

Part 2: Theoretical Background and Further Information

Sexism is a policy and all possible activities that discriminate people on account of their sex. Sexism includes all social policies which:

- 1) stigmatize individuals on grounds of sex (attributing them features according to the category of gender they belong to, but not due to individual qualities)
- 2) contribute to unequal treatment of women and men (e.g. inequality before the law, diversification of work possibilities)
- 3) lessen the chance of individual and group development
 - androgynism – masculine element is in the centre of attention as a neutral norm or standard
 - polarization of gender – perception of women and men as different types of personalities
 - biological essentialism – a set of views justifying dissimilarity of women's and men's natures as well as their roles in evolution of human beings and their culture

The existence of sexism is distinguished at four levels:

a) Individual level

refers to individuals and their approach to sex and gender. One can talk about sexist behaviours when characteristics connected with sex are attributed to people only on the basis of classifying them as women or men. Extremely unfair is to impute negative features (e.g. aggression of boys, talkativeness of girls) or to treat women and men unjustly because of common stereotypes (e.g. female candidates are not admitted to exams or job interviews for 'male' posts).

b) Socio-structural level

is connected with the status attached to an interaction partner due to their sex and it is manifested in interpersonal and group relations. Structural status sometimes adds to the status resulting from the sex either reinforcing it (a male boss – a female subordinate) or reducing it to a certain degree (a female boss – a male subordinate). It happens, however, that women of a higher status who show a pattern of behaviour typical of their dominant position are perceived negatively, especially if they manage men.

c) Institutionalized level

serves as an indication of discrimination because of sex in institutions – in their organization, structures, and ideologies or in their deep-rooted traditions, often as unconscious standards of behaviour.

d) Cultural level

these are most of all hidden and open assumptions on sex and gender, widespread in society, having influence on members of a given culture. This category, in general, represents kinds of sexism:

- characteristic of culture transmission of seeing the world of sex, in the process of socialization, which has influence on individual attitudes towards gender as well as behaviours towards a partner, based on sex classification
- socio-cultural approbation of inequality (religion, science, tradition) reinforces polarization of genders and androcentrism on individual and wide-social levels.