

## **Gender Stereo Types of Children with Cerebral Palsy**

**Dóra Dénes**  
Pető András College  
Hungary

### **Abstract**

*Gender stereotypes influence our lives in every aspect: they have an influence on our private life, on our relationships and on our job choices. Cerebral Paretic children's possibilities are limited by their primary and secondary symptoms: the motoric disabilities, perceptual and sensing disturbance, learning difficulties, and the list go on and on. Many of them depend on others through their whole life. Even those who have the proper cognitive abilities are limited by their motoric disabilities. In my research, I examined whether the children's career choices have any gender aspects.*

Cerebral Palsy is also often called Little's disease. It's the injury of the central nervous system which affects both motoric and cognitive functions. There are four main groups of diagnosis: spastic, athetotic, discinetic and the mixed group. Of course, these can appear together in any kind of variation, especially nowadays when the medicine is so advanced that the doctors can save children with a weight of only a few hundred grams. The main symptoms can variate between spastic and hypotonic muscle tone, there can be two limbs affected: lower or higher or one from both on the same side. In the athetotic diagnosis the main symptom is that their bodies are continuously moving, their limbs, their head, every single little muscle in their bodies, even their tongues for example which can cause serious difficulties with eating or their muscles required for talking so even if they can speak, their speech is really hard to understand. Maybe the best known diagnosis, injury in Cerebral Palsy is the spina bifida which is a condition where the spine does not develop properly, leaving a gap in the spine. Sometimes there is only a gap in the bony arch, but at other times, the spinal cord is also involved and does not form properly either. The skin over the arch can also either be intact or have a gap as well. This damage can lead to problems such as weakness or total paralysis of the legs, bowel, and urinary incontinence, loss of skin sensation in the legs and around the bottom. Whichever diagnosis we are talking about, there are usually serious problems and difficulties in movements, even if we are talking only about lifting up the spoon or fork to the mouth or the complex movement of writing.

Besides the motoric dysfunction, there are many more cognitive symptoms caused by their central nervous system's damage. Cerebral Palsy in most cases come with intellectual disabilities or retardation, learning difficulties, perceptual and sensing disturbances, problems with the eyesight, for example strabismus or various problems with hearing. All in all, even if a cerebral paretic child has the proper intellectual functions, because of their primer and secondary symptoms there are very limited career choices for them. For example if there are serious problems with their sight, they can't work with computers which is a very frequent career choice for them. What happens to their perspective and possibilities when we restrict their choices with gender stereotypes on top of that?

Feminism through the decades had many trends, various views, but it never lost its primer goal: the fight for equality. The expression "feminism" came from France, but the first organized movement of feminism started in England in the 1920 s. Its primer goal was to get the right to vote for women, it was the suffragette movement. The second wave came forty years later in the United States, where it linked together with the sexual revolution. Besides the fight for the voting right, they fought for the right for women to choose their career freely and for the reproductive rights. The third wave started in the nineties where the gender, men's and women's studies appeared. It shows that nowadays the primer goal isn't just the fight for women's rights, society claims gender equality. There were attempts to create a gender oriented pedagogical system, but the theoretical achievements haven't been integrated into practice yet. One of the main reasons is that we don't have enough data in Hungary to create a viable, stable system.

There were researches earlier which showed that children choose extracurricular activities based on gender stereotypes. (Frank-Thun, 2012) For example, boys play football; later chess in school or the girls play with dolls, later learn to play the flute. In addition, while the teachers praise boys for their cognitive abilities, they praise girls for their social abilities and good behavior. It's also a common belief that boys are better at science subjects, while girls are better at art subjects. Although there are some differences between the male and female brain, it's not so huge that it would indicate such a significant difference in the representatives of these two areas.

An American longitudinal research that lasted for fifty years examined this topic. They chose circa three hundred students between the age of 12 and 14, who reached outstanding points in their SAT exam, both in science and art subjects. This study shows that it doesn't really influence their career choices whether they like science or art subjects better or in which area they scored the better point: the boys are more likely to choose the scientific direction, while the girls, even if they were better in science subjects or liked them better, chose areas which require art subjects and social skills. (Gordon, 2007)

It even makes the girls' situation more difficult that in Hungary there are hardly enough role models for them, nor in the scientific area: from the beginning men build the pedagogical and scientific canon; nor in everyday life: it's enough if we just turn on the television and take a look at the news - if there are any extraordinary incidence and they ask for an expert's opinion, it's almost always a men they ask. In the late seventies William Damon examined gender stereotypes mainly about professions among children between the age of six and fourteen. In his research, he revealed that even in those early years there are serious gender stereotypes about how and with what children should play, which jobs they should take later. But as the children got older, it has been revealed that the stereotypes started to fade away, but in every age there are evincible gender stereotypes about all aspects of life. (Damon, 1977)

It isn't surprising when in this situation we ask the question: what possibilities the younger generation nowadays have? Are they influenced by the gender stereotypes? In addition, if the answer is yes, how much? As a breadwinner, will a men take a stereotypically "female job" or a women take a stereotypically "male job" if that is their only chance to provide for their family? Will they go against the unwritten social rules and be norm-breakers? Earlier studies examined gender stereotypes among children, but neither of them examined the career orientation's gender aspects among children between the age of 12 and 14. (Kereszty, 2005) (Frank, 2013)

In my research, my main goal was to get a more or less authentic picture, if nowadays there are any gender aspects of cerebral paretic children's career orientation. In addition, how much influence does it have on their choices? In one of my earlier studies, I examined the same questions among children showing normal development. (Dénes, 2015) I examined the children's attitude with a questionnaire. Because of the restricted possibilities, I could only cooperate with five boys and nine girls.

In the first question, they had to put five attributions in priority order in regard of how important they think it is in a workplace if you are a woman or a man. The five attributions were: pretty/handsome, clever, kind, confident and strong-minded. The cerebral paretic children agreed without an exception that the most important quality is whether someone is clever or not. Among children with normal development, there were a significant percent who thought that the most important quality is prettiness or handsomeness. This difference probably comes from their disabilities. They are highly critical about appearance and because of their disabilities - which are not necessarily attractive in society's opinion - they think they can only prevail in life if they've got the proper intellectual abilities.

In the next question, the children had to sort twenty-three jobs into three groups based on if they think it's a typically feminine, masculine or gender neutral job. The most masculine jobs in their opinions are woodworker, farmer, and chemist. The most feminine are sewer, cosmetician, and nurse, while the most gender neutral jobs are doctor and waiter/waitress. There were five jobs which are reasonable possibilities for cerebral paretic children: librarian, janitor, buffettista, phone customer servicemen/women, and cleaner. The children thought that the only gender neutral job is the buffettista, while the janitor is a masculine job and the librarian, phone customer servicewomen, and cleaner are more feminine. Probably these stereotypes are partly caused by the everyday examples: the janitor service formed by only men and the cleaner service formed by only women and partly caused by associations: the janitor protects institutes which is more masculine in regard of the society. While the cleaner, for example, is associated with the housewives' image. In the last question, there were four pictures: two of men and two of women.

Two of them (one man, one woman) were attractive judged by the social gauge. The other two were pleasant-looking too, a little bit less attractive in regard of the unwritten social rules and they had glasses. Their task was to guess what kind of jobs could they have, judged only by the four pictures. In the first picture was an attractive woman. Most children thought that the woman could only use her body to provide for herself or for her family, among the answers there were model, actress, but also prostitute and porn actress. There were a few who thought she could work as a waitress, but there weren't any answers which said that she could have a white-collar job.

The second picture was of a woman with glasses.

The children thought that she could only have white-collar jobs or work as a waitress or a secretary, but there weren't any answers which said that she could use her attractiveness to provide for herself or her family. Probably this opinion was caused by the above mentioned higher criticism about the external attributions. They think if anyone has any kind of disability which can be seen by others, then they aren't attractive according to the social norms and can't have any jobs which require good external qualities.

In the third and fourth picture, there were the handsome man and the pleasant-looking man with glasses. Half of the children thought that the handsome man uses his attractiveness in his job (actor, model etc.), but there were answers which said that he could have a white-collar job or work as a waiter, secretary etc. The man with glasses got the white-collar job as an answer from all children, there were no exceptions. It's interesting that even cerebral paretic children who study in the Pető András Practicing Elementary School, where ninety percent of the teachers (conductors) are women, still underestimate women against men. Although this underestimation is much, less than the one among children showing normal development, learning in other institutions but it's still there in a significant percent.

### ***Conclusions***

As the results show, the gender stereotypes influence children's career and life choices, even in such a young age. Besides parents, teachers have the biggest influence on children's choices of further education - their role in the career orientation is unquestionable. Cerebral paretic children's choices and possibilities are already limited by their disabilities both physically and by the negative stereotypes which exist in the Hungarian society. How many possibilities will they have if we restrict their choices with gender stereotypes as well?

If they only have the choice to get a job which is typically associated with the other gender, will they accept it and go against the unwritten social rules to provide for their family or the fear of being a norm-breaker is so unbearable for them that they will risk the well-being of their loved ones? Every education system is the most effective when it pays proper attention to the children's age characteristics. Of course, it requires competence and serious preparation from the teachers, educators. There are areas of the education where there has to be a transfer between the subjects, it has to work with a holistic nature. Just like in conductive education where we don't only develop children's motoric functions, we also develop every aspect of their personality - that's the holistic approach which should be the cornerstone of any kind of education, not just of the conductive education. The career orientation is also a multicolored scope of activities which requires this holistic nature, approach.

The twenty-first century, especially the last few decades brought many economic and social changes. Thousands of small firms appear from one week to another and adsorb the experts with proper qualification and competence and multinational companies can go bust in a few days, leave thousands of white-collared people unemployed who usually speak more than one language and have degrees in multiple areas. The educations have to react to these new, existing situations. Help the younger generation with methodological solutions to have a realistic image about their possibilities and chances when they enter the job market and try to find their place in the "real world". The expectation of a multicolored methodology shouldn't be idealistic, since if we want to offer the best for the students, we have to be aware of their talents and knowledge so we can outline realistic possibilities and goals for them.

If we want to tear this down to subjects, in literature we should give them novels which could influence their career choices in an indirect way. Pick texts that give them realistic possibilities, ideas about their future in the job market. In mathematics, we can write our own word problems wherewith we can also influence them indirectly. In science subjects, we have to acquaint them with Hungarian and international scientists, so they can feel that there are people - even disabled ones - behind the scientific breakthroughs. Like above, we can have an impact on them if we acquaint them with Paralympic champions, disabled athletes.

Alternatively, invite older, successful students which can be especially motivating and inspiring for them, because of its proximity to life. There are lots of other untapped possibilities wherewith we can help our children through the challenging times of career orientation: visiting external locations, inviting labor experts, creating cooperation with firms, potential multinational companies.

There is also a necessity to inform the parents, family properly and cooperate with them too, because although it lost a bit of its significance, through the years of growing up they will always have influence on the students' choices, especially on students with Cerebral Palsy.

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