

**RPTSS 2017**

**International Conference on Research Paradigms Transformation in Social  
Sciences**

**AFFINITY OF GENDER STEREOTYPES AND POLITICAL  
CULTURE: FROM DISCRIMINATION TO EQUAL RIGHTS**

S.S. Skorniakova (a), A.S. Safonova (b)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Peter the Great St.-Petersburg Polytechnic University, Polytekhnicheskaya Street, 29, St. Petersburg, 195251,  
Russian Federation, salagot@yandex.ru, 89523734680

(b) Peter the Great St.-Petersburg Polytechnic University, Polytekhnicheskaya Street, 29, St. Petersburg, 195251,  
Russian Federation, merry.pr@yandex.ru 89213801225

***Abstract***

The paper considers problems of influence and affinity of political culture dominating in society and gender stereotypes. Political culture is seen as an integral notion, which includes previous experience, knowledge and emotions. Historical experience, which is retransmitted from generation to generation, is an important determinant in formation of gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes act as a factor of political culture, which forms political preferences of voters today. They affect evaluation of subjects of the political process. Herewith, concepts of masculinity / femininity correlate with perceptions of strength / weakness - the masculine is valued as more positive than the feminine, which allows concluding about the androcentrism of political discourse. At the same time, gender stereotypes, as an integrated part of political culture, are in close relation to politics. First of all, their influence on politics reveals itself in how they impact the political behavior of women and men - both voters and politicians. Thus, as a whole, gender stereotypes act as a factor of culture which limits female representation in power. This is a factor of discrimination against women in the political sphere. Despite the fact that transformation of the political system is accompanied by reproduction of stereotype perceptions of social communities about the leading role of males in politics, it can be claimed that there is gradual correlation of gender stereotypes in the direction of comparatively balanced condition of male and female potentials and there are growing opportunities for women to participate in the sphere of public policy and management.

© 2018 Published by Future Academy [www.FutureAcademy.org.UK](http://www.FutureAcademy.org.UK)

**Keywords:** Gender, political culture, stereotypes, politics, masculinity, femininity.



This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, permitting all non-commercial use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

## 1. Introduction

The theory of stereotypization appeared after the book called "Public Opinion" by American writer and publicist W. Lippmann came out and introduced the concept of "stereotype" into scientific use (Lippmann, 1922). The main areas for studying stereotypes was to analyze the interpretation and perception of information as main factors of stereotypization; dependence of stereotypes on intergroup relations; their role in discrimination, including gender one. Michael Kimmel, American sociologist, looks into the main reason why gender stereotypes are involved in socio-political relations as a possibility to use them in order to hierarchize social subjects. He writes that whenone discusses gender, one means hierarchy, power and inequality rather than just differences between men and women (Kimmel, 2000). Not only individuals, but also the entire range of social actors and phenomena, like nations, social strata and classes, revolutions or wars are characterized as masculine or feminine.

R. Connell developed the perception of gender as a structure of power, a multitude of social relations, common and stable (Connell, 1987). Cultural traditions together with social relations and precondition identification of power with masculinity and subordination with femininity. The attributes of power - strength, reason, will, responsibility, activity, control, justice - are also, to a large extent, the attributes of masculinity, while the attributes of femininity - passivity, emotionality, bias, suggestibility, weakness, hesitation - are associated with subordination. Connell emphasized that hegemonian masculinity is based not on brutal force (although it can be combined with it), but on symbolic power rooted in religion and ideology, politics and everyday practices (Connell, 1987). Gender asymmetry of power is also revealed in the idea that taking power certifies manhood and, in turn, the marker "real man" is used to justify claims for power. That allows sustaining the relations of power and social organization of society as a whole, contributing to legitimization of social inequality between social groups of men and women.

T. Parsons interpreted the influence of political socialization in the following way. A man comes to politics predominantly for the purposes of his career. In this sphere, the same as in a family, he specializes in "instrumental" functions, focusing on the external objectives of the system. Female politicians are much less focused on the career. They specialize in "expressive" functions, internal objectives of the system, ensuring integration of its members (Parsons & Bales, 1955).

S. Aivazova studies the influence of gender on political choice. She shows the interrelation of such exteriorly different spheres as "gender" and "politics" so as to emphasize the "heuristic value of "gender" as a meaningful category in the analysis of mass politics" (Aivazova, 2016, p. 24).

## 2. Problem Statement

The political culture of society can be discussed in terms of two main aspects: as a constituent part of general culture and as an integral element of the political system of society. In the first case, political culture relies on artifacts and symbols which precondition its reproduction based on previous experience. In the second case, political culture is seen and acts as an integral quality of the political system of society and may include political knowledge, political experience, examples of political behavior and participation, political values and ideas, political views and orientations. In this case, the authors may

suggest its impact on the political process (Safonova, 2015, p. 89). Political culture reflects the historical experience of social communities, fixes trends, customs and stereotypes rooted in popular consciousness, assimilates in the process of gender socialization (among other things) and given the stereotypes which historically reinforce in society.

D. Schneider, for example, points out the "big three" of research stereotypes: gender, age and race (Schneider, 2004; Riabova, 2008). Gender stereotypes are socially designed categories of "masculinity" and "femininity", which are proven by distinct (depending on sex) behavior, various distribution inside social roles and statuses, and supported by psychological needs of human beings to behave in socially desirable manner and feel their integrity and consistency.

Being a constituent element of political culture, gender stereotypes are in close relation with politics. Current analysis of political behavior of men and women - both voters and politicians - shows the considerable impact gender stereotypes make on politics in favor of male representation. Thus, as a whole, gender stereotypes act as a factor of culture which limits female representation in power. They become popular in the political sphere - the sphere of activity which is seemingly not related to gender interrelation - due to the fact that sex is easily identified by an individual; the stereotype perceptions of men and women are correlated with his or her personal experience; gender interrelation is perceived as obvious, understandable, and, consequently, legitimate (Kahn, 1996).

Gender stereotypes affect how male and female leadership is perceived. If competence and toughness are more commonly ascribed to male leaders, then women are associated with qualities related to the expressive sphere (warmness, emotionality, sympathy). Speaking about common patterns in using gender stereotypes in political representations, it is necessary to take into account the following circumstance: power is considered to be masculine. That is why with the help of stereotype perceptions about the masculine and feminine, the legitimacy of political subjects' claims for power is assessed implicitly.

Participating in the processes of political mobilization, gender stereotypes imply appeal to the gender identity of individuals. An appeal to voters as men or women becomes a resource for impacting their electoral behavior. Herewith an important role is played by mobilization not only in terms of positive identity as a strive to correspond to certain social standards, but also negative identity as a strive to be different from anti-standards (Renzetti & Curran, 1992).

It is necessary to consider the reverse impact of politics on gender stereotypes too. It is revealed, in particular, in fixation of some qualities, masculine or feminine, in gender division of the public and private spheres, in gender asymmetry of power as a whole. The issues of gender stereotypes, discrimination and power are covered in works by such contemporary researchers as England, P., Brooks, K. Dolan. (England, 2010; Brooks, 2013; Dolan, 2014).

### **3. Research Questions**

In order to be a full-fledged subject of political process, a citizen must have not only gender identification but also be perfectly aware of their rights and interests. Gender equality in society cannot be achieved without investigation into the factors that define the status of women and men, including in the

political sphere. It is obvious that they are not only economic or legislative, but also the factors of political culture, which are even more effective since they are often taken for granted (Randall, 1987).

Gender stereotypes are a factor of social relations organized not only between men and women, but also between other social groups and communities, which affect political relations. The authors have chosen the interrelation of gender stereotypes and political culture of society as a subject of research because of the special role of political discourse in reproduction of gender stereotypes, in formation of national models of masculinity and femininity, in maintenance of social order (including gender order). (Riabova, 2008). Analysis of interaction between gender stereotypes and the political culture of society makes it possible to extrapolate the main conclusions of the research on other spheres of society.

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

Structural transformation of the political system has affected practically all political actors and institutions. Nevertheless, the same as dozens of years ago, gender stereotypes keep on being an important factor of voters' political preferences, which is revealed in the fact that stereotypically male and stereotypically female qualities affect the assessment of political subjects. Herewith the perceptions of masculinity / femininity correlate with the perceptions of strength / weaknesses and, consequently, with the conviction about what position they should have in the hierarchy of power.

The androcentrism of current political discourse is revealed in the fact that the masculine is assessed more positively than the feminine. It preconditions the definition of power as masculine; justification of claims for power implies demonstration of one's own masculinity. It allows gender stereotypes to become a factor of political struggle: the male stereotype is used most often to legitimize Insider politicians, the female one - in order to delegitimize Outsider ones. In turn, political sphere reproduces these stereotypes and participates in the formation and promotion of new meanings of femininity and masculinity (Riabova, 2008).

The space of current public politics is formed in the conditions of new challenges and threats, when the ultimate value is the mindset of personal and collective security, which also preconditions the domination of the signs of gender asymmetry in favor of masculine features. The process of reformation of public institutions is accompanied by reproduction of stereotypic perceptions of social communities about the leading role of men in politics. The purpose of the research is to analyze the self-realization potential of women in the sphere of state politics and management.

The use of gender stereotypes, as a rule, does not chase a conscious goal of discrediting female politicians. However, their exploitation reduces the legitimacy of femininity in the political sphere and, as a consequence, women's opportunities to participate in power. The hierarchy of masculinity and femininity in political sphere is a factor of social inequality in the field of gender relations not only in politics, but also indirectly in social life as a whole (Martell & DeSmet, 2001).

#### **5. Research Methods**

The principle of social constructivism lies at the root of the methodological principle of the research. Historical transformation of gender stereotypes, patriarchy and gender component of

political culture, their affinity, participation in the production of power and subordination relations are seen as social constructions.

The common factor of the functioning gender stereotypes, analysis of their main properties, structure and functions they perform are at the root of the structural and functional approach.

Important methodological fundamentals are given in the works by W. Lippmann, T. Parsons, S. Aivazova, T. Ryabova.

The paper also uses the findings of a survey conducted by Yuri Nevada Analytical Center (Levada-Center) called "Russians about the role of women in politics" according to a representative all-Russian selection of urban and rural population among 1 600 people aged 18 and older in 130 settlements located in 45 regions of the country.

## 6. Findings

Now let us ask a question: how evident is the gender component in political culture as a whole and Russian political culture in particular?

In the political cultures of civilized countries or countries with "established" democracy, gender approach has become the commonplace truth assimilated by politicians of both sexes. In reference to Western American political culture, it is time to speak about gender political culture or, at least, about the indisputable fact of the prevailing gender trend, which exists in political culture today. First of all, in the behavioral element of the political Western American culture, gender dimension is conscious, namely: there is gender quota allocation in party lists in the electoral systems, as well national mechanisms for eliminating gender imbalance of power and other attributes.

An eloquent indicator of real embodiment of gender equality in the political sphere is a larger number of women in the posts of heads of states - A. Merkel (Germany), T. May (UK), E. Solberg (Norway), B. Szydlo (Poland), M. Bachelet (Chile) et al. M. Le Pen (France) and H. Clinton (USA) struggled desperately in the elections, but lost.

In the first Soviet constitution of 1918, Russia legalized an active and passive right to vote for citizens of both sexes and became the seventh state which had equaled the legal voting status of men and women. However throughout the 20th century, gender identifications of men dominated in politics, whereas a woman was cast in the leading role exceptionally in social sphere. Over the last century, it was not possible to move forward a lot in the issues of gender inequality elimination.

Traditional etatist orientation of the state relying on masculine methods of force and coercion, as well as a high level of the patriarchal component in the political culture and weakness of the Russian legislation in the sphere of gender politics, causes further violation of women's rights and their gender discrimination. Today in Russian society, the gender approach has not yet become an important part of all structural elements of political culture. The process of transformation of patriarchal gender stereotypes, especially in the political sphere, is really contradictory and controversial.

However, some positive changes in the sphere of political culture have taken place anyway. Development of democracy and civil society in Russia cannot but put an issue on the agenda about realization of the principle of gender approach - an objective characteristic of political culture, which is common to the democratically developed countries (Skornyakova, 2012, p. 153).

This fact is demonstrated by the findings of Yuri Levada Analytical Center (Levada-Center). Thus on 15-18 February 2014, the sociologists of this Center conducted a survey called "Russians about the role of women in politics" according to a representative all-Russian selection of urban and rural population among 1 600 people aged 18 and older in 130 settlements located in 45 regions of the country (Public opinion-2013, 2014, p. 40).

**Table 01.** Would you like women in Russia to occupy the highest state posts on equal terms with men? (in %)

	January 2006	February 2008	February 2012
Certainly yes / rather yes	70	64	70
Rather no / certainly no	24	28	25
Found it difficult to answer	6	9	5

**Table 02.** Would you like it if in the nearest 10-15 years a woman would become the president of Russia? (in %)

Column Heading	January 2006	February 2008	February 2012
Certainly yes / rather yes	45	41	46
Rather no / certainly no	44	44	41
Found it difficult to answer	11	15	13

These results show that 2/3 of the population approve the promotion of women to the highest government posts and more than 40% are not against of seeing a woman as president of Russia.

The fact of optimistic gender moods in favor of women participating in politics is proven by the real political practice, too. Thus, for example, the proportion of women among the deputies of the State Duma of the RF, VI convocation, was 21 people. The State Duma of the RF, VII convocation includes as many as 67 women, i.e. the female deputy mandates have tripled.

## 7. Conclusion

Despite some optimistic indicators, further research of this problem is needed, since most of the issues of the political culture based on gender approach is only outlined, rather than articulated. A considerable part of Russian and foreign authors' research reflects the interdisciplinary approach to investigating gender aspects of political culture. There is no generally recognized methodology and common approaches to research. Given the ever-increasing role of women in the society, further research into the gender aspects of political culture, gender stereotypes as part of the political culture of society today seems interesting.

It is reasonable to make a comparative analysis of gender stereotypes in the foreign and Russian political culture, determine the most effective ways for overcoming discrimination of women in various spheres of social life and to develop equal representation.

Thus, a number of principle conclusions can be made. Gender stereotypes act as a factor of political culture, which forms political preferences of contemporary voters. They affect the assessment of subjects of the political process. Herewith, the concepts of the masculinity / femininity are correlated with the perceptions of the strength / weakness - the masculine is valued as more positive than the feminine, which allows concluding about the androcentrism of political discourse. However, in the current phase of development, there is gradual correlation of gender stereotypes in the direction of a comparatively balanced condition of male and female potentials, in the direction of equal opportunities policy pursued in various spheres of society's life. The current state of the Russian political culture is preconditioned by the changing social relationship paradigm, gradual transformation of gender patriarchal stereotypes, especially in politics.

## References

- Aivazova, S.G. (2016). Gender aspect of mass policy. *Woman in Russian Society*, 1 (78), 24-34.
- Brooks, D. J. (2013). *He runs, she runs: Why gender stereotypes do not harm women candidates*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Connell, R. W. (1987). *Gender and power: Society, the person, and sexual politics*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Dolan, K. (2014). Gender stereotypes, candidate evaluations, and voting for women candidates: What really matters? *Political Research Quarterly*, 67(1), 96-107, doi: 10.1177/1065912913487949.
- England, P. (2010). The gender revolution: Uneven and stalled. *Gender & society*, 24(2), 149-166. doi: 10.1177/0891243210361475.
- Kahn, K. F., & Fridkin, K. (1996). *The political consequences of being a woman: How stereotypes influence the conduct and consequences of political campaigns*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Lippman, W. (1922). *Public opinion*. New York, NY: Harcourt, Brace, & Jovanovitch.
- Martell, R. F. & DeSmet, A. L. (2001). A diagnostic-ratio approach to measuring beliefs about the leadership abilities of male and female managers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86(6), 1223–1231.
- Kimmel, M. (2000). *The gendered society*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Parsons, T., & Bales, R. F. (1955). *Family, Socialization and Interaction Process*. New York, N.Y: The Free Press.
- Public opinion – 2013. (2014). Moscow. Publishing The Levada Centre.
- Randall, V. (1987) *Women and Politics: an International Perspective*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
- Renzetti, C. M., & Curran, D. J. (1992). *Women, men, and society*. (2" ed.). Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Riabova, T. B. (2008). *Gender of power: Gender stereotypes in Russian politics*. State Ivanovo University.
- Safonova, A. S. (2015). The structure and the formation peculiarities of youth`s political culture. *Science prospects*, 4 (67), 88-92.
- Schneider, D. J. (2004). *The psychology of stereotyping*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Skornyakova, S.S. (2012). Political culture of modern Russian society: transformation of gender stereotypes. *St. Petersburg State Polytechnic University Journal. Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4, 152-156.