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Social Roles of Women: Theoretical Analysis and Methodological Approaches to Study

Abstract:

During the research, a thorough analysis of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of women's social roles was performed. The object of the study is women's social roles in society. The subject of the study is the transformation of women's social roles in society in a retrospective dimension. The purpose of the study is a retrospective analysis of women's social roles and the identification of significant trends in their transformation in society. In particular, the content of the concept of "social role" in the context of social work and gender studies is clarified; the main theoretical approaches to the analysis of women's social roles are characterized, namely structural-functional, feminist and post-feminist; a set of factors influencing the formation of women's social roles is determined, including social, economic, cultural, political and others. It has been established that in the field of social work the category of "social role" has a special theoretical and practical value, since the professional activity of specialists is aimed at supporting various social groups in the processes of restoration, transformation and development of their social functions and role positions in society. It has been proven that the concept of "social role of women" encompasses a set of social expectations, normative requirements and models of behavior that are assigned to women in various spheres of life, in particular family, professional, political and cultural. During the 20th and 21st centuries, a number of conceptual approaches to the interpretation of this phenomenon were formed, among which the structural-functional, feminist and post-feminist ones occupy a leading place. Their comparative analysis allows us to trace the evolution of ideas about the role of women from a passive carrier of traditionally defined functions to an active subject of social transformations and self-realization. The author concludes that the formation of women's social roles appears as a result of a complex and multidimensional interaction of social, economic, cultural, political, psychological, historical, globalization, demographic and family factors that function at the macro-, meso- and micro-levels of social organization. It is the complex nature of this process that determines the diversity of modern women's roles and the dynamic nature of their transformation.

Keywords: society, woman, social work, social role, formation of social roles, gender, stereotypes, retrospective analysis.

Introduction

The social status of women is an important criterion for assessing the level of democratic development, social maturity, and well-being of society. For this reason, a comprehensive study of the position of women as a social community that quantitatively predominates and possesses significant potential to influence social change acquires particular scholarly relevance. International institutions, including the United Nations, emphasise the strategic importance of

gender issues: according to UN analytical materials, questions concerning the role and status of women in the contemporary world rank among the priority global challenges and, in terms of significance, are second only to environmental and economic problems.

The historical development of society demonstrates that the social role of women has not been immutable but has transformed according to the needs of society, political processes, economic conditions, and cultural shifts. In contemporary conditions, particular attention is required for the problem of women's combination of professional activity, family responsibilities, and civic engagement, which is considered through the prism of ensuring gender equality and full social integration.

The theoretical foundation of contemporary studies of women's social roles comprises several interrelated approaches, including social constructivism, the concept of intersectionality, normative-functional approaches, and role theories, which make it possible to comprehend comprehensively the mechanisms underlying the formation of women's social roles.

Current international scholarly research focuses on a number of key areas, including the impact of social norms on societal development, in particular, UN Women studies published in 2023 that analyse the role of education and civic initiatives in transforming gender stereotypes; the significance of women's leadership in processes of advancing equality; and the interconnection between gender, war, and security.

The works of domestic and foreign scholars, including Hovorun, Kikinezhdi, Kutsenko, Arkhypova, Kon, Kostenko, and others, indicate that women's social roles should be considered not only as a component of individual identity but also as a reflection of dominant social values, normative representations, and established patterns of behaviour.

At the same time, existing studies require a more in-depth analysis of women's social roles through a retrospective approach, which makes it possible to trace the evolution of these roles across different historical periods. It is precisely the combination of scholarly relevance, the social significance of the problem, and the need for comprehensive historical reflection that has determined the choice of the topic of this study.

Object of the study is women's social roles in society.

Subject of the study is transformations of women's social roles in society in a retrospective dimension.

Purpose of the study is a retrospective analysis of women's social roles and the identification of significant trends in their transformation in society.

To achieve the stated purpose and to conduct a comprehensive study of women's social roles in society in a retrospective dimension, the study employed a set of general scientific and specialised methods of cognition, including retrospective analysis, generalisation of scholarly literature, the comparative-historical method, and content analysis.

Retrospective analysis was applied in order to trace the evolution of women's social roles across different historical periods of societal development. The use of this method made it possible to examine how perceptions of women's place and functions changed under the influence of socio-economic, political, cultural, and religious factors. Within the framework of retrospective analysis, key stages of societal development were examined—from traditional patriarchal models to contemporary democratic and gender-oriented systems. This made it

possible to identify patterns in the transformation of women's social roles and to determine the historical prerequisites for the formation of women's contemporary status.

The method of generalising scholarly literature was used to systematise and critically reflect upon theoretical approaches and scholarly concepts concerning women's social roles. In the course of the study, the works of domestic and foreign scholars in sociology, history, philosophy, gender studies, and cultural studies were analysed. The generalisation enabled the identification of the main scholarly approaches to interpreting women's roles in society, the determination of common and distinctive features in their interpretations, and the assessment of the level of scholarly development of the problem. This method contributed to the formation of the theoretical basis of the study and to the substantiation of its conceptual provisions.

The comparative-historical method was applied to compare women's social roles across different historical epochs and in various sociocultural contexts. By means of this method, differences and similarities in the position of women in traditional, industrial, and post-industrial societies were analysed. Comparative analysis made it possible to identify the dynamics of change in societal perceptions of women's roles and to determine the factors that contributed to the expansion or restriction of women's opportunities in different historical periods. The application of this method facilitated a deeper understanding of the historical conditionality of gender roles.

Content analysis was used to examine the representation of women's social roles in various sources of information, including historical documents, legislative acts, journalistic materials, literary works, and mass media. Within the framework of this method, textual content was analysed in order to identify dominant images, stereotypes, and value orientations concerning women in different historical periods. Content analysis made it possible to assess both quantitatively and qualitatively changes in the representation of women's social roles and to trace the transformation of societal perceptions of women as social subjects.

Methods

The methodological framework of this study is based on a combination of general scientific and specialised methods drawn from the social sciences, which together ensure a comprehensive, systematic, and conceptually consistent analysis of women's social roles in a retrospective dimension. The choice of methods is determined by the theoretical orientation of the research, its interdisciplinary nature, and the need to examine the transformation of social roles across different historical, sociocultural, and institutional contexts. The applied methodology makes it possible to analyse women's social roles both as a theoretical construct and as a socially embedded phenomenon shaped by historical change and contemporary social processes.

At the level of general scientific methodology, the study employs analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction, abstraction and generalisation, as well as the systems approach. These methods are used to structure the research logic, to ensure conceptual clarity, and to integrate diverse theoretical perspectives into a coherent analytical model.

The method of analysis is applied to decompose the complex phenomenon of women's social roles into its constituent elements, including normative expectations, behavioural models, institutional frameworks, and value orientations. This analytical procedure allows for the identification of key components that define women's roles in different social spheres—family, professional, political, and cultural—and for the examination of their internal structure and

functional significance. In turn, synthesis is used to reconstruct the analysed elements into an integrated conceptual framework that reflects the multidimensional nature of women's social roles and their transformation over time.

Induction and deduction are employed in a complementary manner. Inductive reasoning is used to derive general conclusions from the analysis of specific theoretical approaches, historical cases, and empirical observations presented in scholarly literature. Deductive reasoning, conversely, enables the application of general theoretical principles—such as social constructivism or gender theory—to the interpretation of particular manifestations of women's social roles in different historical and social contexts. This methodological combination ensures both empirical grounding and theoretical coherence of the research conclusions.

The method of abstraction is applied to isolate essential characteristics of women's social roles from historically contingent or context-specific features. Through abstraction, the study identifies stable analytical categories—such as role expectations, social status, and normative regulation—that can be used comparatively across historical periods. Generalisation is subsequently employed to formulate broader theoretical conclusions concerning patterns and trends in the transformation of women's social roles, based on the accumulated analytical material.

A systems approach underpins the entire research design. Women's social roles are examined as elements of a broader social system, in which social, economic, cultural, political, and psychological factors interact at macro-, meso-, and micro-levels. This approach makes it possible to analyse not only individual roles but also their interconnections and mutual influences, as well as their embeddedness in institutional structures and social practices. The systems perspective is particularly important for understanding the dynamic and relational character of women's social roles and for avoiding their reduction to isolated or static phenomena.

A central methodological role in the study is played by retrospective analysis, which serves as the primary tool for examining the historical evolution of women's social roles. This method makes it possible to trace changes in dominant role models, normative expectations, and social functions attributed to women across different stages of societal development. Retrospective analysis is applied to identify how women's roles have been shaped by broader historical processes, including industrialisation, modernisation, political transformations, and shifts in cultural values.

Within the framework of retrospective analysis, the study examines key historical phases—from traditional patriarchal societies to industrial and post-industrial social formations. Particular attention is paid to changes in the balance between family-oriented roles and roles associated with professional, civic, and political participation. This method allows for the identification of both continuity and rupture in the development of women's social roles, as well as the historical prerequisites for contemporary gender arrangements.

Closely related to retrospective analysis is the comparative-historical method, which is used to compare women's social roles across different historical epochs and sociocultural contexts. This method enables the identification of similarities and differences in role expectations, institutional arrangements, and opportunities available to women in various types of societies. Comparative-historical analysis is applied to reveal long-term trends in the transformation of

women's roles and to assess the impact of specific social conditions—such as economic structure, political regime, or cultural tradition—on these transformations.

The use of the comparative-historical method also facilitates a critical assessment of theoretical models that claim universal applicability. By situating women's social roles within concrete historical contexts, the study demonstrates the historically contingent and socially constructed nature of role systems, thereby avoiding ahistorical or essentialist interpretations.

A significant component of the methodology is the analysis and generalisation of scholarly literature, which provides the theoretical foundation for the study. This method involves a systematic review of domestic and international academic sources in sociology, social work, gender studies, philosophy, history, and cultural studies. The literature review focuses on classical and contemporary theories of social roles, gender, and socialisation, as well as on empirical studies addressing women's roles in different social contexts.

Through critical analysis of existing research, the study identifies key theoretical approaches to understanding women's social roles, including structural-functional, feminist, post-feminist, interactionist, and social-constructivist perspectives. The method of literature generalisation allows for the comparison of these approaches, the identification of their conceptual strengths and limitations, and the clarification of their relevance for contemporary social work and gender analysis.

Theoretical analysis is used not only to summarise existing knowledge but also to position the present study within the broader academic discourse. By synthesising diverse theoretical perspectives, the research develops an integrative analytical framework that reflects the complexity and multidimensionality of women's social roles.

To complement theoretical and historical analysis, the study employs content analysis as a qualitative and partially quantitative method. Content analysis is applied to examine representations of women's social roles in various types of texts, including scholarly publications, policy documents, legislative acts, public discourse materials, and media sources referenced in the analysed literature.

The purpose of content analysis is to identify dominant narratives, images, stereotypes, and value orientations related to women's roles in different historical periods and social contexts. This method makes it possible to trace changes in discursive constructions of femininity, motherhood, professional identity, and civic participation, as well as to assess how these constructions reflect and reinforce broader social norms and power relations.

Content analysis also supports the identification of implicit assumptions and normative frameworks underlying discussions of women's roles. By systematically analysing textual data, the study reveals patterns in the representation of women as social subjects and highlights the mechanisms through which social expectations and role models are reproduced or challenged.

Within the domain of social sciences, the research draws on gender analysis as a key methodological approach. Gender analysis is used to examine social roles through the lens of gender asymmetry, focusing on unequal distributions of power, resources, and opportunities between women and men. This method enables the identification of structural and cultural factors that shape gendered role expectations and constrain or expand women's social participation.

The study also employs a socio-constructivist perspective, according to which women's social roles are understood as socially constructed rather than biologically predetermined. This approach informs the interpretation of empirical and theoretical material by emphasising the role of socialisation, education, institutional practices, and cultural norms in the formation of gendered roles.

Elements of institutional analysis are used to examine how legal frameworks, social policies, and international normative documents—such as gender equality strategies and human rights conventions— influence the definition and regulation of women's social roles. This method is particularly relevant for analysing the role of social work as a professional field aimed at supporting role adaptation, transformation, and integration.

Finally, the study incorporates a multilevel analytical approach, distinguishing between macro-level (societal and institutional), meso-level (community and organisational), and micro-level (individual and family) factors. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how women's social roles are shaped and negotiated across different levels of social organisation.

Literature Review

The analysis of women's social roles is grounded in a broad and interdisciplinary body of scholarly literature that encompasses sociological theory, gender studies, social work, psychology, cultural studies, and international normative frameworks. The reviewed sources collectively form the theoretical and methodological foundation for the present study, enabling a comprehensive understanding of the formation, transformation, and contemporary significance of women's social roles.

One of the foundational distinctions between biological sex and socially constructed gender is articulated in the work by Andriiv (2001), which examines women's participation in the labour market through the lens of gender differentiation. This source contributes to the conceptual clarification of gender as a socio-economic category and highlights structural barriers affecting women's employment, thereby informing the economic dimension of women's social roles.

A key theoretical basis for the study is provided by Berger and Luckmann (2016), whose theory of the social construction of reality underpins the understanding of social roles as products of institutionalisation, legitimisation, and social reproduction. Their work is central to interpreting women's social roles as historically contingent and socially constructed rather than biologically predetermined.

The sociological dimension of gender socialisation in contemporary Ukraine is analysed by Bondar (2021), who explores mechanisms through which gender norms and role expectations are transmitted and internalised. This study contributes empirical insights into the national sociocultural context and supports the argument that women's social roles are shaped by ongoing social transformation processes.

An essential normative and legal framework for the analysis is provided by the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1979). This international document establishes gender equality as a fundamental human rights principle and serves as a benchmark for evaluating institutional and policy-related aspects of women's social roles within social work and social policy.

Economic and labour market dimensions of women's roles are further elaborated in the work of Cook and Glass (2021), which examines women's leadership and labour market equality. Their findings underscore the importance of economic independence and structural inclusion for expanding women's social roles beyond traditional domestic boundaries.

The cultural and representational dimension of gender roles is addressed by Hall (2020), whose theory of representation provides analytical tools for understanding how femininity and women's roles are constructed, reproduced, and contested within cultural discourse. This work informs the analysis of media and symbolic representations of women.

The edited volume by Hentosh and Kis (2003) offers a comprehensive overview of the gender approach in historical, cultural, and societal contexts. It contributes to the methodological framework of the study by systematising gender analysis as an interdisciplinary research strategy applicable to social work and social sciences.

Psychological aspects of women's role realisation are explored in Ivanchenko (2021), which analyses personal motivation, self-esteem, and psychological determinants of women's social self-realisation. This source supports the inclusion of individual-level psychological factors in the analysis of women's social roles.

A historically grounded analysis of women's roles is provided by Kis (2017), who examines Ukrainian women's experiences in the context of modernisation. This work contributes a longitudinal perspective and highlights the interaction between historical change and gender role transformation.

The monograph by Kis (2020) further expands this perspective by offering a sociocultural history of Ukrainian women. It is particularly valuable for understanding the persistence of traditional role models alongside emerging forms of female agency in contemporary society.

Educational and methodological foundations of gender studies are presented in Lobanova and Nikolaienko (2000), which outlines programme guidelines for gender-related education. This source contributes to the pedagogical dimension of gender role formation and institutional gender awareness.

The conceptualisation of social roles within social work theory is central to the textbook by Lukashevych and Semyhina (2023). Their work defines social roles as dynamic behavioural models linked to social status and adaptation, providing a direct theoretical framework for analysing women's roles within professional social work practice.

Post-feminist interpretations of women's roles are articulated in MacRobbie (2010), who analyses gender, culture, and social change in late modernity. This source informs the discussion of role pluralisation, individual choice, and women's agency in contemporary societies.

The interactionist perspective on social roles is rooted in the classic work of Mead (2017), which conceptualises roles as outcomes of symbolic interaction and socialisation. This theoretical approach supports the understanding of women's roles as negotiated and situational rather than fixed.

Practical and institutional challenges of social work are addressed in Omelchenko et al. (2021), which provides applied insights into role conflicts, social exclusion, and professional intervention strategies. This source bridges theoretical role analysis and real-world social work practice.

A macro-sociological framework for understanding social systems and role structures is provided by Parsons (2022). His theory of the social system establishes the foundational link between social roles, norms, and systemic stability.

The family-centred role differentiation model is further developed in Parsons and Bales (2014), which distinguishes instrumental and expressive roles within the family. This work informs the analysis of traditional gender role allocation and its enduring influence.

National policy-oriented perspectives on gender development are presented in Pekhnyk (2005), which examines gender development strategies in Ukraine. This source contributes to understanding institutional and political influences on women's social roles.

Contemporary methodological approaches to gender role analysis are systematised by Semenyuk (2021), who reviews current gender-analytical frameworks. This work supports the integrative methodological orientation of the present study.

The symbolic and psychological dimensions of women's representation are analysed by Sidorenko (2022), whose research on media images highlights the role of mass communication in shaping public perceptions of femininity and success.

An important global economic perspective is offered by Women, Business and the Law 2021 (2021), which provides comparative data on legal and economic constraints affecting women's participation. This source reinforces the link between legal structures and women's social roles.

Finally, the conceptual synthesis of gender roles within sociocultural relations is presented in Yarosh (2020). This article directly informs the theoretical core of the present study by integrating sociological and cultural perspectives on gender role systems.

In summary, the reviewed literature demonstrates that women's social roles have been examined across multiple theoretical paradigms and empirical contexts. Each source contributes a distinct analytical dimension—structural, cultural, psychological, economic, institutional, or normative—forming a comprehensive scholarly foundation for the study. By synthesising these contributions, the study situates women's social roles as a dynamic, socially constructed phenomenon shaped by historical processes and contemporary social change.

Results

The issue of social roles occupies one of the leading positions in sociology, psychology, and social work, since it is precisely through the performance of roles that an individual becomes integrated into the social system, realises personal potential, and builds interaction with other members of society. In the field of social work, the concept of the "*social role*" acquires particular significance, as specialists work with various social groups, assisting clients in restoring, transforming, or developing their social functions and role positions. Analysis of the category of "*social role*" makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the processes of socialisation, resocialisation, and role adaptation of the individual, which constitutes the theoretical foundation of effective social work practice.

In the classical understanding, a social role is defined as a set of socially conditioned expectations, norms, and requirements addressed to an individual who occupies a particular social status. Parsons (2022) was among the first to conceptualise the social role as a structural element of the social system that ensures stability and orderliness of social interaction.

Representatives of symbolic interactionism, in particular Mead ([2017](#)), considered the role to be a key mechanism of socialisation through which the individual internalises social norms and becomes integrated into social life.

In contemporary theory and practice of social work, the social role is interpreted more broadly—as a dynamic model of individual behaviour that reflects social status, expectations of the social environment, and individual modes of interaction with it ([Lukasherych & Semyhina, 2023](#)). In this understanding, the social role not only delineates behavioural boundaries but also serves as an indicator of a person's social identity.

A social role may be regarded as a relatively stable type of individual behaviour determined by one's position within the social structure and aligned with the normative expectations of society. It appears as a form of socially approved activity corresponding to a particular personal status. The manifestation of a social role is fixed in the course of prolonged interaction, when certain behavioural patterns are reproduced consistently and, over time, become socially expected. Thus, the role is considered a constituent element of the overall structure of individual behaviour.

The formation of social role theory took place within several scholarly approaches—from structural-functional to interactionist and social-constructivist. The structural-functional approach (Parsons & Merton) emphasises the normative character of the role, which is determined by social expectations and performs the function of maintaining social order ([Parsons, 2022](#)). Symbolic interactionism (Mead & Blumer) focuses on the process of interpreting roles in interpersonal interaction, highlighting their dynamism and variability ([Mead, 2017](#)). The social-constructivist approach (Berger & Luckmann) views social roles as products of social agreements that are formed, maintained, and transformed in the course of social practices ([Berger & Luckmann, 2016](#)).

For social work, the most appropriate is an integrative approach that combines the normative and subjective dimensions of social roles. Within such an approach, the social worker takes into account not only social requirements for the client's role behaviour but also the client's individual experience, resources, and capacity for role adaptation.

Social work is aimed at supporting, correcting, or restoring an individual's ability to perform social roles effectively—family, professional, civic, gender, and others. Disruptions in role functioning often lead to social problems, including isolation, role conflicts, maladaptation, or deviant behaviour ([Omelchenko et al., 2021](#)). Of particular importance is also a systems approach, which makes it possible to consider the interconnection of social roles at the microsocial (family) and macrosocial (societal) levels and contributes to the comprehensive resolution of social problems.

Thus, the concept of the “*social role*” is key to the theory and practice of social work, as it reflects the essence of the processes of socialisation, adaptation, and integration of the individual into society. The social role functions not only as a normative model of behaviour but also as an important instrument of human self-realisation in society. The activities of social workers are aimed at restoring, supporting, or correcting clients' role functioning, the effectiveness of which determines the level of their social competence, psychological well-being, and life stability.

In contemporary society, gender issues acquire particular relevance in the context of individual socialisation and the distribution of social roles. Gender as a sociocultural category

reflects a system of norms, expectations, and stereotypes that define acceptable models of behaviour for women and men in various spheres of social life. The application of a gender approach to the analysis of social roles makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of the influence of social institutions, cultural traditions, and educational practices on the formation of differentiated role models.

In social work, the gender approach has particular practical significance, as it is aimed at overcoming inequalities caused by socially constructed gender differences and at ensuring equal opportunities for all citizens regardless of sex. Its emergence in the second half of the twentieth century was driven by criticism of androcentric theories in the social sciences that ignored or marginalised women's experience. The theoretical foundation of the gender approach is based on the concept of the social construction of gender developed by de Beauvoir, Butler, Lorber, West, Zimmerman, and other scholars.

The essence of the gender approach lies in analysing social processes through the prism of gender asymmetry, which manifests itself in the distribution of labour, power, resources, and social roles between men and women. Simone de Beauvoir's statement that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" has become a conceptual foundation for understanding that gender roles are formed under the influence of socialisation, upbringing, cultural traditions, and institutional norms, rather than being biologically determined ([Omelchenko et al., 2021](#)).

The gender approach in sociology, psychology, and social work is based on the following principles: recognition of the social conditionality of sex roles; analysis of power hierarchies and inequalities between the sexes; consideration of gender differences in access to resources and opportunities; and orientation towards achieving gender justice and equality of rights. As noted by Kis ([Hentosh & Kis, 2003](#)), gender methodology makes it possible to critically reconsider social practices traditionally perceived as "*natural*" and to reveal mechanisms that entrench inequality in the spheres of family, education, labour, and politics.

In scholarly discourse, two basic concepts—"sex" and "gender"—are conventionally distinguished. The concept of "sex" is used to denote anatomical and physiological characteristics that determine biological differences between men and women, whereas the term "gender" encompasses psychological, social, and cultural factors that shape an individual's social identity within a particular society ([Andriiv, 2001, p. 174](#)).

Accordingly, sex is regarded as an innate characteristic primarily determined by reproductive function and physiological differences, whereas gender appears as the result of social construction of roles, statuses, and models of behaviour ([Lobanova & Nikolaienko, 2000, p. 10](#)). In this context, the concept of "gender" is closely linked to the idea of social modelling of sex, since in the process of socialisation society forms a system of norms and prescriptions that regulate acceptable patterns of behaviour for men and women. Thus, gender is not a naturally determined given but is formed under the influence of social representations and cultural practices ([Pekhnyk, 2005, p. 39](#)).

A social role is defined as an expected model of behaviour associated with a particular social position of the individual. Within the gender approach, social roles are interpreted as forms of manifestation of the social status of men and women, conditioned by cultural expectations and normative representations of a given society.

Throughout historical development, women were traditionally assigned the roles of mother, wife, and guardian of the domestic hearth, while men were associated with professional activity and socio-political engagement. However, contemporary social transformations driven by modernisation processes, urbanisation, and changes in the sphere of labour have led to a gradual revision and rethinking of these stereotypical role models.

An important methodological basis for the application of the gender approach in social work is the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) (1979), as well as the Strategy for Ensuring Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men in Ukraine until 2030. These documents define the principles of gender equality and non-discrimination as fundamental guidelines for social policy and the professional activities of social workers.

Thus, the gender approach contributes to the formation of gender-sensitive models of social assistance, within which the client is viewed as an active subject with their own gender identity, needs, and social roles shaped by a specific cultural and social context.

The study of women's social roles occupies an important place in contemporary social and humanities sciences. Changes in sociocultural conditions, the development of the knowledge society, the growing role of human rights, and the consolidation of the principle of gender equality have made it necessary to rethink traditional notions of women's place and functions within the social structure.

The concept of the "*social role of women*" encompasses a system of social expectations, norms, and behavioural models that society ascribes to women in various spheres of life—family, professional, political, and cultural. During the twentieth and 21st centuries, several approaches to interpreting this phenomenon have emerged in scholarly thought, among which the structural-functional, feminist, and post-feminist concepts occupy a leading position. Their analysis makes it possible to trace the evolution of ideas about women's roles—from a passive bearer of traditional social obligations to an active subject of social change and self-realisation.

The structural-functional concept of women's social roles emerged in the mid-twentieth century in the works of Parsons, Merton, and Davis, who viewed society as an integral system of interrelated elements, each of which performs defined functions to maintain social equilibrium. Within this approach, social roles are interpreted as normatively закреплённые expectations associated with a particular social status.

With regard to women, the structural-functional approach presupposes the dominance of family-oriented roles—mother, wife, and educator. Thus, in Parsons's concept of the family, instrumental roles attributed to men (material provision, control, power) are distinguished from expressive roles traditionally ascribed to women (emotional support, care, child-rearing) (Parsons & Bales, 2014).

Although this model is criticised for its patriarchal character, it has become an important theoretical basis for analysing roles as mechanisms of social integration. Its strength lies in recognising the significance of women's contribution to ensuring the stability of the social system, whereas its principal limitation is considered to be an underestimation of the dynamism and variability of women's social roles.

Contemporary scholars note that, under conditions of a post-industrial society, the structural-functional approach loses its universality, since women increasingly realise themselves

in the spheres of politics, business, science, and civic activity ([Semenyuk, 2021; Yarosh, 2020](#)). At the same time, its conceptual propositions remain important for analysing the relationship between social expectations and processes of individual self-determination.

The feminist concept of women's social roles developed as a response to social inequality and discrimination embedded in traditional social structures. Within this approach, social roles are regarded as the result of the social construction of gender, supported by cultural norms, political institutions, and economic relations. Unlike the structural-functional paradigm, feminist theory rejects the natural обусловленность of women's roles. Simone de Beauvoir's dictum that "one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" became pivotal for recognising that social roles are products of socialisation, education, and upbringing, rather than biological determination ([Hentosh & Kis, 2003](#)).

Feminist scholars, including Friedan, Butler, Millett, and Young, developed the idea of the plurality of women's identities, which are not reducible solely to maternal or family function. In this context, gender roles are seen as a space of struggle for power, access to resources, and the right to self-determination.

As noted by Kis ([2020](#)), the feminist approach contributed to deconstructing traditional notions of "*female nature*", emphasising the historical and cultural variability of women's roles in society. It became a foundation for the development of gender studies, the improvement of social policy in the sphere of equal rights and opportunities, and the formation of a new humanistic paradigm of social work.

The post-feminist concept of women's social roles formed at the end of the twentieth and the beginning of the 21st century as a reaction to the radicalism of classical feminism and an attempt to rethink femininity in a globalised world. Without denying the achievements of the feminist movement, post-feminism emphasises individual choice, self-realisation, and women's subjectivity, highlighting the diversity of pathways of women's social and personal development.

According to MacRobbie ([2010](#)), post-feminism recognises feminist achievements in ensuring equal rights, yet shifts the emphasis to women's autonomy, their ability to choose life strategies independently, and to combine traditional and modern social roles. Within this approach, a woman has the right to realise herself simultaneously as a mother, professional, leader, or volunteer, and none of these roles is regarded as less valuable or "*less feminine*".

Thus, the analysis of structural-functional, feminist, and post-feminist concepts of women's social roles demonstrates the evolution of scholarly understanding of this phenomenon—from a normative and descriptive approach to a critical, humanistic, and subjectivity-oriented one. In social work, these concepts perform an important methodological function, as they make it possible to identify the influence of cultural, economic, and institutional factors on forming women's social roles, and also serve as a basis for developing gender-sensitive practices of social assistance.

The formation of women's social roles is a complex, multifactorial process within which social, cultural, economic, political, and psychological factors interact. In sociological, gender, and socio-pedagogical research, women's roles are regarded as a dynamic social construct that reflects the transformation of social relations, shifts in value orientations, and social expectations ([Bondar, 2021; Kis, 2020](#)).

Social factors encompass the system of social interactions, the level of development of social institutions, and the character of interpersonal relations. According to the propositions of social constructivism, social roles are formed under the influence of collective representations and practices that reinforce normative models of behaviour for women (*Berger & Luckmann, 2016*). The main social factors include:

- the family as the primary agent of socialisation, within which basic models of women's behaviour are formed, oriented towards care, responsibility, and emotional support;
- education, which acts as an important channel of social mobility, determines women's professional orientations, and contributes to overcoming gender stereotypes;
- mass media and social networks, which shape mass representations of femininity, success, and social activity.

As Sidorenko's research (*2022*) indicates, the media may both reproduce traditional gender roles and create new images of women—professionally successful, independent, and civically active.

Economic factors exert a substantial influence on the formation and realisation of women's social roles. Economic independence is regarded as one of the key elements of women's self-realisation and social autonomy (*Women..., 2021*). Among the most important economic factors are:

- the labour market and features of the economic structure of society;
- social policy and gender-oriented legislation;
- the level of women's economic autonomy;
- the combination of professional and family responsibilities, which is often accompanied by the phenomenon of the double burden (*Cook & Glass, 2021*).

Cultural factors also have a significant influence on the formation of women's social roles. Cultural traditions, values, norms, and symbols define the *рамки* of socially acceptable behaviour and shape notions of femininity, motherhood, and marital roles (*Kis, 2020*). Key cultural factors include:

- religious and moral norms, which often regulate expectations regarding women's behaviour in the family and community;
- national traditions and customs, which preserve elements of patriarchal models but gradually transform under the influence of modernisation processes;
- cultural globalisation, which creates conditions for intercultural exchange and the dissemination of new models of femininity (*Hall, 2020*).

The cultural context forms primary conceptions of “*proper*” women's social roles—maternal, domestic-family, educational, and caregiving. In traditional societies, expectations associated with women's roles in the family sphere dominate, which often limits opportunities for professional self-realisation. In modern societies, the *спектр* of women's roles gradually expands; however, cultural patterns continue to influence their structure, reinforcing *устойчивые* gender stereotypes.

An important place in the formation of women's social roles belongs to psychological and individual-personal factors, including:

- personal values and the motivational sphere;

- the level of self-esteem and the formation of self-identity;
- the psychological developmental environment.

Personal self-awareness, the system of life values, and attitudes determine those social roles that a woman is prepared to accept and realise. According to the results of psychological research, the level of intrinsic motivation and a sense of self-respect directly influence the choice of professional trajectory, the character of family relationships, and lifestyle (*Ivanchenko, 2021*).

A separate group comprises historical and globalisation factors in the formation of women's social roles. Women's social roles have changed under the influence of socio-political transformations: in particular, industrialisation contributed to the expansion of women's professional opportunities; movements for equal rights transformed their legal status; and wars and social crises necessitated the performance of non-traditional roles. At the same time, globalisation processes and technological development have created new conditions for women's professional, educational, and civic activity.

No less important are demographic and family factors, including the type of family and its structure, the level of urbanisation, reproductive capacities, and особенности of motherhood. These factors directly influence the distribution of roles within the family and in society as a whole.

Thus, the formation of women's social roles is the result of a complex interaction of social, economic, cultural, political, psychological, historical, globalisation, demographic, and family factors operating at macro- and micro-levels. In contemporary society, a tendency towards the pluralisation of women's roles is observed, reflecting processes of democratisation, the development of civil society, and the consolidation of values of equality. Increasingly, women appear not only as guardians of family well-being but also as active participants in social, economic, and political processes. It is precisely the combination of traditional female identity with new social roles that determines the specificity of contemporary gender dynamics in the world.

Discussion

The relevance of the study of women's social roles in contemporary social sciences is determined by profound transformations occurring in modern societies under the influence of globalisation, democratisation, changing labour markets, and the growing institutionalisation of gender equality principles. The results of the present research confirm that women's social roles remain a key analytical category for understanding broader processes of social change, social integration, and the redistribution of power, resources, and responsibilities within society.

The discussion of women's social roles is particularly significant in the context of social work, where professional practice is directly oriented towards supporting individuals in situations of role conflict, role overload, or role exclusion. As demonstrated in the analysed literature and theoretical models, women are disproportionately affected by structural inequalities related to the distribution of care responsibilities, access to economic resources, and participation in decision-making processes. This reinforces the importance of a theoretically grounded and historically informed understanding of women's roles for developing effective and gender-sensitive social interventions.

The retrospective perspective adopted in this study further enhances its relevance. By tracing the evolution of women's social roles from traditional patriarchal models to contemporary pluralised configurations, the research highlights the non-linear and context-dependent nature of gender role transformation. This is particularly important in societies undergoing rapid social change, where traditional and modern role expectations often coexist, generating tensions at both the individual and institutional levels. The findings confirm that women's social roles cannot be adequately analysed without considering their historical embeddedness and sociocultural specificity.

Moreover, the integration of structural-functional, feminist, and post-feminist approaches allows for a comprehensive discussion of women's roles as both socially regulated and individually negotiated phenomena. This theoretical pluralism corresponds to current trends in social sciences, which increasingly reject mono-paradigmatic explanations in favour of multidimensional analytical frameworks. In this sense, the relevance of the study lies not only in its subject matter but also in its methodological and conceptual orientation.

Despite the extensive body of literature devoted to women's social roles, the discussion reveals a number of persistent theoretical and methodological problems that continue to complicate research in this field. One of the central challenges is the tension between normative and descriptive approaches to social roles. Structural-functional theories, while offering valuable insights into the stabilising functions of roles, tend to reproduce normative assumptions that inadequately reflect the diversity and dynamism of women's lived experiences. This limitation remains evident in some contemporary analyses that implicitly prioritise family-oriented roles and underestimate women's agency in redefining role expectations.

Another significant problem concerns the fragmentation of theoretical perspectives. Feminist and post-feminist approaches have successfully exposed power asymmetries and the socially constructed nature of gender roles; but they sometimes lack sufficient integration with empirical social work research and institutional analysis. As a result, theoretical insights into gender inequality are not always translated into practical frameworks for professional intervention. This gap between theory and practice represents a major challenge for applied fields such as social work, where methodological clarity and operationalisation are essential.

The discussion also highlights methodological difficulties related to the retrospective analysis of social roles. While historical approaches are indispensable for understanding long-term transformations, they are often constrained by the availability and interpretative limitations of historical sources. Representations of women's roles in legal documents, philosophical texts, or media sources tend to reflect dominant ideological frameworks rather than the full spectrum of women's everyday practices. This creates a risk of over-reliance on normative discourses and underrepresentation of marginal or non-conforming role models.

Another unresolved issue concerns the intersectionality of women's social roles. Although contemporary gender studies increasingly emphasise the intersection of gender with class, ethnicity, age, and other social categories, many studies—including those within social work—continue to treat women as a relatively homogeneous group. The present research acknowledges this limitation and suggests that insufficient attention to intersectional differences may obscure important variations in role expectations and opportunities among different groups of women.

Finally, the discussion points to the challenge of balancing universality and contextual specificity. International frameworks and normative documents promote universal principles of gender equality; however, their implementation and interpretation are mediated by national cultures, institutional traditions, and socio-economic conditions. This raises questions about the applicability of general theoretical models to specific social contexts and underscores the need for context-sensitive analysis.

The identified problems and limitations indicate several promising directions for future research. First, there is a clear need for studies that further integrate theoretical gender analysis with empirical research in social work practice. Such studies could examine how abstract concepts of social roles and gender equality are operationalised in concrete professional interventions, policies, and institutional practices. This would contribute to strengthening the practical relevance of gender theory and enhancing evidence-based social work.

Second, future research should place greater emphasis on intersectional approaches to women's social roles. Analysing how gender interacts with socio-economic status, ethnicity, disability, age, and family structure would allow for a more nuanced understanding of role differentiation and inequality. This is particularly important in the context of increasing social diversity and migration processes, which reshape traditional role expectations and social support systems.

Third, comparative cross-cultural and cross-national studies represent a valuable direction for extending the present research. By comparing women's social roles across different cultural and institutional settings, scholars can identify both universal patterns and context-specific variations in role formation and transformation. Such research would also facilitate a critical assessment of global gender equality frameworks and their local adaptations.

Another перспективний напрям concerns the impact of digitalisation and technological change on women's social roles. The expansion of remote work, digital activism, and online communities creates new opportunities for role diversification but also introduces new forms of inequality and role overload. Investigating these processes would enrich current theoretical models and address emerging challenges in social work and gender policy.

Finally, longitudinal and mixed-methods research designs could significantly enhance the study of women's social roles. Combining qualitative and quantitative data over time would allow researchers to capture both structural trends and individual trajectories, providing a more comprehensive picture of role transformation processes. Such approaches would be particularly useful for evaluating the long-term effects of social policies and gender-sensitive interventions.

The discussion confirms that the study of women's social roles remains a theoretically rich and socially significant field of inquiry. While existing research has made substantial progress in conceptualising gendered roles as dynamic and socially constructed phenomena, unresolved theoretical and methodological challenges persist. Addressing these challenges requires interdisciplinary, context-sensitive, and practice-oriented research strategies. The present study contributes to this endeavour by offering a retrospective and integrative framework that can serve as a foundation for further scholarly investigation and professional application in social work and gender studies.

Conclusion

Thus, the analysis of the theoretical and methodological foundations of the study of women's social roles has made it possible to formulate a number of generalised conclusions. The examination of the category of the "*social role*" in the context of social work has demonstrated its leading significance both for theoretical reflection and for the practical activities of specialists in this field. Social roles reflect the fundamental mechanisms of socialisation, adaptation, and integration of the individual into the system of social relations, determining expected patterns of behaviour. At the same time, their function is not limited to the normative dimension, since role positions also serve as an important means of self-expression and self-realisation of the individual within the social environment.

In professional social work practice, priority is given to activities aimed at supporting, restoring, or correcting impaired role functioning of clients. The effectiveness of such interventions significantly affects the level of an individual's social competence, their emotional and psychological stability, and their capacity for constructive interaction with the surrounding environment, which, in turn, determines the quality of performance of socially significant roles.

The generalisation of scholarly approaches to the application of the gender perspective in the study of social roles indicates that the gender approach creates opportunities for a deeper understanding of the mechanisms underlying the reproduction of social inequality and for identifying patterns in reformatting role models in contemporary society. Its key premise lies in recognising the socially conditioned nature of roles, which are formed under the influence of the sociocultural context, historical traditions, institutional practices, and state policy, rather than being determined exclusively by biological factors.

The application of the gender approach in social work facilitates the implementation of gender-sensitive methods and technologies oriented towards considering the diversity of life strategies of women and men. This enhances the effectiveness of social support, contributes to the consolidation of the principles of equality, expands opportunities for personal development, and strengthens the foundations of social justice.

The concept of the "*social role of women*" represents a set of social expectations, norms, and behavioural models assigned to women in family, professional, political, cultural, and other spheres of life. Throughout the 20th and 21st centuries, scholarly reflection on this phenomenon has developed within several conceptual approaches, the leading ones being structural-functional, feminist, and post-feminist.

Thus, the process of forming women's social roles appears as a complex, multidimensional phenomenon conditioned by the interaction of various factors operating at different levels of social organisation. It is precisely this interaction that determines the specificity of role expectations regarding women and delineates the real possibilities for their realisation in different spheres of contemporary social life.

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