Parents, teachers, and media: agents of biased socialization

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Antoinette Dana Alice Kroes

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Promotor:
Prof. dr. Judi Mesman

Copromotoren:
Dr. Marleen G. Groeneveld
Dr. Lotte D. van der Pol

Promotiecommissie:

Prof. dr. Sandra Groeneveld	Leiden University
Prof. dr. Eddie Denessen	Radboud University, Leiden University
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Preface

Reflexivity statement

> "Because of the big differences between boys and girls, sexuality for boys is a reality they begin to experience when puberty commences, while for girls sexuality in principle remains a closed book until the time comes that they are approached physically. The fairytale of Sleeping Beauty is based on this: she is awakened by the lover's kiss by the prince of her dreams. [...]
> The girls who experience [a short-term fling] for the first time are surprised by an *aha-erlebnis*, a sort of new world opens for them, they get butterflies in their stomachs. However, it results in nothing, it only gives a hangover. They are overcome by restlessness, a new desire for security and more, but it does not find a place, it is not fulfilled. Through these types of experiences, girls are very easily infected with some sort of 'boy craze', and because of that, girls are in danger of settling very easily for boys and men who present themselves because they have an urge.
> When a girl is awakened sexually, she more or less loses her objectivity that she naturally had. That doesn't just concern a physical desire, but also a broader and deeper desire, of her entire being (Baarsen, n.d., translated by the author)."

This is an excerpt from a pamphlet that I received in high school when I was 13 years old. I grew up in a relatively conservative Christian family, and attended churches and schools that were similarly conservative. Sexuality was a topic that was typically dealt with in a conservative matter, compared to contemporary Dutch standards. Both at school and in church, sexual education was focused on abstinence until marriage (Fine, 1988; Fine & McClelland, 2006), and there were clear double

standards about sexuality. The excerpt from the pamphlet above is an example of these types of double standards, in which girls are presented as asexual and passive beings in contrast to boys, who are sexual and active. Later in the pamphlet, the author goes into this further, explaining that men are meant to slowly guide and initiate women into sexuality. Women, according to the author, are naturally monogamous beings who can give away their virginity only once. When women are subsequently abandoned by men, they lose some of their capacity to attach themselves to someone and to form new relationships (Baarsen, n.d.). It is perhaps no surprise that texts like these had a big impact on me, being a teenager who was infatuated with someone new every few weeks. When I was introduced to feminist theory during a minor on gender and sexuality ten years later, I became very invested in examining these types of bias.

Some researchers may be attached to wearing a metaphorical cloak of objectivity, professing that their research practices are the result of purely rational considerations (Hamby, 2018). Nevertheless, when humans are involved, objectivity does not exist. Sharing a reflexivity statement, in which a researcher reflects on the position they adopt in relation to their research, is common in qualitative research, but often unexpected from quantitative researchers (Darwin Holmes, 2020; Rios-Aguilar, 2014). This was reflected in how objectivity and positionality were regarded during my bachelor studies, in which the focus was mainly on quantitative methods. Objectivity and positionality were not often discussed explicitly, and discussions mainly concerned how to make 'objective' observations. One of the methodological handbooks that was part of the mandatory readings states that in quantitative research "objectivity is sought and distance maintained between the researchers and participants" (Robson, 2011, p. 19). Conversely, for qualitative research, we can read on the same page "objectivity is not valued. It is seen as distancing the researchers from participants". Later on in the same book, novice researchers are warned that caring too much about helping research participants and answering research questions, puts the

researcher at risk of losing their objectivity and ability to evaluate data fairly. According to the author, researchers who only care about doing 'good research' (which apparently does not involve helping people and answering research questions) do not run that same risk (Robson, 2011). This is in stark contrast with the perspective of other academics, who see social justice and striving for equity as fundamental for social/behavioral science and education, especially when involving children (Brown et al., 2019; Grant & Agosto, 2008; Nieto, 2000). The position held by a (quantitative) researcher shapes much more than just the (evaluations of) observations they make. Their position is involved with the entire research process, including activities such as choosing the research topic, employing specific theories, designing the study, applying statistical techniques, and interpreting results. Therefore, by disclosing one's position, the validity and meaning of our research can be enhanced (Rios-Aguilar, 2014). The way I was raised, for instance by being socialized into the idea that sex should be different for girls than for boys, has been important in directing my position as a researcher. My position has further been influenced by many other experiences. For instance, I worked with kindergarten pupils at the time one of the biggest child sexual abuse cases in the Netherlands broke in the media, which made a big impression on me. Later, when I taught children in the highest grade of primary school, my Black male pupils would sometimes tell me how police officers would order them to show their ID while playing outside, even though my pupils were too young to have an ID. Most White people are never asked to provide identification, especially not White children. This ethnic profiling of children, who were very dear to me, fueled my desire for a fairer society. On the following pages, I will further reflect on my position, following the guidelines proposed by Sherry Hamby (2018).

I am a White Dutch cisgender[1] woman. Growing up female shaped my position immensely, and has been an essential aspect of my identity as a feminist, and my interest in studying gender. I was born in the Netherlands, as were my parents and grandparents. I grew up privileged, in a middleclass household in the Randstad, a conurbation in the central-western part of the Netherlands. Privilege stemming from my background is reflected for instance in how visiting libraries and being read to by my mother were part and parcel of my childhood. The attainment of an academic degree was a matter-of-course.

Before I started my PhD trajectory, I worked as a primary school teacher. I thoroughly enjoyed working with children, and was constantly made aware of how demographic characteristics like gender and ethnicity play a big role in their lives. For instance, in kindergarten, there was an omnipresent pink/blue gender division in the classroom, fueled by the popularity of animated movies and television shows like Frozen and Cars. Young children would also observe each other's appearances and wonder why some had darker skin, whether it was possible for a Black girl to be a princess, and why some children's eyes were shaped differently than others. In higher grades, children asked profound questions, such as: "Why do we call it football when boys do it, but *girls'* football when girls do it?" and "Why is it that when girls do boys' stuff they are cool, but when boys do girls' stuff they are losers?" I saw how some children were negatively impacted by biased expectations and prejudice. Through these experiences, my desire to act against and study various forms of bias grew. From 2017 to 2022, I worked within a larger interdisciplinary team, in an overarching longitudinal project, with colleagues who have a background in social psychology, developmental psychology, sociology, political science, and public administration. The overall goal of the longitudinal

[1] Cisgender indicates the congruence between gender identity and sex assigned at birth, e.g., I identify as female and was assigned female at birth.

project was studying gendered socialization of adolescents in the school and family context, and the gendered pathways of vocational interest development and educational choices of adolescents. During our longitudinal project, the world was hit with the COVID-19 pandemic. This had a big impact on our data collection and on the possibilities to recruit participants for our studies.

My position as a privileged White cis-gender woman, who is driven by a deep desire for social justice, can cause bias and oversights. In order to prevent bias and oversights as much as possible, I have collaborated with various people, both inside and outside of the interdisciplinary research team that I was part of. I have had very fruitful discussions with and received indispensable information and feedback from my team members, as well as others, including researchers, statisticians, methodologists, students, non-academic professionals, experts with first-hand experiences of intersecting marginalization, reviewers, editors, and the ethical committee of Leiden University. When working with an ethnically diverse sample (see Chapter 4), I specifically worked with experts on multi-ethnic communication, and with a multi-ethnic team of coders.

I have been diagnosed with ADHD and I believe that this has had an important influence on me as a researcher. Some of the symptoms of ADHD have been a blessing during my past years as a doctoral student. When my attention is grabbed I can dive into hyperfocus and spend hours upon hours investigating and reading about many topics. I am easily enthused for new projects. This is perhaps reflected in my somewhat eclectic dissertation. Still, my neurodiversity also leads to obstacles in life. It has been estimated that when a child with ADHD is 10 years old, they will have received thousands of corrective or negative statements like "Pay attention!" and "Get back on task!" in school alone (Jellinek, 2010), way more than their neurotypical classmates. Having been on the receiving end of many of these types of messages has peaked my interest in investigating the messages that teachers and parents communicate to

their children. Regularly, these corrective comments are gendered. I distinctly remember my 6th grade teacher holding up my somewhat messy attempt at bookbinding and exasperatedly exclaiming, "Antoinette, I thought you were a *girl*!?"

I am glad that now, over 20 years later, gendered messages like these have led me unto a path that resulted in this dissertation.

Terminology and binaries

In the following six chapters, I will give a general introduction to my dissertation and then present four studies for which I was the first author, and for which I collaborated with various co-authors. The last chapter consists of a general discussion. In this preface, the general introduction, and the general discussion I use singular first-person pronouns to describe my position, experiences, and ideas. In the following chapters of my dissertation I will use the plural first-person pronoun "we" when describing all research activities that were carried out with my co-authors.

In my dissertation, gender is the most important central concept. While the term sex commonly refers to biological sex, gender is constructed socio-culturally (R. W. Connell, 2005). Gender and sex can be used to label and interpret human behavior (American Psychological Association, 2020). Sex and gender are often presented as more or less inseparable, and as a binary: man and woman, or masculine and feminine (Hyde et al., 2019). In concordance with Hyde et al. (2019), I will refer to this binary as the gender/sex binary. The gender/sex binary forms meaningful social contexts in life. Within these contexts, people are implicitly sorted into certain binary gendered social roles, like the nurturing mother and the providing father, and the male construction worker and the female nurse. Without intervention, this process of social sorting often results in gender stereotypes, prejudice, and sexism (Hyde et al., 2019; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). This is to the detriment of people, albeit not to the same extent for all. Negative effects are greater for those

who do not conform to gendered expectations in society, and girls and women are affected more negatively than boys and men (Leaper & Brown, 2018). It is noteworthy that while all people are affected at least in some way by gendered inequality, for instance by gendered expectations and the gendered division of labor and care, many people do not desire any further emancipation (Kanne & van der Schelde, 2022).

Both on the biological and on the socio-cultural level, many variations beyond the sex and gender binaries exist (Fausto-Sterling, 2000). Additionally, the sex/gender binary is an important part of heteronormative frameworks, in which one is assumed to be born as either male or female, develop either a masculine or feminine gender identity, and be sexually attracted to someone of the opposite sex, with the opposite gender identity (Hyde et al., 2019; Martínez-San Miguel & Tobias, 2016). It is important to note that non-cisgender people and members of the LGBTIQ+[2] community experience greater marginalization through (cis)sexism than cisgender straight people (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Huijnk & van Beusekom, 2021; Leaper & Brown, 2018; Martínez-San Miguel & Tobias, 2016; Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018). This is one of the reasons that over the past decades, the number of studies that pay attention to the variations that go beyond the sex/gender binary has increased (Hyde et al., 2019; Leaper & Brown, 2018). Other reasons include that identities beyond the sex/gender binary are the reality, and excluding participants with these identities can contribute to their marginalization. Moreover, limiting research to the sex/gender binary impedes the discovery and development of new theories.

Throughout my dissertation, I use the sex/gender binary to label the participants as either male or female, and to measure differences between

[2] LGBTIQ stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, and Queer. The + indicates all other variations of (non hetero) sexual attraction and (non cis) gender expression, including people who identify as non-binary.

them. During recruiting and data collection, we asked the participants to identify with binary gender categories (e.g., "Are you a boy or a girl?"). We did not ask participants whether they were cisgendered. The omission of participants whose identity goes beyond the gender binary, is due to two reasons: firstly, for the samples in the studies presented in my dissertation I was dependent on two larger longitudinal research projects (Chapter 3, 4, and 5). The overarching aim of these projects involved the study of gendered socialization within families with a father, a mother, and (at least) two children. A substantial part of this sample had been recruited 7 years prior to the start of my PhD trajectory. Exclusion criteria included being raised outside of the Netherlands, and families with same-sex parents. To enable the possibility for an accelerated research design in the subsequent overarching longitudinal project that I was part of, the same exclusion criteria were used for the new participants. This limited the possibilities to include participants with identities that go beyond the sex/gender binary. Secondly, for the studies that employ statistical analyses, recruiting enough extra participants in various gender categories to reach sufficient power was not feasible. I want to acknowledge that this is a limitation in my dissertation. Studying the experiences and attitudes of people with non-binary and non-straight sex/gender identities is important, as they experience more and different forms of marginalization than those who fall within the heteronormative binary (Fine & McClelland, 2006; Huijnk & van Beusekom, 2021; Leaper & Brown, 2018; Martínez-San Miguel & Tobias, 2016; Van Beusekom & Kuyper, 2018). Additionally, people who do not conform to the sex/gender binary can be a rich source of information on how to dismantle gender stereotypes, prejudice, and sexism.

In Chapter 4, I have examined both gender and ethnic bias. In the general introduction of my dissertation, I therefore pay attention to this latter type of bias as well, albeit to a lesser extent than to gender bias. Similar to gender, I have employed ethnicity as a binary construct, as there was not enough power to differentiate further between the ethnic

backgrounds of the participants from ethnic minority groups. I am aware that working with these binary categories can obscure forms of intersectional bias (Crawford et al., 2019). However, simultaneously, the sex/gender binary does lie at the root of most gender stereotyping and gender discrimination (Hyde et al., 2019). In the case of ethnicity, any person from an ethnic minority background can be seen as 'the Other' by members of the dominant ethnic group, without distinctions regarding specific backgrounds (Jensen, 2011; Van Schie, 2018). Therefore, studying bias along these binaries is still a worthwhile endeavor.