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Gender as a category entangled in the matrix of power and gender resistance potential

ABSTRACT. The subject of presented analysis is gender treated as a social category entangled in power relations. There are presented main social matrices of the gender-based power practices and it's institutional and extrainstitutional, structural and individual expressions and consequences. The attention is focused at the classical conceptions of power and the perspectives of using it's elements in the analysis of gender-based discipline practices in modern and postmodern society. There are also indicated—connected with queer culture—resistance strategies realized by using gender symbols and stereotypically perceived roles.

KEYWORDS: gender, power, discipline, resistance, sexism, heterosexism, homophobia

Gender is one of the main variables, which are taken into account in social research of various types. It is treated as an attribute on the basis of which individuals may gain access to resources, resulting in the diverse stratification location. However, at the same time it is not treated as an isolated variable, as numerous intersectional configurations of gender and race, ethnic identity, social stratification, or sexual preferences are analysed. Gender is viewed as the matrix, which is the foundation for defining roles attributed to individuals. Therefore it is an important variable through the prism of which the subject's identity is characterised. The analysis of gender includes such elements as identity, social roles, social relations, or sexual preference (Kerr & Multon, 2015, p. 183). Studies, which concentrate on gender treated as a variable co-determining individual's status, are usually focused on two issues. One of them is male and female access to various valuable social resources, which is the subject matter of feminist studies. The second issue is related to social status of non-heteronormative individuals i.e. gays, lesbians, transgender and transsexual individuals. This is the main area of interest of interdisciplinary LGBT studies and queer theory. The subject matter of the present analyses, which is merely an introduction to much wider issues, is a category of gender treated as a variable used in the

constructed matrices of power. At the same time, it is the matrix of undertaking resistance, thereby being a category of emancipation potential.

Power is a classic category within the discourse of social studies. The issues related to it constituted a subject of interest of both classics of various disciplines and representatives of critical deconstruction thought connected with postmodernism. In the context of the present analyses, references to Max Weber and Michel Foucault's trains of thought are particularly useful.

Power, in its general meaning accepted in social studies, determines the existence of asymmetrical relation. In the analyses of this subject, various elements defining the bases and consequences of domination and subordination are exposed. It may be viewed both as the cause and the consequence of asymmetrical distribution of capital, goods and resources (cf. Dick, 2008, p. 328). This view is based on Karl Marx's classic thought. It is also treated as a crucial assumption in modern interpretations of issues related to causes and manifestations of social exclusion. Subordination is a category corresponding to power. It defines a relatively low rank (compared with e.g. statutory position) in a given type of hierarchy, and is a consequence of domination (Athens, 2010, p. 340). At the level of discourse and social relations, subordination may be strengthened by discourses justifying it, which are of prejudice nature. Power is a social relation applied in various institutions. According to Max Weber's theoretical model, it may be based on three types of justification and it may have legal, traditional, or charismatic bases, accordingly (Weber, 2002, pp. 158-227). This category is defined by Weber as a chance "to realize their own will in communal action, even against the resistance of others". This classic of German sociology completes the interpretation of the notion of "power" by introducing two terms: *domination* and *discipline*. In the context of the present analyses, the way Weber understands the notion of discipline is particularly helpful. Discipline is treated as a chance of "immediate, automatic and schematic submission for order given by many other people, resulting from drilled attitude". This notion also relates to a "drill" of uncritical and obedient submission" (Weber, 2002, pp. 40-41). According to Peter M. Blau, power is understood as all types of interactions between individuals or groups, in which one person or a group offers others awards, punishment or some services, which are unavailable (or hardly available) outside this relation, thereby forcing them to meet the expectations of the dominating subject. It is always an asymmetrical relation. Blau makes a distinc-

tion between coercive power and power based on gratification. The notion of power defines the ability of individuals or groups to impose their will on others, despite resistance undertaken by subordinate subjects. In this context, net value of power is analysed i.e. the ability to practise it regardless of restrictions imposed by subordinate subjects (Blau, 2009, pp. 119-121).

However, according to Michel Foucault, power practised in the context of modern and postmodern societies is of blurred and panoptic character, and it is based on the interpretation of *truth* as a social construct. Relations of power and submission are ever-present in social structures and interactions created within them, e.g. in communication as well as in institutional, economic, or intimate relations when at least one of the subjects of interaction tries to take control over another subject's actions (Foucault, 1994, pp. 285-293).

Oppressive power is a special type of power. It is a type of asymmetrical relation, which is accompanied, apart from normal manifestations of power, by social or political exclusion and depreciating the identity of the members of the subordinate group (cf. Prilleltensky, 2003, p. 195). Oppression, which may be analysed both as a process or a state of affairs, is a complex category and includes sociological, psychological variables and also possesses a political position. Its consequence may be both victimisation of the members of subordinate groups, or undertaking resistance strategies as indicated by many representatives of social studies (Prilleltensky, 2003, p. 195). Taking into consideration the above-mentioned interpretations of the concept of power, it can be assumed that they can be used in the analyses of diverse meanings ascribed to roles related to gender and in the analyses of diverse access to socially established resources considering the gender variable.

Applying power within particular institutions is realised by using diverse means. In the context of modern and postmodern systems, the discourse is one of the basic means. Michel Foucault indicates the importance of the discourses related to demography, biology, medicine (especially psychiatry), psychology, pedagogy, politics and morality (Foucault, 2010, p. 31). Scripts normalising discriminatory practices may be placed within the matrices of knowledge. These are the scripts based on the model of sexism. The concept of sexism may be referred to the specific type of attitudes and also to institutional structures. Within their scopes, the following are observed: practices related to discrimination of individuals or groups due to their gender, gender role or sexual preferences.

This concept can be used both in making the description of knowledge, beliefs, cognitive matrices of individuals (individual sexism) and relationships, interaction models occurring within institutions (institutional sexism). Individual sexism is expressed by the individual's conviction of the superiority of one of the genders (e.g. androcentrism), the gender role or sexual preferences (e.g. heterosexism) over the others. Undertaking actions that strengthen that implicated superiority is a consequence of such convictions. On the other hand, institutional sexism indicates various manifestations of individual sexism, expressed in the open or hidden form by the practices undertaken within the institution, including its structures, rules of operation and action or the practised policy (Szarzyńska & Toro, 2012, p. 35).

Individual sexism is a consequence of socialisation based on presenting the vision of gender reality as an explicitly binary. Its reality is based on precisely defined matrices of femininity/masculinity, treating as a norm identifying, practising of the explicitly defined identity based on these matrices, as well as attributes, preferences and a range of social roles related to identity (Ross, 1996, p. 16). Rob Moore takes into consideration diverse sources of matrices and discourses which create power relationships of sexist character indicating particular models of feminist theory focused on them. Distinguishing different types of feminism i.e. liberal, radical, Marxist, black or poststructural, Moore indicates the use of capitalist, patriarchal and racist ideology in strengthening power based on sexism (Moore, 2007, p. 22).

Heterosexism is one of the varieties of sexism. It may be placed both structurally (within the normative structure or the discourse structure) or it may adopt the internalised form. Heterosexism can be expressed in the form of homophobia. As a social fact, homophobia covers a set of negative attitudes and views towards homosexuality itself and towards individuals of non-heterosexual identity. On the other hand, internalised homophobia is a reaction to the conviction about social stigmatisation of non-heterosexual individuals (gays, lesbians, bisexuals) (Ross, 1996, p. 16). It is a consequence of the participation of the individual in the context of homophobic culture in which the following occur: devaluation or discrediting of the identity, desire, practices of non-heterosexual character (cf. Russel & Bohan, 2006, pp. 344-345). The discourses, which are based on homophobia, become part of the system of social control, basing on knowledge systems of stereotype character and marked by stereotypes (Madureira, 2007, p. 225). Internalised homophobia is

a consequence of socialisation in the specific social, cultural and political contexts which discredit individuals of LGBT identity (Russel & Bohan, 2006, p. 345). It is a type of attitude based on prejudice against individuals creating their own identity in a way which differs from heteronormative matrices (gays, lesbians, transgender individuals, bisexuals, transsexuals) (Madureira, 2007, p. 226).

Individuals who create their own identity against the socially normalised matrices are exposed to difficulties in the interaction structures and processes. According to the theory by Erving Goffman, interaction takes place in accordance with culturally defined models, describing attributes of their participants, their functioning within roles and behavioural models treated as a norm ascribed to individuals of the specific gender, at a specific age, fulfilling specific professional and social roles. Gender is an important attribute, which describes a course of typical interactions. Individuals of non-heteronormative identity are exposed to be labelled as deviants due to the discrepancy of social expectations concerning the identity of females and males with the real identity (cf. Goffman, 2005).

Atmosphere conducive to reflective self-identity management by agents of the society occurs in the context of the postmodern society. The individual gains access to matrices which allow for free moving between modernly established categories. These are open-access matrices included in pop-cultural texts broadcast by the media (cf. Melosik, 2013). Identity understood in such a way becomes the area of practising emancipation strategies of political significance. The development of subject's consciousness of occupying unfavourable and subordinated status due to the represented features which are within the category of independent variables (such as gender) can be the basis for resistant actions (Abowitz, 2000, p. 878). Considering various interpretative perspectives of the notion of resistance, a tentative definition may be accepted for the purposes of the present analyses, according to which it is an opposing action towards the subject, group or the ideas identified as related to oppressive dominance. It is practised in the situation of interference of diverse interests of particular social group representatives with simultaneous unequal possibilities to achieve them. Resistant actions are of reflective and intentional character with aspiration for the introduction of the change at their basis (Bielska, 2013, p. 67). Lauraine Leblanc assumes that the appearance of resistance is a consequence of several factors such as subjective consciousness of functioning in oppressive condi-

tions, motivation to oppose it and undertaking actions expressing the motivation (Leblanc, 2006, p. 18). Indicating forms which can be assumed by resistant consciousness, Chela Sandoval lists the following ones: equal rights form, revolutionary form, supremacist form, and separatist form. At the bases of the equal rights form lies the conviction that differences between representatives of the dominant group and the subordinate group are deliberately escalated in an unjustified manner when the representatives of both groups should have an equal access to various resources present in the public sphere. The revolutionary form is based on the conviction that assimilation of difference is not feasible within the present social order and that modification of social structure and social institutions is a condition for the introduction of the change. The supremacist form defines the conviction of representatives of the subordinate group according to which due to their own attributes (e.g. moral ones), they possess a better identity than representatives of the dominant group. The separatist form defines preference for preservation of the difference and its protection by means of separation from symbols, preferred values, and systems of evaluation accepted by the dominant group (after Spade, 2007, p. 240). Another exemplification of resistance strategies achieved by the usage of gender matrices is the construction of *queer* identity. Assuming resistance against the assimilation model, it takes into consideration the possibility of accepting automarginalisation strategies. It constitutes a specific resistance strategy against heterosexist order and characteristic gender hegemony, in the context of which an assumption is adopted that each individual is obliged to construct their own identity within the limits of binary matrices—scripts, defining male and female roles socially recognised to be proper. A similar identity model also expressing resistance against the above-mentioned binary is constructed within *Drag Queen, Drag King* culture. These are the strategies based on fun and performance in which conventions concerning exaggerated body construction and gender performance are neutralised, frequently corresponding to stereotype interpretations of femininity and masculinity. Referring to a theoretical model of performativeness indicated by Judith Butler, it can be assumed that *Drag Queen/ Drag King* identity breaks the social model which defines femininity/masculinity. A performer of a Drag show (as the script itself) relies on a parodic exaggeration of socially accepted gender characteristics, sexual and gender norms and on deconstruction of social definitions of gender category. *Drag Queen/ Drag King*, who is a performer of the biological gender role

opposite to their own, is given an insight into a social definition of masculinity/femininity. At the same time during the performance he/she questions the model (script) (in this case only apparently) arbitrarily authorised, acknowledged to be proper and natural. Thus the performer enters into a play with gender convention, the body becomes an area to redefine meanings, to perform identity experiments and it becomes the area of play (cf. Gaşior, 2008, p. 211). In reference to the analyses conducted by José Esteban Muñoz, it can be assumed that this is a trend based on disidentification strategy with a masculinised culture script interpreted as oppressive with the simultaneous implementation of the assumption of intersectionality of the experienced oppression (Muñoz, 1999, p. 22). The resistance expressed by the usage of gender matrices may adopt the nature of infra-political strategies. Infra-politics defines an area of a subtle hidden and secret political fight. However, it includes actions which form the basis for potential open actions, especially in the case of a significant power asymmetry between the dominant and the subordinate subjects (Scott, 1990, pp. 183-184). It constitutes an everyday expression of a resistance form, realised both individually and collectively. This is a strategy based on practising “hidden transcripts”, as an alternative to “public transcript”. The result of this is identity construction based on matrices alternative to socially recognised femininity and masculinity norms.

In conclusion, it may be assumed that gender is usually presented as an explicitly binary category in social discourses. The discourses assume that women and men demonstrate culturally defined for themselves identity models, heterosexual preferences and they function within specific, culturally defined roles. Gender identity is treated as a constant characteristic throughout one’s life. Gender, acquiring a social meaning, is a category constituting the matrix of practices of social control and power. It is a category subjected to disciplinary practises such as naturalisation and normalisation. Individuals who construct their own identity by using the elements of matrices different from culturally defined hetero-normativeness constitute a social agent who is *unpredictable* and different from the accepted role definition. Consequently, they are at risk of receiving the label of deviants. At the same time, however, reflective management of variables characterising the gender may adopt the form of resistance actions. Within this type of strategies one includes constructing queer identity or exaggerated demonstration of sexual identity by representatives of the opposite gender as part of a drag queen/drag

king show deliberately based on stereotypes. Thus they become part of the resistance model of infra-politics character. In a cultural sphere, the context of late modernity creates chances for reflective construction of one's own identity by the subject, including creative management of elements related to gender identity. However, at the same time in the social sphere, it is possible to identify numerous areas of stigmatisation of people constructing their own identity in a way which is different from the assumptions of hetero-normativeness.

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