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PSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH AND GENDER APPROACH

Abstract

Over the past 30 years, psychological theory and practice abroad has undergone the most severe criticism and reappraisal than ever before. As an academic discipline, psychology contained distorted facts and pseudoscientific theories about women, supported stereotypical ideas about the abilities and psychological characteristics of women and men. Under the powerful influence of the female movement, feminism, independent areas were identified, which included the psychology of women and men (psychology of women, women's study, men's study, gender studies, feminist psychology) in different volumes and contents.

Keywords: psychology, gender, women's study, research conduction

Introduction

The targeted efforts of women psychologists led to the establishment of the Association for Women in Psychology (AWP) at the annual congress of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 1969. Its purpose was to reassess and define the role of psychology and the mental health sciences in women's lives. Thanks to the Association of Women in Psychology (AWP), the Department of Women's Psychology (Division 35) was created in 1973 as part of the APA, which until then has stubbornly refused to consider the psychological problems of women as requiring special attention. The Association of Women in Psychology (AWP) holds regional and national conferences on feminist psychology, annually awards several awards for outstanding publications in the field of female psychology. Now the Association has more than 2,000 members, a quarterly newsletter is published - AWP Newsletter. The association collaborates with other organizations, helping to integrate a gender approach in psychological research, education and psychotherapy. Since 1976, AWP is the official non-governmental organization of the United Nations.

Members of the Association (AWP) seek to rethink the prevailing theoretical principles, research traditions, clinical and psychotherapeutic practices, institutional and social structures that limit the understanding of problems and the provision of psychological support in the professional achievements and personal self-determination of women and men. They also resist the attempts to divide women on racial, ethnic, age, class, religious grounds or on the basis of sexual orientation. The objectives of the Association include:

- Education and sensitization of society and professional psychologists to the problems of women;
- Recognition and research of all that is of concern to women and those who support them;
- Revision of the conceptual apparatus of psychology and the expansion of the vision of its prospects;
- support for professional and institutional practices that contribute to the removal of restrictions on women's self-realization; criticism of practices that harm women and men because of their commitment to the traditional view of their social roles;

- providing opportunities for the manifestation of feminist creativity and the dissemination of feminist ideas.

In the course of intensive systematic studies of the psychology of women, which are stimulated by the activities of AWP, a number of important problems of a methodological and methodological nature were identified. To solve these problems, recommendations were developed for conducting psychological research on a non-sexist basis (*McHugh, M. C., Koeske, R.D. & Frieze, I.H, 1986 P. 879-890*)

Moreover, problems began to be studied that are significant both for women themselves and for the development of new ways to analyze the relationship between women and men. As a result of these changes, psychology was enriched with a new vision of the developmental characteristics of girls and boys, women and men, expanded the range of its methods, and developed new approaches to psychotherapy and counseling. Currently, about ten scientific journals devoted to various aspects of the psychology of women are published abroad.

Nothing of the kind exists in psychological science in our country. In private conversations, scientists express sincere bewilderment: "Why do they need this?" Turning to domestic (+ Soviet) psychology leads us to the paradoxical conclusion (made by I. S. Kon in 1981) that this is a "sexless" science. In age psychology, the subject of which is the identification of patterns of child development, there are no such words as "boy, girl", only the word "child" is used, not to mention the peculiarity of their mental development. In order to be convinced of this, it's enough to look at the recently published "Reading Book on Child Psychology" (*KOH H.C., 1988*) which, according to the annotation, includes the work of several generations of Russian psychologists.

The female gender is practically invisible in our psychological science. At the present stage, psychology has barely addressed the women's issue, without touching upon a wide range of problems that are significant for the mental development and well-being of women. It is time for Russian psychology to integrate the accumulated abroad and begin full-scale own research aimed at revealing the specifics of the psychology of women in Russia and psychological assistance to them. For this, it is necessary to take into account the most general conclusions so as not to repeat the mistakes.

They seek to present psychology as aimed at obtaining objective knowledge (about the secrets of human nature), which is obtained by people who are unbiased and able to maintain neutrality. Nevertheless, the selection of a woman as an independent object of study revealed a number of methodological and methodological flaws that naturally lead to a distortion of the facts obtained about the psychology of women. The most important tasks of psychology using a gender approach are a critical review of theories of woman's development, analysis of the shortcomings of the established research practice, and the development of provisions leading to the liberation from stereotypes and prejudices in the study of the psyche. In this article we will consider the generally accepted procedure of scientific research and show how it can affect the nature of the knowledge gained about the psychology of women.

Stages of the study

Any research, including psychological research, begins with an assumption or a question, the answer to which is sought by collecting systematic information. The question may arise from theory or personal experience, from observations, or from previous studies. The next step is planning, in other words, developing a strategy for finding the answer to the question. Here, the choice is made of those who will participate in the study, its methods are determined (questionnaires, tests, interviews, etc.). Then begins the actual collection of necessary data, its processing and analysis. Typically, statistical methods are widely used for analysis. Then the researcher / researcher interprets the results, draw conclusions and write an article.

If reviewers and the editorial board find that the study is done competently and the findings are important, then the results are published in a scientific journal. Accordingly, they can affect both future research and theory. Some of the research from scientific journals falls on the pages of textbooks and popular literature, thus influencing the general public, teachers, parents and the next generation of researchers. This is a short, schematic description of the research process.

It is important for us to understand that a biased attitude can manifest itself at any stage of this process. Of course, first of all, we will talk about gender-specific prejudices, that is, related to the views of researchers about the characteristics of women and men, their life paths and priorities in it.

Formulating a hypothesis or posing a question

It is to this stage of the study that students and female students are least attracted to the study of psychology - most of them are usually devoted to how to test an advanced assumption using a complex system of various methods. "Can gender-specific ideas appear at this stage and are they so important for the final result?" - this is the question that an inexperienced person is entitled to ask. Let's look at a series of examples.

In the mid-80s, the academic authorities briefly and impressively explained to the author of these lines that there are more pressing issues than the problem of the attitude of teachers to students of different sexes. I was recommended to choose a different topic for research. Now a fairly wide public knows that this problem is really relevant, that girls study in less favorable conditions than their classmates as a result of their neglect (*Ионова Л.В., 1996, 31-42*), (*Reis, S.M., 1995. p. 162-170*)

Many of us have met with descriptions of the results of research on working mothers. The main question of such a study proceeds from the assumption that the work of a woman entails undesirable changes in the mental development of the child. A fair amount of effort must be made in order to discover studies of how a father who is constantly busy with work affects the development of a child. Thus, the very formulation of the question calls into question the significant role of the father in raising a child, gives him the right to participate less in this process and continues to reinforce the prevailing notions of a rigid sex-role division of family functions, regardless of the individual characteristics of family members, their preferences and current professional tasks of mother and father. (*Sadker M., & Sadker D., 1982*)

The following example concerns leadership research. It can be built on the basis of a traditionally masculine set of traits that determines power relations, that is, ask a question about how pronounced traits such as a tendency to dominate, a desire for self-affirmation, etc. Another type of research question may be based on a different concept of leadership - leadership as the ability to negotiate, find a compromise, take into account the interests of stakeholders, and the ability to constructively resolve conflicts at different levels. You don't need to think long to understand how such two statements of the question will affect the results of the study entitled "Who Can Become a Good Leader". If, on the basis of the research conducted in the first formulation, a questionnaire is developed for selection for

training or promotion, the number of men in leadership positions will undoubtedly not decrease, and the leadership style will remain the same - imperious, overwhelming. Therefore, already at the first stage - raising the question, making assumptions - it is possible:

- face a direct ban on the study of "female" issues;
- use a biased theory to make assumptions (such as, for example, Freud's theory);
- formulate a hypothesis based on previous studies, which themselves contained bias;
- limit the formulation of the issue to a narrow area.

Study Planning

The most important first step in planning is the choice of operational definitions, that is, what exactly, which variable will be measured and how.

One of the most common methodological problems is the difficulty of separating gender as a variable from other related variables that are typical of our society. Gender is associated with factors such as parental expectations, parenting tactics and strategies, educational content, status achieved, etc. In the study, psychologists deal with the results of the interaction of all these factors, and it is often impossible to establish which of them led precisely to these consequences. When compiling groups, choosing participants in the experiment, scientists try to take them into account. age, socioeconomic status, level of education, etc. However, it is very difficult to determine which of the factors are significant and which are not.

For example, when studying the ability for logical reasoning, you can compare female students and students of the same age of the same faculty, that is, equalize them by age, education. Nevertheless, this does not guarantee that both groups had the same opportunities to exercise this ability during their previous development. It is known that in the process of development, the child assigns those relationships, ideas that are common in society. In turn, the assigned relationships affect the child's own development. Everyday view, the notorious myth of "female logic" (the lack of logic in women), can affect the formation of this ability in girls and boys in different ways. In addition to this, parents and teachers can have the same stereotypical ideas.

Another example related to the choice of research methods. Imagine that we want to study the features of empathy in women and men. To this end, we will compile a questionnaire that contains a series of questions such as: "If you meet a good friend who is nervous before an important event, will you also get nervous?" In other words, the purpose of the questionnaire is to determine the level of empathy based on the self-report of the respondents.

It would seem that what could be wrong with choosing such a method? However, let us recall that sex-role stereotypes require men to be restrained in the manifestation of their emotions. Men and women may be the same in their ability to empathize, but when answering questions, men may not admit it, as they are guided by the traditional image of severe, emotionally restrained masculinity. Accordingly, the data obtained will most likely reflect the influence of this image, rather than the actual sexual characteristics of emotionality.

In this case, in order to avoid the influence of social stereotypes, it is better to use video recording of a facial expression with a hidden camera or to measure, with the help of special equipment, heart rate changes when watching a movie with emotional content. As you have seen, it seems that the "little things" in choosing a technique can greatly affect the overall result and conclusions of the study. It should be emphasized that in order to neutralize such influences it is important to use several different, complementary methods.

The methods themselves may also contain a certain bias. So, most often tests for determining technical abilities are based on material that is well known to boys, but, as a rule, is absent in the usual environment of girls' life. Girls may possess the same technical skills, but as applied to other material and other tools. Accordingly, such a difference cannot but affect the test results.

The second source of distortion at this stage may be the choice of study participants. First of all, it was found that psychologists, at least abroad, more often studied men than women (*Grady, K.E. 1981, P. 628-636*). In studies, for example, of aggression, they prefer to work with men, and when they experiment with women, they use milder forms of aggression, for example, only verbal. The data obtained are compared, although they cannot be compared, and conclusions are drawn about the presence or absence of gender differences in the level and manifestations of aggressiveness.

Obviously, the gender of the researcher as a user of the methods becomes an important factor. The results of a study, for example, of sexuality can vary greatly depending on whether the interviewer is male or female. If the researcher is a man, then women may be confused when answering questions, not disclose their true relationship to sex, or not describe their actual behavior. The opposite is also true - it is unlikely that a man will give sincere answers to the researcher.

Conducting research

The expectations of the researchers themselves, which he / she acquired in the process of their own development, can significantly distort the results. This effect is known as a self-fulfilling prophecy. So, if a researcher / researcher expects that women will get along worse than men, then this cannot but affect her / his observations of groups of men and women. Plus, expectations can manifest themselves in unequal treatment of these two groups.

It is especially difficult to avoid the influence of expectations during observations, since it is impossible to hide the gender of the study participants. Naturally, the categorization and evaluation of the observed behavior depends on the stereotypes and expectations of the person conducting the study. For example, an emotional discussion of a problem in a female group can easily be categorized as a “quarrel”, and in a male group as a “verbal showdown”. Even in the handbook on gender differences, E. Maccoby and C. Jacklin (*Maccoby E.E. & Jacklin, C.N., 1974*) noted that parents, teachers and other observers have different assessments of the behavior of boys and girls, while an objective calculation of the frequency of real behavior does not reveal any significant gender differences between them.

One cannot but take into account that in any study there are two sides that have learned the views of their sociocultural environment. This means that the results change not only under the influence of the expectations of researchers and researchers, but also under the influence of the expectations of those involved. So, women may well share the widespread stereotype that irritability increases in the premenstrual period and mood worsens. If we explain to women that the purpose of the study is to study the effect of menstruation on mood, then those involved will more negatively assess their mood during this period than if they do not know about its purpose. The results obtained in the first

version, when the purpose of the study is known to women, is more likely to confirm than to refute the prevailing notions. In the second option, the results will be different. Accordingly, it is necessary to take into account that gender-specific expectations of both those conducting the study and those participating in it can distort the real picture.

Interpretation of data

Gender research data can be misinterpreted in a variety of ways. Firstly, this refers to concepts such as statistical significance and practical significance. Just note that the latter concept is rarely used in psychology.

The presence of statistical significance indicates that the differences are most likely not accidental. Statistical significance is calculated with a very large number of participants in the study. Moreover, the larger the number of participants, the higher the probability of detecting statistically significant differences. However, a more thorough examination of the obtained quantitative indicators may reveal a lack of practical significance. Imagine that the average indicator for the test of mathematical abilities of young men is 40.5 points. For girls, this figure is 40.0. The difference is statistically significant, while its practical significance, that is, what important conclusions it contains for the real world of training, education, vocational guidance, is insignificant.

Established formal research requirements insist on the use of statistical, but not practical significance. Discussion of the latter is rarely found in psychological works, while underlining and discussion of the former is considered a sign of a professionally performed study and gives a higher chance of selecting articles for publication.

In interpreting data, researchers may ignore alternative explanations. For example, differences in the performance of a mathematical test can be presented as confirmation of the biological basis of mathematical abilities - "a hormonal shift in adolescence makes it impossible for girls to achieve high results in this area" (statement by a psychologist colleague in person). This explanation excludes the search and verification of other options, such as, for example, a decrease in girls' interest in mathematics under the influence of a wide environment; the influence of teachers and parents claiming that math is not for women; the absence of female mathematicians in the immediate environment of girls as necessary role models, etc.

Let us also pay attention to the fact that the “biological” option is most often not directly studied in the study, but is readily involved as an explanatory principle. One of the leading modern psychogenetics R. Levontin noted the tendency to explain the psychological characteristics of the two sexes by the biological differences between them: “the biological and cultural differentiation of these groups [men and women, black and white, etc.] varies, but all these differences have two common features: all of them - even the most biological - are of historical origin and all are declared biological - even the most historical of them ... In discussions about gender differences in our society, there is always REPRESENTATIONS that cultural differences are rooted in biology” (*Левонтин Р. 1993, p.33*).

An additional problem is the tendency toward over-generalization. The dangers of over-generalization cannot be avoided even by the most famous scientists. Harry Harlow became famous for his interesting research on the behavior of anthropoid apes. Having discovered the great aggressiveness of male rhesus monkeys, H. Harlow (1971) without any hesitation connects this feature with human behavior. He is convinced that the biological preconditions cause the same differences in primate behavior that are common to humans. He writes that the soft and relatively passive behavior of most young girls is a useful maternal trait, and the more aggressive behavior of boys is a necessary preparatory stage for a protective paternal function. However, H. Harlow never studied girls and boys, as well as biological factors of aggressiveness.

As we can see, interpretation also carries a number of possibilities for creating an incorrect picture.

Publication

But now the study is completed, and it is time to think about where and how to publish it. A biased attitude is also possible at this stage. Typically, results that emphasize differences, rather than the similarities between any psychological characteristics of the sexes, attract attention. It seems uninteresting to write and unprofitable to write about what girls and boys, women and men are similar in. Adapting to such an unwritten rule, researchers selectively present the results.

How easy it is to do this without distorting the data can be seen in the following example. Suppose we can write about the results of testing spatial imagination as follows: "More than 28% of men achieved this indicator, while among women only 24% demonstrated it" (*McHugh, M. C., Koeske, R.D. & Frieze, I.H., 1986. P. 584*). Each difference is noted, analyzed, interpreted, while the similarity is often taken for granted, not analyzed and, sometimes, not included in the conclusions.

The manifestation of such an attitude is reflected primarily in the choice of the title of the article. The study of the psychological characteristics of women and men is presented with names that emphasize "gender or gender differences." The name itself imposes an obligation to look for differences, forms an attitude towards the search for discrepancies. The wording of the name such as "gender comparisons or gender characteristics" is more consistent with the real state of things, creates a neutral background and an unbiased attitude of readers to the material.

Finally, the title is selected, the article is written and sent to the journal. Now it's worth remembering that the editors, like the researchers themselves, prefer differences rather than similarities. Consequently, articles on gender similarities are more often rejected by editorial boards. When scientific research attracts the attention of the popular press, then sticking out the differences is inevitable - otherwise who wants to read it. Here are just a few headlines that have flashed in the domestic press lately: "Different sex. Different brain ...", "Man and woman: two big differences", "Two planets: ladies and gentlemen from school."

In short, even if the research is inherently open-minded at all of the above stages, prejudices can be introduced at the stage of publication in the scientific and mass media. Perhaps the reader will receive an altered version of the truth - gender differences will be somewhat exaggerated, the actual experience of women and men will appear distorted.

The use of a gender approach in psychological research allows us to take a fresh look at the results obtained in traditional (= male) psychology, and it opens up areas and problems without which a real understanding of the human psyche and life path is impossible (*Арчер Дж., 1994. С. 199-211*), (*Попова Л.В. 1996, p.31-42*), (*Silverman, L.K. 1995, P. 5-13*). In domestic psychology, systematic studies of such problems as: attitude to feminism in society; psychological consequences of contraception, miscarriage,

abortion, pregnancy; the influence of sexist images of women in the media on the development of girls' identities; prostitution as a traumatic life experience and social violence against women; contradictions in clinical psychology; the use of sexist theories in psychotherapy, etc.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that the methodological and methodological difficulties of research considered in our work are not the prerogative of psychology. Any science in contact with the life of society and of an individual contains only part of a holistic picture if it does not use a gender approach.

Finally, one cannot fail to warn that it is just as difficult for scientists to break free from the influence of gender socialization as other people. After all, sex-role stereotypes are appropriated by all who grow and develop in society. The ideas associated with these stereotypes become an unconscious ideology that is transferred to all spheres of life. Therefore, one must be prepared for the fact that the desire to shake the patriarchal foundations will cause resistance and an increased desire to prove the objectivity of established approaches. The hard, painstaking work of catching fleas of prejudices is necessary so that they do not grow into real elephants that destroy everything in their path.

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