Parents, teachers, and media: agents of biased socialization

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Chapter 1

General Introduction

Many adolescents are confronted regularly with deeply misogynistic messages through social media platforms (Weimann & Masri, 2020), on which popular influencers state that men are better than women, and that women 'belong at home' and should 'make men a sandwich' (Fazackerley, 2023). In short format videos, especially aimed at boys, famous content creators say that women are a man's property, and (female) rape victims are responsible for the crimes committed against them. Recently, many schools have reported that these influencers are hugely well known among their pupils (Fazackerley, 2023). Teachers state that they are worried about how this affects the adolescents they educate. When social media apps are studied, reinforcement of stereotypical masculinity and femininity are found (Foster & Baker, 2022; Kennedy, 2020). For instance, in content related to self-harm, suicide, and eating disorders women and girls appear far more often than men and boys (Arendt, 2019; Minadeo & Pope, 2022). The selection of content presented to users is fueled by algorithms (Bueno-Fernandes & Campos-Pellanda, 2022; Das, 2022). Users are presented with gendered videos automatically, even without liking or searching for specific content. For instance, while both male and female users are confronted with heteronormative content, male users are more likely to see violent and sports related videos, and female users are more likely to see content related to skin care and sexuality (Bueno-Fernandes & Campos-Pellanda, 2022).

Gender-based prejudice and discrimination are well-known problems not just in social media but in many aspects of life (Leaper & Brown, 2018). Women structurally experience mistreatment based on their gender. They are, for instance, much more likely than men to experience sexual harassment, sexual violence (Laan et al., 2021; Leaper & Brown, 2018), domestic/partner violence (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022a), earn less (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022d), and be shamed and penalized for their sexual behavior (Endendijk et al., 2020). On the other hand, while cisgender men often reap benefits of gender inequality in society, there are many disadvantages for them too. Examples of these

disadvantages include that men receive far less paid parental leave than women, giving them less opportunities to build relationships with their children (Tamm, 2019). Men are more likely to experience physical assaults (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022a), and are at much higher risk for suicide (Standish, 2021).

Gender inequality is pertinent in many aspects of children's lives too. For instance, in early childhood, they already perceive limits to what toys they can play with, according to their gender (Freeman, 2007). Children also experience gender inequality in schools. Gender-based grading bias has been found in many studies, with boys receiving lower grades than girls on non-standardized tests while there is no actual difference between their achievement (Voyer & Voyer, 2014). Teachers often have more positive attitudes towards girls than boys (Glock & Klapproth, 2017; Myhill & Jones, 2006), while boys receive more attention (Bassi et al., 2016), and higher quality feedback (Bašaragin & Savic, 2019). During sexual education, the penis is prioritized and the full anatomy of the clitoris is often omitted completely, even though it has been known for centuries (Gerritsen, 2022; Laan et al., 2021). For children from ethnic minority backgrounds, gender inequalities can be different than for the ethnic majority. Negative bias against ethnic minority children is found regularly (Geven et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2018), and ethnic minority pupils do not appear to reap the benefits from their gender like ethnic majority pupils do (Glock & Klapproth, 2017; Menegatti et al., 2017; Musto, 2019). When children experience negative bias, this can have various adverse effects on their achievements, behavior, and various socio-psychological aspects like self-esteem and motivation (Wang et al., 2018).

As gender and ethnicity based bias have many adverse effects on the lives of people, it is important to study the mechanisms that create and perpetuate bias. In this dissertation, I will do this by focusing on socialization agents. These are people and entities that model and instruct (potentially biased) behaviors and attitudes to individuals (Bandura, 1986). By investigating powerful socialization agents (parents, teachers,

and mass media; Zaikman & Marks, 2017) I aim to contribute to a deeper understanding into the mechanisms that underlie gender and ethnic bias. A better understanding of these mechanisms is beneficial in combatting bias and creating a fairer society.

Developing inequalities and bias

Because bias can lead to inequalities, it is important to understand how it works. Many theories explain the origin, development, and transmission of prejudiced and biased attitudes and behaviors (for overviews of several of these theories, see for instance: Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Levy & Hughes, 2009; Rutland et al., 2010; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). In this section, I will highlight and connect three of these theories that are relevant for my dissertation: constructivist-ecological perspective, social cognitive learning theory, and social role theory. Theoretical viewpoints are important for good research design, gaining deeper understanding into underlying mechanisms, and for theoretical integration across different areas of social and behavior science (Leaper, 2011; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). The constructivist-ecological perspective and social cognitive learning theory are common in developmental psychology, while social role theory is mostly used in sociology and social psychology.

Constructivist-ecological perspective

In the constructivist-ecological perspective, the development of biased attitudes is explained by drawing from constructivist theorists on the one hand, and from the ecological model of Urie Bronfenbrenner on the other (Liben, 2017).

Underlying constructivism is the premise that human development is cumulative. Knowledge is built upon previous knowledge, and prior knowledge affects how knowledge is modified or how new knowledge is constructed (Philips, 1995). Central to learning and development is active participation by the learner, as well as the social nature of learning (Leaper & Bigler, 2018; Liben, 2017). According to Lev Vygotsky, a

quintessential constructivist (Philips, 1995), the construction of knowledge always takes place on two planes: first on the social/interpersonal level, and then inside the individual, on the intrapersonal level (Duveen, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Missing in the works of Vygotsky is the notion that the construction of knowledge is not the same for each learner, as social groups and social identities play a role as well (Duveen, 1996). A similarly quintessential constructivist is Jean Piaget (Philips, 1995), who developed a comparable constructivist theory but with more attention to the individual qualities of the learner (Liben, 2017). Central to the work of Piaget are the concepts of assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1954). Assimilation refers to the process in which new information is made sense of and incorporated with existing knowledge and schemata of the learner. Accommodation refers to the way in which the learner modifies and adjusts their current understanding in response to new information. For example, on my first day as a teacher in kindergarten, one of my pupils enthusiastically shouted: “You are our teacher and you are also a mother!” She assimilated my gender and age with her idea of adult women who, in her experience, were always mothers. When I explained to her that I was indeed an adult woman, but that I did not have children, she accommodated her idea of adult women to include non-mothers. For the remainder of the year, she did not refer to me as a mother anymore. She had encountered this new knowledge first on the social level, and then internalized it, on the intrapsychic level. This exemplifies how constructivist theory can be applied to the construction of gender-related cognitions specifically (Duveen, 1996; Kohlberg, 1966; Liben, 2017). Children acquire their beliefs, behaviors, and cognitions from the social world around them, influenced by what they have acquired previously.

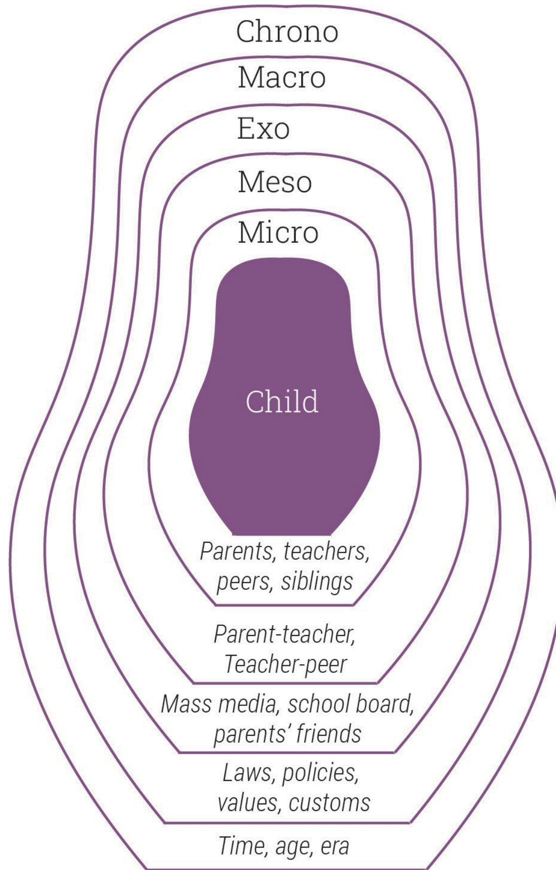
The importance of social contexts is further explained in the ecological model that was developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner (1979). Bronfenbrenner defined development as “a lasting change in the way in which a person perceives and deals with his environment (p. 3).” In the

ecological model, the developing person stands at the center. The model consists of five types of systems, each type is nested within the next, engulfing the developing child like Russian nesting dolls (see Figure 1.1; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). I will present the five types of systems below, illustrating for each system how they are involved with biased attitudes and/or behaviors with examples from literature. Working outwards from the center, the five types of systems are (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Liben, 2017; Perry et al., 1993):

1) Microsystems: are the direct and immediate interactions in which the child is involved, like with parents and siblings in the home and with peers and teachers in the classroom. For example, when boys are penalized by their peers for not adhering to the standards of masculinity, they are likely to adjust their behavior to fit stereotypical ideas of masculinity and to avoid being stigmatized (Pascoe, 2007). Likewise, girls will adjust their behavior when their femininity is criticized (Allan, 2009).
2) Mesosystems: are the interconnections between the micro systems, like the connections between parents and schools, or between teachers and peers. For instance, when teachers show higher levels of ethnic prejudice, ethnic majority children are more likely to exclude and bully peers with a refugee background (Alan et al., 2021).
3) Exosystems: consist of one or more settings in which the child is not an active participant, and with which the child has no interactions, but which can still influence the child indirectly. These include mass media, the school board and its policies, parents' place of employment, and parents' friends. For example, mass media can reinforce homophobic attitudes, which can result in homophobic bullying (Hong & Garbarino, 2012), while positive portrayals of gay people can lead to more positive attitudes (Schiappa et al., 2006).

Figure 1.1

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Model



Note. The ecological systems model consists of five types of systems that engulf the developing child like nesting dolls. The names of the five types of systems are seen at the top of the model, examples of the systems are in italics at the bottom of the model.

4) Macrosystem: is the collection of broader systems like culturally based belief systems, economic system and the political systems in society. These systems influence the child's daily life through laws, values, policies, and customs. For example, in 2012 the Dutch government made an addition to the mandatory curriculum: all primary and secondary school pupils are to learn to respectfully interact with diversity within society, including sexual diversity (Bron et al., 2015).
5) Chronosystem: encompasses the role that time plays in the development of the child, both in the aging of the child as through the historical eras and zeitgeist. For instance, children's stereotypical attitudes typically become more flexible with age, as their cognitive skills develop (Liben & Bigler, 2002). On a historical scale, premarital and casual sex have become more acceptable over time for both men and women in countries with high levels of gender equality, while women are judged more harshly for this behavior in other countries (Endendijk et al., 2020; Wouters, 2013).

As reflected by the examples given for each of the systems, there is support for the constructivist-ecological perspective on the development of multiple kinds of intergroup bias and stereotypes (Bigler & Patterson, 2017; Liben, 2017).

Social cognitive learning theory

Social cognitive learning theory offers a second explanation on how biased attitudes are transmitted and how subsequent behaviors and socio-psychological characteristics are influenced. Social cognitive learning theory was first introduced by Albert Bandura (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). In social cognitive learning theory, three socio-cognitive modes of influence are distinguished that bolster the development of learning in general, and of biased attitudes specifically (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Firstly, through

direct tuition, in which (biased) ideas and meaning are explicitly taught. Secondly, through modeling, in which the individual models their behavior after a (role) model. Like the constructivist-ecological perspective, social cognitive learning theory places emphasis on the idea that learning is informed by social interaction. According to this theory, individuals learn by observing and imitating the behavior of others (Bandura, 1977, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1963; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). The third socio-cognitive mode of influence on the development of biased attitudes is enactive experience. This entails observing the social reinforcement and social sanctions that follow from specific behavior. When certain behavior is met with disapproval, this discourages the individual to repeat said behavior. Not just actual reinforcement and punishment promote and discourage certain behaviors, expected reinforcement and punishment are also encouraging and discouraging respectively (Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Positive reinforcement can also be given simply by the presence of certain things, and the absence of others. For example, infants show gendered preferences for toys, according to the presence of the types of toys in their home (Boe & Woods, 2018). In classrooms, social sanctions have been found to be gender-differentiated, with boys receiving reinforcement for academic success and sanctions for misbehavior, while girls receive praise for tidiness and compliance, and sanctions for academic failure (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). This leads to differences in self-efficacy, sense of agency, and competencies, as well constraints on career aspirations. These negative effects have been found to be stronger for ethnic minority girls.

Social role theory

In his work on the ecological model, Bronfenbrenner discussed social roles (1979). He defined social roles as the “activities and relations expected of a person occupying a particular position in society (p. 85).” For instance, the activity expected of a primary school teacher is to teach, and the expected relation is with primary school pupils. According to

Bronfenbrenner, social roles are differentiated not just by occupation, but also by various other characteristics, such as sex/gender, age, social status, ethnicity, and religion. By interacting with people in various social roles, human development is facilitated. In the following decade, social role theory was developed with the aim to understand sex/gender differences and similarities in social behavior (Eagly et al., 2000). Later, social role theory was also used to examine other social roles (Koenig & Eagly, 2014), making the connection with Bronfenbrenner's definition stronger. According to social role theory, prejudice and biased attitudes originate in the uneven representation of specific social groups in specific social roles (Eagly et al., 2000; Eagly & Wood, 1999; Koenig & Eagly, 2014; Morgenroth & Ryan, 2018). People enact certain behaviors within their social roles, and when specific social groups are overrepresented in certain roles, this affects the traits that are assumed to be characteristic of these groups (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). For instance, there is a widespread division of labor, with women doing more unpaid labor in the home, while men do more paid work outside of the home (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022a; Petersen & Hyde, 2010). Because of this, women and girls are more involved in home-making roles, in which they learn skills like cooking and taking care of children (Eagly et al., 2000). Simultaneously, men and boys acquire more skills that are rewarded in paid occupations. The division of labor is an important facet of gender-based stereotypes, which positions men as breadwinners and women as homemakers. Other important facets of gender based bias include the idea that men are expected to be dominant, assertive, independent, and leaders, whereas women should be submissive, caring, kind, considerate, helpful, and nurturing (Eagly et al., 2000; Endendijk et al., 2020). Social roles related to gender can also concern specific traits that are important in school. For instance, girls are often positioned as well behaved and diligent, and boys as more disruptive (Glock & Klapproth, 2017; Myhill & Jones, 2006; Timmermans et al., 2016, 2018). Teachers are more tolerant to disruptive boys than they are to girls (Musto, 2019). Children are aware

of these assumed traits, and perceive that their teachers expect trait related behaviors from them (Myhill & Jones, 2006).

Social role theory also alludes to the idea that all social behavior is in a sense scripted and performed, explained further in social script theory (Wiederman, 2005, 2015; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Shared meanings, beliefs, and values exist within social groups. Together, they construct an interpretation of reality, metaphorical social scripts, which are internalized and enacted by the individual members of the social group (Simon & Gagnon, 1984, 1986), not unlike actors who perform scripts on stage (Wiederman, 2005). Social scripts operate on three different levels. Firstly, there are cultural scripts. These are collective, broad, and general social norms, which are often conveyed by cultural institutions like mass media, politics, governments, laws, policies, education, and religion (Wiederman, 2015), comparable to the exo- and macrosystems in the ecological model by Bronfenbrenner. For instance, religious messages in the Bible, which are further conveyed by Christian political parties, prescribe that men and women have distinct gendered roles: a man should be the breadwinner and head of the household, while a woman should be a caring and nurturing mother and homemaker. The performance of virtually every social role has to adhere at least to some extent to the appropriate cultural scripts (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). Cultural scripts are often rather abstract, and it is quite possible that a cultural script is incongruent with a concrete situation (Simon & Gagnon, 1984). To resolve this incongruence, and to allow social actors to participate in social interactions, interpersonal scripts are used. This second level of scripts concerns the adaptation of cultural scripts within social interaction (Wiederman, 2015). The idea of adaptation is comparable to the constructivist idea of assimilation (Piaget, 1954). For example, a parent may be aware of certain cultural scripts, like "women are well suited to be home-makers", and adapt this script in child rearing by giving their daughter dolls and miniature household appliances to play with. In this context, the interpersonal script is how the child is provided with tools

that symbolize women in the role of homemaker. This can be further reinforced by social interactions with their parents, who adapt and adhere to the cultural scripts of gendered social roles. Lastly, the third level of social scripts are intrapsychic social scripts. These are social scripts at the most personal level, which include fantasies, mental rehearsals, desires, and memories (Wiederman, 2015). Intrapsychic social scripts exist on the most personal level; they connect social meanings to individual desires and ideas (Simon & Gagnon, 1984), similar to the constructivist idea of accommodation (Piaget, 1954). These intrapsychic scripts could include the make believe play, fantasies, and drawings of a girl, who imagines herself being a mother and a homemaker, her desire to fulfil those roles when she grows up, and her memories of her own mother in those roles (see Figure 1.2). Thus, the three levels of social scripts are dynamically interrelated and constantly co-act in behavior and social interaction.

People incorporate their social roles into their identity (Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Because of this, social roles have a considerable influence on human behavior (Eagly & Wood, 1999). Adherence to prescribed social scripts and roles is important, as people are judged on how well they conform to these scripts and roles (Zaikman & Marks, 2017).

Conformity leads to praise and positive evaluations, while violation leads to penalization and negative evaluations. Through these positive and negative consequences of the adherence or rejection of prescribed social roles, gender bias and stereotypes are reinforced and perpetuated. People who belong to a high-status group are inclined to be more rigid in guarding the boundaries of their group (Leaper, 2015). In many (patriarchal) societies, men are valued higher than women, and consequently gender roles are more rigid for men and boys than they are for women and girls (Leaper, 2015; Leaper & Brown, 2018). For girls, adhering to prescribed gender roles also means devaluing their own gender (Duveen, 1996). For example, stereotypical gender roles prescribe

Figure 1.2

Intrapsychic Script: Drawing of a Young Girl's Wish to Become a Mother

Note. This drawing represents an intrapsychic script: the wish and fantasy of a young girl to become a mother when she grows up. I made this drawing in 1994 (age 6 years) in response to the question "What do you want to be when you grow up?" The teacher wrote down my answer to the question at the bottom: "I want to become a mother and nothing else!" At the top of the image, I drew a bassinet, to represent a baby. I drew a man on the left, my future husband, wearing a tie as he works in an office. I drew myself with substantial breasts, something I saw as a necessity for being a mother.

that girls should prioritize being sexy and attractive to boys, which is perceived to be incompatible with being intelligent and performing well in school (A. A. Nelson & Brown, 2019). Therefore, gender roles are more flexible and non-conforming behavior is more acceptable for girls than for boys (Leaper & Brown, 2018).

While social role theory has mainly been used to investigate gender-based bias and prejudice (Zaikman & Marks, 2017), research has shown that the theory also applies in other contexts, like ethnicity, body type, and sexual orientation (Koenig & Eagly, 2014).

Socialization Agents

A concept binding social role theory, the constructivist-ecological perspective, and social cognitive learning theory are socialization agents (also: socializing agents, agents of socialization). In society, there are various socialization agents, people and entities that instruct, model, and through praise and penalties show which behaviors are appropriate and which are not (Bandura, 1986). Important socialization agents include the media, cultural and governmental institutions, schools, peers, and parents (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; C. Connell & Elliott, 2009; Endendijk et al., 2022; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). These agents are situated in the cultural and interpersonal social scripts of social role theory (Wiederman, 2015), and exist within the various systems in the ecological model of Bronfenbrenner (see Figure 1.1). In my dissertation, I will focus on three different socializing agents: parents, teachers, and media in Chapters 3, 4, and 5 respectively.

Parents

From the constructivist-ecological perspective, and both within social cognitive learning theory and social role theory, parents are seen as largely influential on their offspring. When parents raise their children, they teach them many types of essential cognitions and skills. Especially from infancy to early adolescence (0-12 years), parents are very important

agents of socialization. They play a large part in children's development through direct modeling, instruction, praise, and discouragement (Astle & Anders, 2022; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). During this process, parents have been found to shape the gender attitudes of their children (Kågesten et al., 2016). This often happens through implicit processes. From birth (and possibly prenatally as well) parents show differences in their behaviors towards boys and girls. Even when there are no physical differences between boys and girls in their size and their activity, parents have gendered perceptions of newborn girls being more fragile, softer, and finer featured than newborn boys (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Parents vary and adjust their body movements, the way they touch, vocalize, and make facial expressions according to the gender of their infant (Fausto-Sterling, 2012). More explicitly, gender differentiation and bias can be transmitted through the physical appearance and environment of babies, which are adjusted according to their gender. Parents dress boys and girls differently, style their hair differently, decorate their rooms differently, and buy different toys for sons than for daughters (Brown & Stone, 2018; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Parents have different rules for sons than for daughters (Axinn et al., 2011; Endendijk et al., 2022), and may directly formulate differential gendered expectations, or show their bias through emotional responses (Astle & Anders, 2022). In similar processes, parents have been shown to transfer other types of attitudes and bias to their children, like intergroup/ethnic bias (Bigler & Liben, 2006; Bigler & Patterson, 2017; Degner & Dalege, 2013; Levy & Hughes, 2009), and political attitudes (Torney-Purta, 2006). Because of their crucial role in the socialization of children, parents are central in developmental psychological research.

Teachers

Like parents, teachers socialize through (differential) instruction, modeling, praise, and punishment (Bandura, 1977; Bussey & Bandura, 1999). There are various socializing practices that are quite unique to the

position of the teacher. Teachers of course use instruction on a daily basis as a socio-cognitive mode of influence on the development of children. Other socializing practices that are mostly reserved to teachers include giving turns in a classroom setting, grading, writing evaluations, giving (extra) homework, and dividing children into groups. Teacher bias has been found in many of these practices (see for instance, Bašaragin & Savic, 2019; Bassi et al., 2016; Denessen et al., 2020; Frawley, 2005; Kågesten et al., 2016; Mason et al., 2014; Voyer & Voyer, 2014; Wang et al., 2018). Teachers shape biased attitudes of pupils. For instance, teachers reinforce stereotypical gender norms by pardoning the bullying of girls by boys, and regarding it as a form of heterosexual attraction (Kågesten et al., 2016). Teachers have also been found to actively exclude girls from sports that promote male-typed qualities like toughness, aggression, and competitiveness, while boys who do not conform to these qualities are stigmatized. Teachers' interethnic prejudice has been found to put refugee children at higher risk of peer violence, and to be negatively linked to inter-ethnic social contact (Alan et al., 2021).

The differential treatment of pupils fueled by teacher bias also has impact on various other pupil outcomes like achievement, self-efficacy, and motivation (Denessen et al., 2020; Gentrup et al., 2020; Jussim, 2009; Wang et al., 2018). The importance of investigating biased socialization by teachers therefore is important even when their pupils do not adopt and internalize the same bias as their teachers.

Media

In media portrayals, bias and stereotypes can often be found. For example, in newspaper articles, White men in politics are most often described by their political ideology, while for other politicians aspects of their identity are often emphasized, like their gender identity and ethnic background (Runderkamp et al., 2022). By stressing these identities, the media implicitly conveys the message that women and people belonging to ethnic minority groups defy the norm and are out of place in politics.

Other examples of bias in media include magazines aimed at adolescents that perpetuate gender stereotypes (Joshi et al., 2011), heteronormative television shows (Aubrey et al., 2020), sexist music videos (Endendijk et al., 2022), children's TV shows and advertisements that portray strongly gender stereotyped behaviors (Brown & Stone, 2018; Coyne et al., 2014, 2016; Walsh & Leaper, 2020), and the way in which Black people are more likely to be depicted as criminals, unemployed, or working in lower status jobs than White people (Signorielli, 2009). Through these types of bias in media, social roles are conveyed and modeled, which could affect the media consumer's own attitudes and behavior (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). For instance, in news media, crime is overrepresented, and specific groups like ethnic minorities, men, and juveniles are overrepresented as (potential) criminals, which can lead to negative attitudes towards these groups (Arendt & Northup, 2015; Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007; Popović, 2018a; Windzio & Kleimann, 2009). Specific forms of crimes are notably overrepresented, like child sexual abuse (Grosholz & Kubrin, 2007; Hove et al., 2013). Especially cases that are particularly abhorrent, for instance because there is a large number of victims or because the victims are exceptionally young, result in spikes of media attention, with emphasis on the perpetrator, who is almost always male (Cromer & Goldsmith, 2010a; Hove et al., 2013; Popović, 2018b; Weatherred, 2015, 2017).

A specific case of how the media possibly negatively affects gendered attitudes is the case of male early childcare professionals. Men in early childcare are quite rare. For instance, according to the most recent data, in the Netherlands only 12% of early childcare professionals are male (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022b). Early childcare professions are seen as traditionally feminine roles, particularly due to the physical contact that is involved in working with very young children (Eidevald et al., 2018). This is reflected in the media portrayal of girls and women as nurturing and caring, while men and boys are far less likely to be portrayed as such (Steyer, 2014). These gender roles and the status of child care professions as feminine are in itself reason for many men not to work

in early childcare (Rolfe, 2006). Additionally, men working in early childcare can be exposed to the risk of being seen as a (potential) pedophile or abuser, as them working with and touching children can be seen as unnatural (Eidevald et al., 2018). Men working as early childcare professionals can lead to parental concern and suspicion, exactly because they are somewhat of a novelty (Rentzou, 2011). Some studies have additionally theorized that media attention to child sexual abuse may lead to negative attitudes towards male (early) childcare professionals (Eidevald et al., 2018; Fahmy & Ibrahim, 2022; Munk et al., 2013; Rentzou, 2011). In Chapter 5, I will present a study on this topic.

While many studies have focused on the biased content of mass media, less attention has been paid to the possible impact of this content (Mutz & Goldman, 2010). There is consensus that media affect attitudes, but views differ to what extent and in what way (Easteal et al., 2015). Some studies have shown longitudinal effects of media consumption on attitudes and social-emotional behaviors (Arendt & Northup, 2015; Coyne et al., 2014, 2016; Schiappa et al., 2006; Slater, 2007). For instance, boys who watch superhero programs that contain strong masculine gender stereotypes, show more male gender stereotyped play (Coyne et al., 2014). Likewise, children who watch princess programs that contain strong feminine gender stereotypes, show more female gender-stereotypical behavior a year later (Coyne et al., 2016). However, a few years later, this effect is no longer present (Coyne et al., 2021). Similarly, other studies show no proof for longitudinal effects (Breuer et al., 2015; Shi et al., 2018), or longitudinal effects for negative bias towards some social groups but not towards others (Tukachinsky et al., 2017). Because of these conflicting results, studying the (longitudinal) effects of media as a socializing agent of bias remains important. The effect of media attention to child sexual abuse on attitudes towards male childcare professionals has not been investigated yet. As the media attention on child sexual abuse is capricious, with stark peaks (Weatherred, 2017), this may be especially interesting.

Subtle bias: does it really matter?

When my paternal grandfather was born in 1918, women did not yet have the right to vote, nor did the inhabitants of the Dutch overseas territories. When my paternal grandparents married in 1942, my grandmother lost her legal capacity (*juridische handelingsbekwaamheid*), meaning that she could not sign a contract, open a bank account, or make decisions independently on how she wanted to rear her children. Both my paternal and maternal grandparents belonged to the working class, which meant that they only received a primary school education. Any further education was beyond their means. It should be mentioned that unlike my maternal grandmother, my maternal granduncles did receive further education. My greatgrandparents decided that their small funds were better spent on the education of their sons than on the education of their daughter. Over the past century, many of these types of social inequalities have shrunk considerably (Liben, 2016). However, biases rooted in mechanisms such as sexism and classism persist and are still expressed, albeit in different and often more subtle ways (Dovidio et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Leaper & Brown, 2018). For example, bias can be expressed by differential treatment through eye contact, smiling, tone of voice (İnan-Kaya & Rubie-Davies, 2021), exclusionary discipline, and name mispronunciations (Childs & Wooten, 2023). These types of subtle forms of discrimination are also known as microaggressions. Microaggressions are subtle, low-intensity incidents, that express discrimination or hostility towards marginalized or underrepresented groups, like ethnic minority groups and members of the LGBTIQ+ community (Byers et al., 2020; Ogunyemi et al., 2020). The various types of subtle expressions of bias are often enacted unconsciously or unintentionally (Jones et al., 2016). Expressions in spoken and written language, including linguistic abstraction and word use, constitute one field in which subtle forms of bias are studied (Beukeboom, 2014; Biernat et al., 2012; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017; Rojek et al., 2019).

Attention to biased and discriminatory language regularly meets mocking or even hostile reactions (Murray, 2018). In contemporary media and online discourse many people are of the opinion that tackling issues of potentially biased or offending language is unimportant or even unworthy of attention. People who do bring such issues to attention are seen as too sensitive and too easily offended (Murray, 2018). Another common response, for instance voiced by politicians, is that there are bigger, more important problems to focus on (Lowrie, 2018; Van der Aa, 2023). Likewise, acknowledging bias in language, opting for more inclusive language, and investigating more subtle forms of biased expressions has been met with intense discussions as well as resistance in academia (see for instance Funnekotter, 2021; Hofhuis & Pas, 2021; Natri et al., 2023; Özdil, 2014; Singer et al., 2023; Veldhuis & Weeda, 2022).

This begs the question: do these types of subtle bias matter? Most people oppose overt forms of discrimination, which can be defined as differential and unfair treatment of members of specific social groups, with observable negative outcomes (Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). Examples of overt discrimination include denying a person a promotion, position, education or housing because of their social characteristics, like their gender identity or ethnicity. Overt forms of discrimination have become quite rare, are largely considered unacceptable, and are unlawful in many cases (Dovidio et al., 2016; Jones et al., 2016; Van Laer & Janssens, 2011). Explicit attitudes towards groups that have traditionally been marginalized have in general become much more positive (Dovidio et al., 2016). In polling research, many people indicate that emancipation has come far enough (Kanne & van der Schelde, 2022). So is studying these subtle types of bias and discrimination a worthwhile endeavor, or should we be satisfied with how far we have come and focus on other topics?

There are several arguments to be made in favor of the continued study of bias. Firstly, research shows that, perhaps counterintuitively, subtle forms of discrimination have comparable adverse effects to overt discrimination (Jones et al., 2016). These adverse effects include negative

psychological health, physical health, and work-related outcomes. Thus researching subtle forms of discrimination is important for the sake of its victims. Secondly, due to its subtle and often implicit and unintentional nature, subtle bias is harder to recognize and to change (Dovidio et al., 2016). By investigating and documenting subtle forms of bias, we can contribute to awareness of contemporary biases, especially when they evolve into phenomena that are more elusive. Investigating contemporary biases therefore demands a critical lens when choosing research instruments, and perhaps demands improved or new methodologies.

Practical significance

In research into the effects of gender and ethnicity on (subtle) socialization practices and outcomes, it is not uncommon to find mainly or only small effects (see for instance Gentrup et al., 2020; Menegatti et al., 2017; Mertens et al., 2019; Miller, 2012). Like the question whether subtle forms of bias are important, this may lead to the question whether small effects are relevant. To answer this question, it is first necessary to understand what constitutes a small effect.

In quantitative research, statistical analysis is employed to investigate whether certain characteristics, conditions, or treatments have an effect on a dependent variable. For a long time, there has been a heavy emphasis on significance testing in quantitative research in the social and behavioral sciences (American Psychological Association, 2020; Cohen, 1994; Hyde, 2001; Keppel, 1991). This entails the calculation of the probability that any effect in a study was found by chance or coincidence. This probability is represented by the *p*-value, and usually it is agreed that when the *p*-value is lower than .05, it can be ruled out that the effect found was based on chance (Kirk, 1996). The *p*-value represents the statistical significance of a test and is affected by sample size. When we investigate a hypothesized effect among a larger sample, the chance of finding the effect is higher. However, the *p*-value only tells us what the probability is

of an effect being present, it does not inform us about the strength of an effect (Fritz et al., 2012). To measure the strength of an effect, several effect sizes exist. Over the past two decades, scientific attention to the importance of reporting effect sizes had increased (Alhija & Levy, 2009; Fritz et al., 2012; Peng et al., 2013; Sun et al., 2006; Zhou & Skidmore, 2017). Contrary to statistical significance, effect sizes are not dependent on sample size (Levine & Hullett, 2002). Effect sizes help us understand the impact of the treatment, condition, or characteristic that we investigate. Because of this, effect sizes have been called measures of *practical* significance (Ellis, 2010; Kirk, 1996). It is possible to find a difference between two groups, for instance men and women, which is statistically but not practically significant. For example, imagine we examine one million people who make a standardized language test, and men make significantly more mistakes than women do. However, the difference in mistakes is so small that this does not result in a difference between the grades men and women receive. While the difference is significant statistically, it is not a meaningful difference. Vice versa, it is possible that we find a quite large effect size when investigating a small number of people, but the effect is not statistically significant. This indicates that a bigger sample size is needed to reach statistical significance (Fritz et al., 2012).

This may lead to thinking that the larger the effect size, the better, but this is not quite true. Small effects are actually rather common in social and behavioral research, as the investigated issues are often subtle (Cohen, 1988). Large effects are often already well-known, so further verification and investigation is often not scientifically interesting and could be a waste of resources (Keppel & Wickens, 2004). Conversely, small effects can be much more interesting than large ones for several reasons. Firstly, a small effect can still have great real-life consequences (Maxwell et al., 2018), especially when many people are affected by it. For instance, a small negative effect on ethnic bias among police officers in a city the size of New York, could result in a decrease of thousands of Black people

being ethnically profiled (Greenwald et al., 2015). Secondly, small effects may accumulate, leading to larger effects (Greenwald et al., 2015; Jones et al., 2016; Prentice & Miller, 1992). For instance, research into the effects of (biased) teacher expectations on the learning opportunities and achievements of, and interactions with pupils reveals only small effects, but the accumulative effects have widened the achievement gaps between specific groups of pupils (Rubie-Davies, 2015). Thirdly, small effects may be important in providing a decision between competing theoretical explanations (Keppel, 1991), like whether gender differentiation can be explained by evolutionary or biosocial theory (Endendijk et al., 2020; Zaikman & Marks, 2017). Lastly, when an effect is tested under inopportune or tough circumstances and a small effect is found, it shows that an effect is pervasive (Prentice & Miller, 1992). However, it should be noted that it is important that the right effect size is chosen and that the calculation of effect sizes is done correctly. Research has shown that this often is not the case (Peng et al., 2013; Zhou & Skidmore, 2017).

Dutch context

It is important to discuss the larger cultural/national context in which the studies in my dissertation took place. As explained by Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (1979; see Figure 1.1), socialization is embedded in various social structures. The way in which bias plays a role differs between national societies and cultural groups. Below, I give a brief description of how gender and ethnicity play a role in Dutch society.

Gender

On various international indices for gender equality, the Netherlands rank high (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022a). Compared to most other countries, women often do paid work. Dutch men and women attain a comparable high level of education, and have relatively equal political power (although women still form less than 40% of parliament; The Economist, 2022). In other aspects, the Dutch do less well. While political

power is shared relatively equally, the Netherlands has never had a female prime minister. The gender pay gap in the Netherlands is still relatively large and men take up way more leadership positions than women (World Economic Forum, 2021). Contributing to the fact that the Netherlands has the highest rate of women working part-time worldwide, is that, compared to other OECD countries, maternity leave is short in the Netherlands, and child-care costs are high (The Economist, 2022). Additionally, are women more often in occupations in which working fulltime is difficult due to irregular shifts and scheduling issues, like home care and childcare (Daub, 2022; UWV, 2020). This division of labor is striking. While being overrepresented in occupations involving (health) care and children aged 0-12 years, Dutch women are greatly underrepresented in occupations related to science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM; Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022a). This division is reflected in school choices of Dutch students.

Although Dutch men and women share household tasks and care responsibilities more equally compared to people in other countries (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022a), women spend more hours each week on these tasks than men (Kanne & van der Schelde, 2022). Even when men indicate that they find it important to share care for their children equally, they generally spend over 10 hours per week less on care for their children than women. While Dutch men and women indicate that they find gender equality important and see themselves as emancipated, they simultaneously endorse traditional gender roles, indicate that they do not want to emancipate any further, and especially men have negative attitudes towards feminism (Kanne & van der Schelde, 2022).

Ethnicity

In the Netherlands, there are high levels of ethnic and racial segregation, both geographically and educationally (Boterman et al., 2019; Hondius, 2009). Racist and Islamophobic practices can been found in many facets of Dutch society, like classrooms (Weiner, 2015, 2016), newspapers

(Runderkamp et al., 2022), television broadcasts, and in political campaigns (Welten & Abbas, 2022). There are various social movements that (for example) make efforts to bring attention to the colonial history and present of the Netherlands, address inequalities in the educational system and on the labor market, as well as protests against ethnically biased police brutality and the use of Black caricatures in Dutch festivities (Rose, 2022). There are also various examples of recent institutional racism in the Netherlands. After controlling for several demographic characteristics, parents from ethnic minority groups are at much higher risk to have their children placed in out-of-home care by court order than White Dutch parents (Dutch Central Bureau of Statistics, 2022c). In the so-called *Toeslagenaffaire*, parents were unlawfully targeted based on their ethnicity by tax authorities with false allegations of fraud with childcare benefits (Van der Bunt & Verheul, 2022). In a report published in late 2022, it was revealed that there is pervasive institutional racism at the Dutch ministry of Foreign Affairs (NOS, 2022). For example, employees of the ministry reported that the n-word is used to address Black people, as well as words like 'apes'. African countries have been described as 'monkey-countries' by employees of departments aimed at foreign aid. Specific cultural backgrounds were connected to being lazy and criminal. Employees indicated that supervisors rarely intervened in these types of situations.

While there are many examples of how ethnic bias plays a serious role in Dutch society, and Dutch people indicate that they find ethnic equality important (Kanne & van der Schelde, 2022), there is a large tendency to refuse to acknowledge race and racial discrimination (Wekker, 2016). The Dutch often position themselves not just as very tolerant, but also as 'colorblind', indicating that race and skin color are so unimportant that they do not even see it (Hondius, 2009; Özdil, 2014; Rose, 2022; Weiner, 2016). This is for instance reflected in the belief that the Dutch school system is meritocratic and that ethnicity is unimportant in the attainment of success (Stevens et al., 2019; Weiner, 2015). This attitude of

White Dutch people towards ethnic bias appears to follow the same pattern as the attitude towards gender equality: they find it important, but many feel like the final destination has been reached and improvement is no longer required. Research into the remaining structures of gender- and ethnicity-based inequalities therefore remains very important. Academia can play a pivotal role into uncovering bias that society refuses to see.

Aim and outline of the dissertation

The general aim of my dissertation is to provide insight into subtle forms of bias in socialization by various socializing agents, and exploring novel ways to document bias. In **Chapter 2,** we present a tutorial on understanding and calculating effect sizes in the context of the analysis of variance. As my dissertation focuses on a research area that is characterized by small and subtle effects, calculating correct and unbiased effect sizes is important. The tutorial is subsequently used to calculate effect sizes in Chapters 4 and 5. In **Chapter 3,** parents of 15- and 17-year old adolescents are the socializing agents of interest. We examine the responses of parents to adolescents who engage in multiple romantic relationships and kissing a stranger. Men are often praised while women are penalized when engaging in the same sexual behavior. This differential way in which men and women are treated for sexual behavior is called the sexual double standard. However, what gendered messages parents convey when talking about sexual behavior has rarely been studied. We use content analysis to investigate whether the sexual double standard is present in parents' responses. In **Chapter 4,** we study teachers as socializing agents. We analyze what teachers write on the school reports of primary school pupils in grade 6-8. We focus on three aspects: 1) the proportion of positive and negative remarks, 2) whether the remarks evaluate school work or other pupil aspects like behavior and character traits, and 3) the linguistic categories of the remarks. We examine whether differences exist between boys and girls, and between

pupils from the ethnic majority and pupils from ethnic minority groups. In **Chapter 5,** we investigate the media and their role as socializing agents. We examine the attention to a big child sexual abuse story with a male perpetrator in the media, and the influence of this attention on parents' attitude towards hiring a male babysitter over the course of four years. We investigate whether parents of 1- to 7-year old children become more negative towards hiring a male babysitter after prolonged attention to a male perpetrator of child sexual abuse, and whether this differs between fathers and mothers. Finally, in **Chapter 6,** a general discussion of this dissertation is presented, describing the main findings, limitations, implications, and future directions of the research.