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Generating Gender Capital
in the Education Process and its Impact
on the Functioning of Men and Women

School education is a process in which the principle of equality should be implemented both as regards the treatment of those who participate in it and in terms of equal opportunities for learning. Democratic societies should recognise the child's right to having equal opportunities to education, as provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child[1]. In the widely practiced model of co-education, school was to be free from gender inequality, and the introduction of this model at secondary and higher education level was connected with the implementation of the demands of the feminist movement fighting for equal access to education for women at all levels. Moreover, progressive educational activists argued that such a school model is superior as regards its educational aspects over gender-segregated schooling[2]. They emphasized the positive educational atmosphere, camaraderie and cooperation in co-educational schools[3]. However, numerous studies indicate that in the field[4] of school there is a process of generating gender capital in accordance with the old gender stereotypes and reproducing the gender gap in the treatment of boys and girls. Gender turns out to be a strong dividing line in school.

This paper will show the mechanism of generating gender capital within the school space – the mechanism, which undoubtedly has a detrimental effect on the functioning of women and men in the social environment. This text will provide an overview of the most important gender studies conducted by Polish education researchers, but it will also attempt to go beyond the mere diagnosis of school functioning in the context of gender issues.

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[1] *The Convention on the Rights of the Child*, www.unicef.org, 15 August 2012.

[2] *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku* [Pedagogical Encyclopaedia of the 21st Century], vol. II, T. Pilch (ed.), Wydawnictwo Akademickie Żak, Warszawa 2003, p. 637.

[3] *Ibid.*, pp. 640–641.

[4] P. Bourdieu, L. Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1992.

The school operates essentially on the premise of hidden violence. Zbigniew Kwieciński, citing Pierre Bourdieu and Johan Galtung, describes the school as a place of symbolic and structural violence. These two forms of violence are concealed "from the awareness of the subject and the ability of the subject to discern the objective and mediated force exerted over them in order to subordinate their awareness and the way in which they perceive events, people and relations in the social and cultural world, so that they are accepted as natural, self-evident and therefore justified […]"[5] (structural violence) and consisting in the imposition of interpretations of the symbols and meanings of existing culture (symbolic violence)[6]. Symbolic violence, in Pierre Bourdieu's view, legitimizes, perpetuates and strengthens real violence by symbolic means, adding to it a purely symbolic enslavement in the sphere of values. The mechanism of this violence consists, among other things, in shaping the habitus, which Bourdieu describes as "socially constructed nature"[7].

In this paper, the school is regarded as a social field, which is one of the main categories in P. Bourdieu's social theory. The field is "a network, or configuration, of objective relations between positions. These positions are objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants, agents or institutions, by their present and potential situation (situs) in the structure of the distribution of species of power (or capital)"[8]. In Bourdieu's view, access to the benefits of this power is the ultimate goal of the game that is being played in a given field. The social field is, therefore, a game. Players are drawn into it, they fight, they are united by their consent to the game and its stakes, its beliefs (doxa), and recognition of its importance. Just as the value of a card depends on the game, the hierarchy of capital (cultural, economic, social, and symbolic) is different in different fields[9]. "The principle of the dynamics of a field lies in the form of its structure and, in particular, in the distance, the gaps, the asymmetries between the various specific forces that confront one another"[10]. The field undergirds and guides the strategies whereby the occupants of these positions seek, individually or collectively, to safeguard or improve their position and to impose the principle of hierarchisation most favourable to their own products"[11].

Actions aimed at preserving a privileged position and imposing a subordinate position while assigning specific values also take place in the case of masculine domination. According to Bourdieu, masculine domination is a form of symbolic

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[5] Z. Kwieciński, *Ukryta przemoc jako podstawa racjonalności funkcjonowania szkoły* [Hidden violence as a rationale underlying the functioning of a school], [in:] *Socjopatologia edukacji* [Sociopathology of Education], Z. Kwieciński (ed.), Wydawnictwo Edytor, Warszawa 1992, p. 121.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 122.

[7] P. Bourdieu, J.-C. Passeron, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, SAGE Publications, 1977, 1990.

[8] P. Bourdieu, L. Wacquant, *op. cit.*, p. 97.

[9] *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.

[10] *Ibid.*, pp. 101–104.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 104.

violence. Such violence "accomplishes itself through an act of cognition and of misrecognition that lies beyond – or beneath – the controls of consciousness and will, in the obscurities of the schemata of habitus"[12]. As noted by P. Bourdieu, the social order functions as a symbolic machine ratifying the masculine domination on which it is founded. It includes the sexual division of labour, the structure of space – with the opposition between the place of assembly or the market, reserved for men, and the house, reserved for women and the structure of time[13]. Even the perception of sexual organs and male and female bodies, as well as the understanding of sexual intercourse[14], are subordinate to male domination. Differences between the female and male bodies are the result of social constructs – incarnation. The androcentric vision of the world establishes "the difference between biological bodies as objective foundations of the difference between the sexes, in the sense of genders constructed as two hierarchized social essences", embedding the relationship of domination in a biological nature[15]. The structures of domination are "the product of an incessant (and therefore historical) labour of reproduction, to which singular agents […], and institutions: families, the church, the educational system, the state – contribute"[16].

There is a mechanism of generating gender capital in schools. This capital can be treated as a form of symbolic capital[17]. Research on gender capital is connected, among other things, with differentiating the positioning of individuals in the social (school) space, through the active contribution of the teaching staff to creating differences in the school career development of the male and female pupils. Teachers do this by "assigning them different tasks to perform, expecting or predicting mastery in different fields of knowledge, insisting on the mastery of qualitatively different skills, […] through the practice of a double standard in the assessment process"[18].

School is, therefore, the place where the system of gender roles is maintained, which, according to Sandra Bem, is expressed through the lenses of gender, representing implicit assumptions about gender and sex, rooted in social practices, socio-cultural norms and individual awareness. Bem mentions three constitutive lenses of gender: androcentrism (male-centeredness), gender polarisation and biological essentialism[19]. "Androcentrism is the privileging of male experience […]

[12] *Ibid.*, pp. 171–172.

[13] P. Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, Stanford University Press, 2001, pp. 9–10.

[14] *Ibid.*, pp. 17–24.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 23.

[16] *Ibid.*, p. 34.

[17] L. Kopciewicz, *Szkoła i dramat płci. Teoria społeczna Pierre'a Bourdieu w badaniu rodzajowego kapitału i habitusu* [School and gender drama. Pierre Bourdieu's social theory in the study of gender capital and habitus], [in:] *Teatr płci. Eseje z socjologii gender* [Gender Theatre. Essays in Gender Sociology], M. Bieńkowska-Ptasznik, J. Kochanowski (eds.), Wydawnictwo Wschód–Zachód, Łódź 2008, p. 130.

[18] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[19] S.L. Bem, *The Lenses of Gender: Transforming the Debate on Sexual Inequality*, Yale University Press, 1993.

males and male experience are treated as a neutral standard or norm for the culture or the species as a whole, and females and female experience are treated as a sex-specific deviation from that allegedly universal standard". Gender polarisation, in turn, makes the distinction between male and female the organizing principle for social life in a given culture. This distinction affects numerous aspects of the social life. And biological essentialism rationalizes and legitimizes both other lenses by treating them as the natural and inevitable consequences of the intrinsic biological natures of women and men. Thus, "looking through these lenses of gender perpetuates male power" in the society[20].

According to Dorota Pankowska, the essence of these lenses are gender stereotypes. Stereotypes, being mental constructs, usually prevalent among members of a specific social group, based on a simplified and schematic perception of reality, are passed on in a given culture in the socialisation process. Gender stereotyping is influenced by the social (gender) norms and roles. The mechanism of gender stereotyping works through assigning men and women different tasks and responsibilities that are related to allegedly certain psychological traits, interpreting these traits as "natural" for women and men, which reinforces the belief that men and women are created to undertake different activities, and extending the expectations of men and women's behaviour also to other situations. Individuals feel the pressure of norms concerning their functioning as a woman or a man and submit to them, following the imposed patterns of behaviour. Behaviour in line with expectations confirms the legitimacy of the female and male stereotypical representation[21]. One of the places where gender stereotyping (categorisation?) takes place in the process of secondary socialisation is, naturally, school.

The creation of the social order in the context of gender roles in the school field takes place through an official and hidden curriculum. According to Roland Meighan, "the hidden curriculum is broadly defined as everything else that is learnt in addition to the official curriculum"[22]. In Meighan's case, this phenomenon concerns the school space, timetables, forms of organisation of education, the official curriculum, teacher's expectations and language and ways of communicating in the classroom[23]. The hidden curriculum is also implemented through the content of school textbooks.

The school textbooks incorporate content that moulds stereotypical gender roles, as confirmed by scientific research. Dorota Pankowska analysed 25 textbooks for elementary education, which were in use in 1989, taking into account the prevalence of women and men, their professions, mutual interactions, types of activity, personality traits and ways of communication. These studies show that in school

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[20] *Ibid.*, pp. 41–46.
[21] D. Pankowska, *Wychowanie a role płciowe* [Education and Gender Roles], GWP, Gdańsk 2005, pp. 19–20.
[22] R. Meighan, *A Sociology of Educating*, Holt, Reinehart and Winston, 1981, p. 133.
[23] *Ibid.,* pp. 63–176.

textbooks we can encounter all the determinants of the system of gender roles: gender-segregated tasks (gender polarisation), different mental traits of women and men among the textbook characters (stereotyping), and the domination of masculinity and men (androcentrism)[24].

In the textbooks under review, women work in the services and care occupations, while men dominate the other professional groups. In addition, men's work goes beyond the local environment, and the work that women do is related to their immediate environment and does not require qualifications or mobility. The world of women is focused on children and the home. The role of women is defined from a maternity perspective. The masculine world, on the other hand, is defined by dynamism, activity, independence and diversity. A man is open to expansion, mobility and activity. He fulfils himself in his professional work and through his work and impressive accomplishments changes the world, for the good of the whole society. According to the author, gender polarisation in textbooks seems inevitable and natural[25]. Thus, textbooks create psychological portraits in accordance with the stereotypes of masculinity and femininity; masculinity in general is valued higher, "[…] in society it is accepted to value professional rather than domestic work, public rather than private activity"[26].

Iza Desperak also points to the stereotypical depiction of women and men in textbooks. The author argues that despite all the changes that have taken place in education, school textbooks continue to offer the same portrayal of boys and girls, men and women. Social transformation, changes in social communication, or education reform, have not contributed to changes in this area. There is still a double standard of femininity and masculinity[27].

Indeed, school textbooks are an area that largely supports socialisation into traditional gender roles. The mechanism of gender capital generation in female and male pupils is also influenced by the expectations and behaviour of teachers towards the pupils.

Mariola Chomczyńska-Rubacha, citing Kłoskowska, argues that school is a socialising agenda that activates the transmission and adoption of behaviours, models and norms, as well as a certain body of knowledge related to the reality[28]. Chomczyńska-Rubacha conducted research using the diagnostic survey method.

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[24] D. Pankowska, *Wychowanie a role płciowe* [*Education and Gender Roles*], GWP, Gdańsk 2005, p. 96.

[25] *Ibid.*, pp. 96–97.

[26] *Ibid.*, pp. 97–98.

[27] I. Desperak, *Podwójny standard w edukacji. Kobiecość i męskość w podręcznikach szkolnych* [A Double Standard in Education. Femininity and Masculinity in School Textbooks], [in:] *Płeć i rodzaj w edukacji* [Sex and Gender in Education], M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej w Łodzi, Łódź 2004, pp. 139–141.

[28] M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha, *Nauczycielskie i uczniowskie przekazy socjalizacyjne związane z płcią* [Teachers' and Pupils' Socialisation Messages Related to Gender], [in:] *Płeć i rodzaj w edukacji* [Sex and Gender in Education], M. Chomczyńska-Rubacha (ed.), Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Humanistyczno-Ekonomicznej w Łodzi, Łódź 2004, p. 53.

She found that at school there are two conflicting socialisation worlds: that of the teachers and that of the students. The author describes and interprets the message concerning gender and sex that is sent by teachers and the message that is sent by pupils. For the purposes of this text, I will present the results concerning the message conveyed by the teachers themselves. Socialisation messages in this study have been operationalised as egalitarian, stereotypical or mixed. The study has demonstrated, however, that the dominant messages to students are mixed messages (37%); moreover, teachers trigger more stereotypical messages, consistent with the dominant definition of masculinity and femininity and negatively evaluating manifestations of traits considered feminine in men and vice versa (33%) than egalitarian messages, renouncing gender-specific behavioural and personality characteristics attributed to men and women (29%). As the researcher points out, the school simultaneously emancipates, typifies and activates ambiguous mixed messages[29].

Konarzewski conducted research in the first grades of four Warsaw-based primary schools, which has shown that boys and girls are assigned tasks of a different nature: girls – exercises, while boys – problem-solving tasks. Success in solving tasks positions students differently with respect to the authority of the teacher. Boys become independent from the teacher's authority and are encouraged to seek autonomy, while the girls' success leads them to submit to authority, which in turn fosters interpersonal dependence.

Elżbieta Putkiewicz carried out a study on the communication between teachers and students in grades III-IV during mathematics classes. The researcher noticed statistical differences in teachers' relation to boys and girls. The messages addressed to boys were less dogmatic; what is more, teachers seemed to accept their own person and the person of the listener. The less dogmatic the manner of communicating with students, the greater the student autonomy. Girls, through dogmatic messages, tend to receive and memorize information in a dogmatic way, whereas boys are treated as partners. Such experiences can influence the different educational outcomes of boys and girls and the development of their personality traits.

The methods of persecuting female students were the subject of the research by Lucyna Kopciewicz. In assessing the data using critical discourse analysis, the author distinguished several types of persecution employed by teachers and distinct forms of hate speech. These were referred to as discursive formations. Normative discourse is a kind of preventative measure regarding "girls' sexual appeal"[30]. What teachers evaluate here is the girls' appearance. The reason for persecution is the concern about "not spoiling boys in class" or "not provoking boys". The cat-

[29] *Ibid.*, pp. 53–62.
[30] L. Kopciewicz, *Nauczycielskie poniżanie: szkolna przemoc wobec dziewcząt* [Degrading Treatment by Teachers: School Violence against Girls], Wydawnictwo Difin, Warszawa 2011, p. 120.

egory that binds together the recollections of the study subjects is the category of a "prostitute". A female student being persecuted is separated from the rest of the class and thus made visible. It is an example of a class discourse depicting the actions of teachers from a position that suggests their greater cultural capital, and female students as uncritically devoted to fashion, devoid of these cultural competences. Teachers discredit cheapness (poverty) and the kitsch of "new money". Female students are commented on in public and teachers speak from the position of universal aesthetics, stigmatizing lack of taste, mediocrity and gaudiness. On the basis of this discourse, a figure of "vulgarity" emerges. Items of clothing that do not fit the concept of a school outfit are treated as symptoms of the lack of class. From the analysis of the data, one can discern a singular canon of girls' appearance at school, assuming the imperative of being "transparent"[31]. In the discourse of submissiveness, the classroom is treated as the teachers' private kingdom, where they are free to impose their own concept of order. There are even cases of schoolgirls being physically assaulted. Teachers impose strict rules, which often result in victims looking for guilt within themselves and not seeking help in institutions[32]. Regulatory discourse involves "generating gender", forcing schoolgirls to return to "appropriate" girly outfits. In the case of people who cannot or do not wish to comply with the stereotype, the aim here is to "turn them back" from the "deviant" path. A typical example of preventive measures is the de-homosexualisation of the classroom space[33]. Another discursive formation (distaff discourse?) in which "teachers refer to […] biological facts – they denounce girls' physiology, and ridicule the changes occurring in girls' bodies" – creates "an exceptionally unfavourable learning environment, imposing numerous limitations, causing emotional tension and avoidance of contact with the teacher", which can affect personal development and learning outcomes[34].

In the field of school, stereotypical gender roles are created through official and hidden curricula, textbooks, and teachers' expectations and behaviour towards male and female pupils. This has far-reaching implications for the functioning of women and men in society. The negative consequences of raising children to fit the roles stereotypically attributed to women and men include, among others, discrimination and sexism.

Discrimination involves unequal treatment, the limitation of someone's rights, and, from a sociological perspective, treating members of one or more social groups worse than others. Gender discrimination is therefore the unequal treatment of people on the basis of their gender. The system of gender roles, which assumes the supremacy of masculinity, allows for open discrimination against women. This

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[31] *Ibid.*, pp. 126–131.
[32] *Ibid.*, pp. 133–139.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 140–146.
[34] *Ibid.*, pp. 147–156.

phenomenon occurs in many areas of life, including legal, political, educational, professional, moral and family life[35].

This affects access to ownership and law, the justice system, education, the labour market, and the capacity to determine one's own destiny[36]. Despite the social changes that have recently taken place in Western societies, there are still hidden forms of gender discrimination. Old stereotypes of femininity and masculinity continue to exist[37].

A fairly recent term is sexism, which includes social practices that stigmatise individuals on the basis of gender, contribute to inequalities between women and men, and restrict groups and individuals' opportunities for development. Sexism may occur at four levels:

1. individual, i.e. referring to individuals and their attitudes towards gender and sex. This is when we attribute to people gender stereotypical characteristics based on whether they belong to a group of women or men;

2. socio-structural, in which the status attributed based on gender to the partner in the interaction manifests itself in group and interpersonal relations; in an androcentric society higher status is attributed to men, which in relations with women may be represented by the superior-subordinate, dominant-submissive model;

3. institutional, i.e. gender discrimination in institutions and their structure, ideology, organisation, patterns of behaviour – e.g. inequalities between women and men in the labour market, the gender pay gap, the glass ceiling, the glass escalator, i.e. fast-track promotion for males in female-dominated occupations, the sticky floor, i.e. keeping women in low status jobs without promotion opportunities;

4. cultural, which refers to explicit and implicit assumptions about sex and gender that influence the behaviour of members of a particular culture. Such beliefs are the basis for social inequalities[38].

Is it possible for a school that should perform an emancipatory role to fulfil its mission and prevent discrimination and sexism? After all, pedagogical texts do deal with transcending stereotypes, partnership and self-actualisation[39].

Sandra Bem, on the other hand, advocates changes in the patterns of social life and culture that would eliminate gender polarisation and androcentrism in favour of gender neutrality[40]. The author recommends accepting a certain level of male-female difference as axiomatic, thus shifting the debate from "difference per se to the society's [androcentric] situating of women"[41]. Reflections on the androcentric

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[35] D. Pankowska, *op. cit.*, p. 115.

[36] *Ibid.*, pp. 115–116.

[37] *Ibid.*, p. 118.

[38] *Ibid.*, pp. 118–128.

[39] *Ibid.*, p. 131.

[40] S.L. Bem, *op. cit.*, pp. 183–192.

[41] *Ibid.*, p. 182.

organisation of social life concern, among other things, the organisation of work, in which one may have the impression that no account is taken of the fact that a woman may or has become pregnant. Bem claims that "social institutions […] invisibly and automatically smooth the way toward whatever the historically pre-programmed options – or the conventionally standard behaviours – are for a particular group in a particular time and place"[42]. The author also proposes a utopian vision of the world without gender polarisation. Eliminating gender would entail limiting the distinction between women and men to the narrow sphere related to biological reproduction[43]. "Gender depolarisation would require even more than the social revolution involved in rearranging social institutions and reframing cultural discourses. Gender depolarisation would also require a psychological revolution in our most personal sense of who and what we are as males and females, a profound alteration in our feelings about the meaning of our biological sex and its relation to our psyche and our sexuality"[44]. Bem's reflections contribute to policy changes that address gender issues.

The system of gender roles is undergoing a transformation; therefore it is worth adapting social awareness to those changes and helping individuals to develop an individual gender role that is consistent with their needs. Moreover, today, as Dorota Pankowska points out, more and more researchers believe that gender typification is discriminatory and has a negative impact on mental health[45]. Krzysztof Arcimowicz points to the limitations of the traditional system of gender roles, describing the changes in the paradigm of masculinity over the years[46]. Today, the price that women and men pay for traditional gender roles is being revealed.

The results of this study indicate that changes are called for, but how to accomplish them? The conclusion of this paper will provide some proposals for improvements in the field of education. Research has revealed a major problem, which may require radical steps in the design of educational activities. Therefore, there is a need for educational projects that will make people sensitive to gender issues. But how to design equality education in a school that, as I have shown earlier, referring to critical sociology theories, is a place of hidden violence and the imposition of stereotypical gender roles? This is a question that applies to the entire system.

Gender-sensitive teachers should be able to hold discussions and organise debates in the classroom. Debate is one of the best ways to mobilise pupils in the classroom, enabling them to genuinely confront different views. Making teachers themselves sensitive to gender is warranted. The attitudes and expectations of

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[42] *Ibid.*, p. 189.
[43] *Ibid.*, pp.192–193.
[44] *Ibid.*, pp. 196.
[45] D. Pankowska, *op. cit.*, pp. 158–159.
[46] K. Arcimowicz, *Obraz mężczyzny w polskich mediach* [Male Image in the Polish Media], GWP, Gdańsk 2004.

teachers influence their behaviour towards male and female pupils, thus generating gender capital. But what about people who think in a stereotypical fashion and are guided by prejudice and gender bias?

Perhaps it would be appropriate to go beyond the institution of the school itself and to vet the people who will work as teachers in terms of their awareness of gender issues? The diagnosis will be difficult in a mass education setting, and there will always be an argument that the universities cannot afford it; but the consequences of such short-sightedness are painfully clear. In teacher training programmes there is a need for a curriculum which would make future teachers sensitive to gender issues. Gender, as a category more and more frequently encountered in pedagogical discourse, could be dealt with not only in optional but also in compulsory classes: lectures or workshops. It might be necessary to educate students about gender theory, to make them acquainted with the latest socio-pedagogical research in the field of gender education/sociology and to encourage them to carry out their own research on gender stereotypes and the consequences of these stereotypes.

Students could be able to conduct studies under the supervision of professors and assistant professors who explore gender issues, for example by participating in their research projects, which may inspire the future teachers to further broaden their knowledge in this area.

The issue of gender stereotyping in school textbooks is also an important problem. How is it possible to enact change when it is evident, as research by Pankowska or Chomczyńska-Rubach shows, that they reproduce and perpetuate gender stereotypes? How to reach out to people involved in the design of school textbooks? How to give a voice to those who are gender-sensitive and who are not afraid to take up important issues in the 21st century and make them influence the content of school textbooks? The problem is the invisibility of these people and the impression is that they are not allowed to enter the public debate. Let us therefore work on their visibility and equality in the broadest sense of the term in a democratic society. These are challenges for the contemporary critical pedagogy in Poland.

Summary

*Generating Gender Capital in the Education Process
and its Impact on the Functioning of Men and Women*

Gender is a category more and more frequently encountered in Polish pedagogical research. This paper will present the problem of generating students' "gender capital" in the educational process and will demonstrate the mechanism of reproduction and its social implications for the functioning of men and women. School is the place where socialisation intensifies the social roles, including the roles stereotypically attributed to women and men. School reinforces the individuals' sense of belonging to a particular

gender, but it can also be a place of negotiating the meaning of gender. The article refers to Pierre Bourdieu's social theory, in which a school can be described as social field where the reproduction of the social order in terms of gender takes place. Gender roles in the school space are established through the formal and a hidden curriculum, textbooks and teachers' expectations and behaviour towards male and female students. The author refers to these issues, pointing to major socio-pedagogical studies. Socialisation into "normal" gender roles is treated by the school system as a desirable and positive process, despite the fact that it carries with it negative consequences in the form of discrimination and sexism.

English translation: Anna Moroz-Darska