and reactions to them are changing, causing alterations in the speed of social changes. These changes play an important role in the formation and development of the phenomenon of gender representation of social actors, since the digital spaces of social communication mediated by the Internet define a new vector and new speed of self-determination of a person in society.

Almost unique information-technological nature of the world Internet network has conflicting characteristics. Throughout its existence, the Internet has demonstrated the impossibility of privatization, centralization and control. This creates conditions for the description of virtual communications outside the terms of the "direct oppositions" model. The information and technological architecture of the Internet is described as unique that creates a unique cultural environment, defining modern economic, political and social relations. Such an image of virtual communications is most accurately described in the metaphors of postmodern philosophy. "After Deleuze and Guattari, the Internet appears as a rhizomatic desiring-machine which frees up and allows desire to be set in motion. Its rhizomatic quality stems from the accented web of interconnections in which any point of control can be so easily bypassed that such concepts are displaced and outmoded. Still, cyberspaces remain the open frontier for those oppressed by social norms – patriarchy, capitalism and sexual ideologies" (Taratuta, 2007, p. 110).

Many Internet researchers prefer to talk about it as a fundamentally new type of space – virtual, communicative, hyperspace, cyberspace, etc. The fact that computer network turned into a communications space was quite unexpected, as even the first ideologists and developers of the information society

conception could not imagine. The means of communication between users were originally intended for purely utilitarian needs and were not seen as an end in itself. However, the gradual evolution of technological education has resulted in the Internet communication that has acquired features of a social space based on interaction and communication. It is quite obvious that communication and the means of its implementation have acquired a leading role on the Web (Goroshko, 2009).

According to this approach, the Internet is seen as a domain of simulations, a new place, different from the space or spaces of social reality and separated from them by a monitor screen. A new space of that kind is conceived most often in opposition to real social being. Nevertheless, real users of the information and communication network are recognized as participants in this virtual space. The question arises, how the network space correlates with the social space of the real physical world of the society. In particular, how the real space of users correlates with the virtual world of the Internet. The network space gives a somewhat euphoric sense of freedom from everyday life, including traditional sociality and gender roles. Such feeling in the social-philosophical and psychological literature is designated as a symptom of disappearance.

In addition, the social actor on the Internet is more active in relation to the positions occupied and has greater freedom of choice, and also can occupy simultaneously more various positions of different levels than it is possible in reality. Here we are talking not only about the degree of social mobility. This can be described by the term proposed by J. Deleuze and F. Guattari as “multiple identity” or “polyvariant identity” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986). Concerning the gender identity, it becomes possible to present a social actor – a user of a communicative network in virtually any gender image.

Being on the Internet is mediated by signs and symbols represented in the form of text and leads to the fact that even a literal representation of the user on the network begins to acquire some features of the simulative social construction. However, a simulation of that kind is not always recognized by the user, which is then constrained in his ability of sign and symbol verbalization, style, graphic visualizations, sound series, etc. Whether these are direct representations of a social actor on the Internet or simulations, “the worlds of interactive games” are inhabited with, the representation will still contain those features that the author is not able to change.

Z. Bauman presents interesting reflections on the community in the modern information world, noting that the word “community” has never been used so indiscriminately and incoherently as in the decades marked by the fact that societies in the sociological sense of the word become more difficult to detect in real life. “People are steadily and for a long time looking for groups they could belong to, in a world where everything moves and gets around, and nothing is safe” (Bauman, 2005, p.120). In a different view, in Z. Bauman’s opinion, this situation is presented by J. Young and co-authors as follows: “as soon as the community disintegrates, identity is invented” (Young, 1999, p.164). If we continue this line of thinking, it becomes obvious that as soon as “identity is invented”, the mechanism of representation becomes valid.

The gender representation shown above is a product of the “identity problem”. However, in the information society, there dominate problems of search for identity and correct and timely choice; the issue of gaining and maintaining official and traditional identity does not disappear, but goes to the background. It becomes relevant to monitor the point in time when it is necessary to represent his or her Self, if the

previously chosen identity fails in a social group or is deprived of seductive and attractive features. Representation becomes a permanent non-passing system-forming feature of a communicative community. Thus, in this context, we can talk about the presence of virtual social representation as certain identification of a personality in communication on the basis of attributes that the interlocutor can assume by reading the sign-symbolic language code. In the virtual reality of the information society, a virtual representation is constructed in virtual communication. The communicating subject or “schizo-subject” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986), who has no connection with time or space of his surrounding society, is able to generate his or her own contexts and no longer represents his or her own ego, but a communicating “body without organs” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1986).

It can be claimed that the information society has generated such an ambiguous tool as the Internet, which in turn is being realized in the form of a special communicative environment. A new communicative environment allows for the existence of multiple identities and accordingly becomes open to representations. A phenomenon of virtual representation based on interaction, identification and internalization is emerging. Accordingly, gender representation in the information society should be viewed as a procedural characteristic of a social actor. Gender representation becomes incessant but at the same time seems something that “can be put on and removed like a costume”. Gender representation becomes the matter of free and comfortable choice, when a person “is in no way more connected with obligations and consequences”, and thus “in practice, freedom to choose is reduced to abstinence from choice” (Lasch, 1984, p.38).

7. Conclusion

In conclusion, we note that the position of an individual in society is a very complex socio-cultural phenomenon. It is the result of interaction of economic, political, spiritual, moral, social and ethnic aspects of a society; religious, scientific and everyday norms, dogmas, theories, traditions and innovations. Gender patterns of male or female behavior reflect what is happening in the depths of the social and national consciousness of the modern society.

Regardless of the cultural affiliation, social structure and degree of society development, the attitude towards the bio-anatomical characteristics of sexes is primarily associated with socio-cultural traditions of the relationship and has a long history. Belonging to a certain sex is one of the main characteristics of a person. The life activity of individuals of different sex, their interests and needs, positions in society and statuses are traditionally determined by their natural differences, which are subsequently determined by social differences.

The impossibility of full self-actualization leads to irreversible deformation processes of gender self-awareness. In these conditions, one of the priority tasks for the social theory is the study of gender representations affecting the system of values, social expectations and status preferences of feminine and masculine societies. Moreover, as a result of the research, we have come to the conclusion that the formation of gender representations is influenced not only by the sociocultural attitudes of society, but also by the personal social attitudes of men and women formed by tradition, religion and the microcommunity of the immediate circle.

Revealing the peculiarities of the gender representation phenomenon in the relations of modern society, we find it necessary to point out a few basic conclusions.

1. Gender representations are one of the axial components of the entire system of social communication formed by a social actor.
2. In this paper, we have considered only gender representations, which are the most stable and prevailing at the beginning of the 21st century and determine the trend of the relations system in society.
3. Gender representation actively interacts with social reality and adapts to it; as a result of this influence, positive and negative trends are observed. The positive ones are the increased social adaptability, flexibility of the gender system that forces a person to increase his or her activity and make efforts to realize his or her interests and meet his or her needs. Negative factors include weakening and displacement of reproductive (specified by the biological sex) and educational functions that lead to a decrease in the birth rate, adolescents and young people's deviant behavior caused by the erosion of the generally accepted features of the gender identity, lack of upbringing and parental attention.
4. The prevailing gender representations always correspond with certain goals, therefore, speaking of the dominant tendencies in gender representations and general orientation of a social actor, the dominant goals of society, social group and community are possible to be determined.
5. Gender representation of an individual is the result of the interaction between social and biological properties inherent in the social subject; and it is impossible to separate these properties mechanically, since the set of these properties include both the semantic side of gender representation, that is, the significance of the needs and system of values of a subject, and his/her emotional, sensual and energetic aspects, giving power and spiritual tension to the representations.
6. The formation of gender representations typology in the practice of social being is influenced by all levels in the hierarchy of the objective conditions of the society: the condition of the social system on the whole, including national problems, conditions and processes in the main social subsystems (political, economic, cultural and spiritual); regional social changes; the status of various social groups, in which the social actor is included; and the nature of situational changes in the household everyday sphere of a personality. The biological (sex, physiological and mental characteristics of a particular person) and social constants of the gender system of an individual (social experience, mentality, traditions, values, etc.) exert a great influence on the formation of dominant gender representations.
7. The main types of gender representation in the social system are the dynamic property phenomena, which are a reflection of a specific social situation and time.

In other words, gender representations refer to those social phenomena that, on the one hand, rely on the deeply personal principles of a social actor; on the other hand, they are the product of the historical

development of a society. Their development testifies to the active man's search for himself or herself in the new conditions of an informative, changing and globalizing world.

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