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Peculiarities of young people's gender awareness in contemporary Kazakh society

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Abstract

Relevance. The relevance of the study in the field of youth gender awareness in the current conditions of Kazakhstan is conditioned by the fact that providing gender education and conducting gender policy is an important tool for the development of gender equality for any state in the world.

Purpose. The objectives of the study include the investigation of the institution of gender awareness and its key components in the form of characteristics and features of functioning, analysis of the features of gender identity in the structure of self-concept among young people, and the study of modern approaches of the authors to the definition of gender identity.

Methodology. The main methodological approaches used in the study include the theoretical methodological approach, the functional methodological approach, logical analysis, sociological analysis, deduction, etc.

Results. The study revealed that there is currently ambiguity and unformed attitudes among young people regarding their distribution in marital roles; identified factors of self-concept development that serve as components of gender identity, and developed a model of gender identity in the structure of self-concept among young people; highlighted the main gender stereotypes that influence youth and may serve as a problem in their perception of gender identity.

Conclusions. The gender policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan in relation to the formation of teacher education on defining one's gender identity was analysed; appropriate recommendations for implementation in the gender policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan were developed to increase efficiency and avoid possible problems.

Keywords: gender identity; gender policy; gender socialisation; legal protection; educational environment.

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Introduction

Nowadays, there is a fairly large number of studies in psychology that are devoted to the examination of the phenomenon of personality self-awareness. They note that it has a considerable number of aspects, types and structural components. The relevance of the studies in the field of the phenomenon of individual self-awareness is conditioned by the fact that it is necessary for studying the formation of a person's life position and for a better understanding of self-awareness in general. First of all, the main condition for the formation of self-awareness is the distinction between the content of self-concept and "self-image". At the same time, two components of "self-image" are distinguished: the integrating one, which includes knowledge about one's own personality, inherent characteristics and properties, unites a person with other people, and the differentiating one, which is based on knowledge about one's own personality, inherent characteristics and properties, but which also distinguishes a person from other people [1]. Considering a different approach, "self-image" and self-concept are formed as a consequence of the subject's activities for common reasons [2]. Thus, three levels are distinguished, which differ in the degree of generalisation. The first level is the least general formation of the structure. It consists of the readiness and the level to implement specific actions in relation to one's own personality. The second level is based on a more general level of self-concept, which includes respect for one's own personality, interest and self-sympathy. The third level consists of a global self-concept, which is carried out through an undifferentiated sense of the pros and cons of one's own self.

In other words, it denotes that self-concept has a cognitive and an emotional component of aspects. The gender self-awareness phenomenon is a three-dimensional formation that includes affective, cognitive and conative components. The cognitive component refers to perceptions of the femininity and masculinity of the self in its various manifestations; the affective component refers to emotional experience of various manifestations of the self; the conative component refers to the actual behaviour of the individual as manifested in his or her gender position [3]. The subject of young people's gender awareness is particularly relevant in today's context. The principles of individualisation and exposure of young people to socio-cultural norms, family traditions, the traditions of society and the state, entail the inclusion of a gender component in the development of gender education among youth [4]. Currently, there are a number of problems that can have a negative impact on the development of gender awareness among young people. These problematic aspects include the destruction of traditional stereotypes of male and female behaviour, parental incompetence in conducting gender education, and the lack of gender education among young people in educational settings [5; 6].

Therefore, based on the above, the key objectives of the study are a detailed investigation of the institution of gender awareness, which includes a study of this concept, its characteristics and features, and the principles of implementing this mechanism; the study of the self-concept and the formation of this model based on the principles of its functioning; the development of a gender programme aimed at improving the quality of gender

awareness among young people. Key recommendations for making this sector more effective include developing gender competence among parents and teachers through the provision of special education, developing youth representatives' understanding of themselves and others as physical and social persons who have flaws and strengths, individual and typical characteristics, and developing a gender education programme among youth representatives to improve their understanding of gender awareness.

Materials and Methods

The study in the field of gender identity among young people in contemporary Kazakhstani society was carried out using methodological approaches that reveal the theoretical and practical nature of the study object. The importance of using a theoretical methodological approach is conditioned by the fact that it provides an opportunity to study the institution of gender awareness in general. This includes the disclosure of this concept, the identification of its specific features and characteristics of its functioning. The logical analysis method enables an analysis of gender stereotypes and ideals. This will provide an assessment of young people's commitment to a certain type of attitude in modern society. As a result of the functional methodological approach, the formation of gender attitudes towards marital roles among young people can be noted. The sociological analysis method helps to analyse the self-concept, namely the factors of its development that contribute to the formation of gender identity among young people. The structural methodological approach provides an opportunity to build a model of gender identity in the structure of self-concept among young people.

The systematic analysis method enables an analysis of the role of gender stereotypes as a factor in the formation of gender identity among the representatives of Kazakhstani youth. When determining the importance of using statistical analysis, its role is conditioned by determining the indicator of androgyny, masculinity and femininity among young people in Kazakhstan and providing certain statistics of a sociological survey. Psychological analysis can be used to explore the gender identity crisis, which is a problem in the development of gender awareness among Kazakhstani youth. Induction provides an opportunity to characterise the institution of gender awareness as a whole based on the considered features and characteristics of the functioning of its constituent elements; deduction provides an opportunity to consider the characteristic constituent elements through the study of this institution. Synthesis provides an opportunity to identify the theoretical and practical elements that will enable this institution to be characterised in relation to its specific features in Kazakhstan. It will also highlight recommendations that will contribute to the development of gender policy and increase the effectiveness of gender awareness among Kazakhstani youth.

Thus, this study will be conducted in several stages. The first stage is focused on the theoretical component of the study object. It is based on the study of the gender identity concept, highlighting its characteristics and peculiarities of its functioning, particularly in the territory of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The second stage involves a study of the index of muscularity, femininity and

androgyny among young people in Kazakhstan; the self-concept, which is a factor in the formation of gender identity among youth, was investigated; and a self-concept model was developed for the more detailed analysis of gender awareness. The third stage of the study presents an opportunity to conduct sociological surveys on indicators of gender awareness among young people; recommendations have been developed that have an impact on gender policy and, in turn, on increasing gender awareness among Kazakhstani youth.

Results and Discussion

The institution of gender and its gender awareness component

The issue of gender education in today's context is more relevant than ever. In general, conceptually, human sexuality can be divided into two aspects: the biological, which is referred to by the term "sex", and the social, which is referred to by "gender". The term "gender" should not only refer to individual cognitive perceptions of one's own gender and socio-cultural representations of biological sex. It should also refer to those components of female and male existence that have traditionally been considered as biological [7]. Thus, the term "sex" should be reserved for reproductive function only, and "gender" should be understood to refer to any manifestations of gender that are not related to reproductive activity. In general, gender contains two components, namely cognitive, emotional and behavioural ones. The cognitive components include gender awareness, the emotional ones – gender identity, and the behavioural ones – the subject's behavioural traits and gender role [8]. Gender self-awareness consists of being aware of one's body as a person of a particular gender, being aware of one's identity and life path as a person of a particular gender, having ideas about gender stereotypes and roles, and being aware of one's own identity according to gender perceptions, stereotypes, roles, etc.

Gender identity, on the other hand, should be defined as an aspect of self-consciousness that describes one's experience of a particular gender. Gender identity also encompasses certain areas. These include self-definition as categories of femininity and masculinity, the subjects' goals and values, the subject's state of identity, the subject's level of development and condition, the subject's degree of maturity, and interactions with others that are gender-influenced [9]. Gender identity begins to form from the moment a person is born. From age 2, the child becomes aware of his or her gender identity; from age 3 to 4, the child begins to form a gender identity based on external appearance; from age 6 to 7, the child finally recognises his or her gender identity and differentiates behaviours and choices of interests for the different genders [10]. The most important stage in the comprehension of one's own gender identity is the adolescent period. This is when gender identity becomes a central element of self-awareness. In adulthood, a person's gender identity comprises an already complexly structured entity that includes awareness of one's own gender, sexual orientation, gender stereotypes, "sexual scripts", and gender preferences [11].

Gender behaviour refers to the relevance of a person's behaviour to certain roles, statuses, values, and norms that are specific to a particular gender. Gender roles are the

differentiation of activities, status, rights, responsibilities of an individual according to his or her gender. This awareness includes the extent to which the qualities are consistent with the expectations and requirements of female and male roles, and the gender preferences of the individual. When analysing gender stereotypes, they should be seen as standardised perceptions of behaviours and their patterns according to femininity and masculinity. In general, masculinity and femininity are two independent constructs. Femininity is the expectation of traditional female behaviour, masculinity is the expectation of traditional male behaviour, and androgyny is the combination of certain male and female psychological traits [12]. The gender identity crisis should also be mentioned. It is defined as a dynamic process reflecting its content in different spaces of being and making it difficult to meet the basic needs of the individual, namely fulfilment, coherence and affirmation. Based on the above, gender identity is one of the basic characteristics of a person. It refers to an aspect of self-awareness that describes a person's experience of themselves as a representative of a particular gender.

Survey of Kazakhstani youth on their gender awareness

To determine gender identity, one should first refer to the measurement of the masculinity-femininity index using the Bem Sex-Role Inventory [13]. This inventory is widely used in sociology to identify how one evaluates oneself according to the 5 gender types. These gender types include pronounced femininity and masculinity, moderate femininity and masculinity, and androgyny. The inventory presented the qualities of masculinity, femininity and androgyny in the form of a simple list, in which the person had to mark those qualities inherent in him or her. S. L. Bem's [13] concept of the androgynous person combines the best qualities of opposing gender role. According to this concept, an androgynous person has a set of gender attributes that are common to both women and men and can easily use these in relation to changing social situations, and can easily find common ground with members of any gender. This term is used to describe the flexibility of gender roles. This trait enables people to express the most appropriate forms of behaviour for various situations. For example, androgynous women and men can be assertive and bossy when it comes to work and career, and at the same time caring with friends and family members. Notably, those with diametrically opposite genders, i.e. women with a high degree of femininity and men with a high degree of masculinity, often find it difficult to establish contact with the opposite sex. This causes gender-based conflicts in the family, at work, in public places, etc.

According to the conception of S. L. Bem [13], typical masculine qualities include analytical mind, strong character, self-confidence, independence, self-sufficiency, ambition, propensity for leadership, aggressiveness, having and asserting one's opinion on all issues. Typical feminine qualities include femininity, compassion, pliability, shyness, friendliness, gullibility, tenderness, caring, etc. Another significant role in the Bem Sex-Role Inventory relates to gender-neutral qualities which are not gender-specific. Such qualities as artistry, jealousy,

truthfulness, luckiness, etc., are inherent to both genders. All the qualities were provided in the form of a list, and the person being tested had to choose only those inherent in him or her. Statistics indicate that the rate of androgyny reaches 88% among girls and 90% among boys [14]. S. L. Bem [13] has argued in her studies that androgynous individuals are more adaptable, have flexible behaviour and creative inclinations. The rate of moderate femininity among girls is as high as 12% and 10% among boys [14]. The rates of strong femininity and masculinity are extremely low. This leads to the conclusion that an androgynous gender type is prevalent among boys, while the rates of moderate masculinity are extremely low. This is caused by the feminisation of men and masculinisation of women, as social attitudes are currently changing. Women are now working on an equal footing with men, they are becoming less compliant and soft; men, in turn, are losing their former position, becoming less masculine, dominant and self-confident.

The fact that the rate of androgyny among girls is quite high could be foreseen, as social attitudes have begun to change significantly in the twenty-first century. In today's society, there are many factors that are mitigating gender inequalities in society. They are changing traditional ideas about gender roles, especially for women: for example, women now have high levels of higher education and this increases their prospects of getting more prestigious and well-paid jobs. This provides women with opportunities for greater individual autonomy, both in personal and family relationships [15-17]. Further investigating the issue of gender stereotypes, a large number of young people adhere to traditional stereotypes of patriarchal thinking. Females see their purpose as "being a woman", which refers to starting a family, having children and raising them, creating comfort at home, being a good wife, etc. However, at the same time, girls also note their need to get a good job, build a career, and find themselves. In other words, girls are still oriented towards building their careers and personal growth. Male representatives also provided their answers to this question. For them, it is important to get a good education, a decent job, the ability to support a family, etc. [14].

The issue of gender ideals among young people is also worth addressing. For this purpose, representatives of different genders among young people should list the weaknesses and strengths they note in their own sex and in the opposite one. Among the positive traits of the female sex, girls note such qualities as intelligence, kindness, beauty, loyalty, openness, purposefulness, self-sufficiency. Among the negative qualities, girls mentioned arrogance, self-love, narcissism, pride, and selfishness. With regard to the male sex, the girls considered purposefulness, athleticism, and masculinity to be positive qualities, and irresponsibility, cowardice, indecision, frivolity, laziness, and rudeness to be negative ones. When providing an assessment of masculinity, the boys highlighted reliability, courage, and determination, while the negatives included irresponsibility and frivolity. In the assessment of the female sex, boys highlighted loyalty, intelligence, beauty, and tenderness as positive aspects, while the negative ones included capriciousness, rudeness, and resentment [14]. The analysis of these results suggests that gender ideals correspond to the gender polarisation of society. This

denotes the differences between males and females that overlap in every aspect of culture. Also, gender ideals have proved to be more resistant to gender education than gender stereotypes.

A large number of androgynous individuals are clearly visible among young people. In other words, female representatives among young people show themselves as carriers of new stereotypes that meet the demands of modernity. For example, this refers to women's perception of their need for social activity outside the marriage-family sphere and their willingness to assume responsibility for their own families [18-20]. However, the fact that modern society reproduces the stereotypes of the past results in certain contradictions. Thus, representatives of the youth believe that in an ideally arranged marriage, the man should be engaged in the material support of the family and himself, and, in turn, the woman – to solve domestic issues, to implement the function of care and concern in the family [21-22]. However, in modern society there is an increase in the number of women who receive higher education and have a desire to have a good job with a high salary in the future, and the opportunity to build a career. This survey in the area of measuring gender ideals and stereotypes has revealed that there are still patriarchal values among young people, but there is a contradiction in measuring masculinity and femininity, as the number of androgynes is quite high. Yet modern society should not expect a change in gender asymmetry any time soon, as young people give preference to patriarchal values and plan their lives according to traditional gender scenarios.

Self-concept as a component of gender awareness

Self-concept as an independent psychological phenomenon is implicitly embedded in another psychological phenomenon, namely self-awareness, which is one of the most important phenomena of the psyche [18]. Currently, there is no conceptual unity in its interpretation. This can be explained by the complexity of self-awareness, the difficulty of generalising and bringing scientific concepts in the field of self-awareness to a common denominator. The phenomenon of self-awareness is a set of mental processes through which an individual becomes aware of himself or herself as an activity subject. Self-awareness is the structure that ensures the definition and development of a person. Self-concept is a personality formation. It enables a person to perceive the influences of the environment, to determine the extent and nature of his or her own activity, which is aimed at mastering the social experience of activity and behaviour. The concept includes cognitive, evaluative and behavioural components.

The cognitive component refers to knowledge about oneself and representation, i.e. the "self-image". Psychologically, it is formed with an emotional attitude towards people and with the expression of one's own will, which acts as a specific need of the child. It includes the "I-real" – what a person really is, the "I-ideal" – what a person should be, the "I-mirror" – how a person is perceived by others, the "I-to-ideal" – how a person strives to get closer to the ideal version of oneself [23]. The evaluative component expresses a person's attitude towards his or her own personality and inherent qualities. This is manifested in the form of an immediate emotional reaction or through evaluative judgement. When

considering an appropriate attitude towards oneself, it includes self-respect, pride in oneself, self-exactingness, sound self-esteem, and a sense of duty. The behavioural component manifests itself in the self-regulation of a person's behaviour. Adequate forms of cognitive and evaluative components enable adequate behaviour to be formed. Self-regulation of behaviour comes in two forms: planning, which acts as the basis of education, and managing specific behaviour [24-26]. Self-concept as a new level of self-awareness is a central new formation of older adolescence. Its formation is characterised by the emergence of a personal need to know oneself, one's own capabilities and characteristics, one's similarity to others, and one's uniqueness. This period is characterised by the fact that consciousness, which has passed through many relational objects, becomes the object of self-awareness, completes the structure of the character, and ensures its integrity and stabilisation of the personality.

Elements of gender identity include the idea of one's own conformity to femininity and masculinity models, the evaluative conformity to this, and the willingness to act in terms of creating one's own behaviour model [27; 28]. In other words, it includes awareness of one's own body as a human body, awareness of oneself and one's personality, one's life path as a representative of a particular gender, knowledge of gender roles and stereotypes, awareness of sexual behaviour, and the relationship of oneself according to gender perceptions, roles and stereotypes. Thus, the conclusion can be drawn that gender identity is a component of such a broad concept as self-concept. Accordingly, a model of gender identity in this structure was developed among young people. This model includes the "Real Self" – what a person really is, the "Mirror Self" – how a person is seen by others, and the "Ideal Self" – what a person wants to be. The components of the self-concept are behavioural – behavioural reactions evoked in relation to and knowledge of the self, emotional-volitional – emotional evaluation of the self-image, and cognitive – the individual's idea of himself or herself.

Gender awareness in this model includes the following: knowledge of gender roles and stereotypes, awareness of oneself, one's identity and life path as a representative of a particular gender, awareness of one's body as a body of a particular person, awareness of sexual behaviour, awareness of gender stereotypes, attitudes and roles, awareness of gender conformity to certain stereotypes and perceptions [29-31]. According to this model, self-concept is a set of attitudes about the self, which consists of many components. Factors that contribute to the development of self-concept and gender identity in general are parents' expectations and perceptions, experiences gained during education, social influence, peculiarities of the ethno-cultural environment, specificity of media content [7; 32; 33]. As a consequence, the totality of such components as self-concept, factors of self-concept formation, and gender identity are transformed into such a complex phenomenon as gender awareness of an individual.

Recommendations for improving gender awareness in Kazakhstan

To ensure that Kazakhstan's youth have a correctly formed and functioning gender awareness, changes should be made in gender policy of the Republic of Kazakhstan. This

should be developed as early as in the family and in kindergarten, since a child begins to develop a gender awareness and identity between the ages of 2 and 7. The main problems in today's context are the breakdown of traditional stereotypes of male and female upbringing, incompetence of parents in gender education, and shortcomings in the provision of education and educational space for girls and boys [9]. The creation of an educational environment is therefore an important challenge, as a proper socialisation and education on gender issues requires a strong emphasis on visibility and active interaction, in particular the involvement of parents and teachers [12]. As a result of changes in the educational process, a gender-sensitive learning environment can be created; parents will have the opportunity to improve their own competence in gender education; children will have a traditional understanding of female and male stereotypes; children will develop a perception of themselves and other people as social and physical persons who have advantages, disadvantages, individual and typical characteristics [34-36].

Currently, there is a Concept of Family and Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030 [37]. It is aimed at providing equal enjoyment of all types of benefits regardless of gender, preventing discrimination, gender asymmetry in public and state life, formation of gender awareness, and elimination of gender stereotypes in society. In other words, it means ensuring equality in benefits, rights, obligations and opportunities for both women and men in all spheres of public life, and eliminating gender-based discrimination. This provides an opportunity not only to improve the institution of gender awareness, but also to shape gender equality in practice. These objectives should be achieved by strengthening the institution of gender equality through state regulation and the introduction of gender assessment in budgeting and public planning systems. This should also include promoting gender education, creating equal employment opportunities for both genders, ensuring that both genders have access to all categories of resources, and increasing women's participation in ensuring security and peace. Equally important is the creation of a mechanism and environment for the provision of effective planning and coordination of activities at local and central levels to implement gender policies, the introduction of gender budgeting, and gender-sensitive public planning. Moreover, additional conditions for the implementation of the Concept of Family and Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030 are the involvement of state and non-state stakeholders in the development of gender policy [37]. Gender policy development is essential for gender awareness, as it will provide an opportunity for young people in Kazakhstan to explore their own identity, their belonging to a particular gender, and to understand the differences in gender roles and stereotypes.

Conclusions

Therefore, having conducted the study of gender awareness and its peculiarities among young people, the following has been revealed. Currently, young people adhere to patriarchal attitudes, traditions and gender roles, and androgyny dominates according to the definition of gender awareness. This means that as a result of the

breakdown of past stereotypes and the emergence of gender equality, youth representatives absorb the qualities of both genders. In general, gender awareness should be defined as a person's awareness of his or her body as that of a person of a particular sex, awareness of one's identity and life path as a representative of a particular sex, awareness of gender stereotypes and roles, awareness of one's identity according to gender perceptions, stereotypes, roles, etc. Gender awareness is characterised by an understanding of one's own conformity to feminine and masculine models, an evaluative conformity to this, and a willingness to act in terms of creating one's own model of behaviour. In self-concept, gender awareness includes the following: knowledge of gender roles and stereotypes, awareness of oneself, one's identity and life path as a representative of a particular gender, awareness of one's body as a particular person's body, awareness of sexual behaviour, awareness of gender stereotypes, attitudes and roles, awareness of one's gender conformity to certain stereotypes and perceptions.

Today, some of the main problems that may be preventing people from developing a gender awareness are the erosion of traditional stereotypes of male and female

upbringing, incompetence of parents in terms of gender education, and shortcomings in the provision of education and educational space for girls and boys. The educational environment should be developed and the Concept of Family and Gender Policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan until 2030 should be further applied to avoid the presented problems. As a result, it will provide an opportunity to improve understanding of one's own identity among young people, their parents and others as social and physical persons who have advantages, disadvantages, individual and typical characteristics. It will also contribute to the perception of belonging to a particular gender, the difference in gender roles and gender stereotypes, and improve the quality of provision of education in this area.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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Особливості гендерної свідомості молоді в сучасному казахстанському суспільстві

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Анотація

Актуальність. Актуальність дослідження у сфері гендерної обізнаності молоді в сучасних умовах Казахстану обумовлена тим, що забезпечення гендерної освіти та проведення гендерної політики є важливим інструментом розвитку гендерної рівності для будь-якої держави світу.

Мета. До завдань дослідження входить вивчення інституту гендерної свідомості та його ключових складових у вигляді характеристик та особливостей функціонування, аналіз особливостей гендерної ідентичності в структурі Я-концепції молоді, а також вивчення сучасних підходів авторів до визначення гендерної ідентичності.

Методологія. Основними методологічними підходами, використаними в дослідженні, є теоретико-методологічний підхід, функціональний методологічний підхід, логічний аналіз, соціологічний аналіз, дедукція тощо.

Результати. Дослідження виявило, що наразі серед молоді існує неоднозначність та несформованість поглядів щодо розподілу подружніх ролей; визначено чинники розвитку Я-концепції, які виступають складовими гендерної ідентичності, та розроблено модель гендерної ідентичності в структурі Я-концепції молоді; виокремлено основні гендерні стереотипи, які впливають на молодь і можуть слугувати проблемою у сприйнятті нею гендерної ідентичності.

Висновки. Проаналізовано гендерну політику Республіки Казахстан щодо формування у педагогів готовності до визначення власної гендерної ідентичності; розроблено відповідні рекомендації для імплементації в гендерну політику Республіки Казахстан з метою підвищення ефективності та уникнення можливих проблем.

Ключові слова: гендерна ідентичність; гендерна політика; гендерна соціалізація; правовий захист; освітнє середовище.