

## HOW STUDENTS THINK GENDER.

### An empirical approach

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#### **Abstract**

The following research focuses on gender stereotypes and gender inequalities in Romania and the way they are perceived by college students from Cluj-Napoca. Differences between men and women are universal and they are learned through socialization that starts in the family, continues further in school and in peer groups, being also reinforced by mass-media. Such differences can be encountered in the way people perceive men-masculinity and women-femininity (namely in gender stereotypes) or in more tangible aspects such as labor force or distribution of rewarded and non-rewarded activities between men and women and so on. This pilot study analyzed the college students' perception regarding how typical different characteristics are for each gender and it has shown that some adjectives are still correlated more with men or women. It also examined the way their family members divide the non-rewarded activities and the results displayed the tendency of family members to share most of the activities and it emphasized the fact that women's role is no longer seen as traditional as it was in the past. Lastly, the study emphasized that students consider that activities such as taking care of the housework activities and being a breadwinner is the responsibility of both men and women.

#### **Sex, gender and stereotypes**

In order to talk about gender inequalities, the difference between two concepts, sex and gender must be made. The terms are not completely interchangeable or distinct. The term sex is used as a dichotomous biological variable which divides people in males and females. On the other hand, the term gender to describe the dimensions of masculinity and femininity that have social and cultural implications. As children gather information regarding gender, the knowledge will result in stereotypes that transmit children that the other people of the same sex as them should also look, think and do the things that they do by themselves. There is created a model that allows them to evaluate and categorize new information. (Leinbach, Hort, & Fagot, 1997, pp. 108)

Social and cultural stereotypes are used to describe beliefs that are shared with the members of a culture and which are general consensus. Through stereotypes the information received about various persons is filtered and

organized and people are categorized to a group without making great efforts and after that, different trait specific to the group are assigned to them. Moreover, stereotypes help people make their first impression about a new person and give them guidance regarding the way they should act with the new person. The most remarkable stereotypes are gender stereotypes because they are universal; they can be encountered in any society and they have similar characteristics. (Iluț, 2009, pp. 297-315)

### **Gender issues in Romania**

In Romania there are still a lot of problems to solve when talking about feminism because when we are referring to Romania we must have in mind the post-socialist context. Socialism had a great impact to the women's condition due to the pro-natalist policies which reduced women's participation to labor force and increased the gender gap between men and women. Socialism has devaluated women and made them depend to the needs of the forced state policy (Magyari-Vincze, pp. 65-73).

During the last twenty years of post-communism transition the subject of feminism has gone through three main stages. The first stage, during the 90's, made Romanians more familiarized with the concept of feminism and the idea of gender equality. The second stage can be identified with the pre-adhesion to the European Union and the third one with the post-adhesion to the European Union. During these two stages, the subject of gender equality was added to the public agenda and after that a lot of European projects were implemented in order to reduce gender inequalities in the labor market and social inclusion. However, the reactions regarding this topic were ignorance, because people thought that it is a subject that is not relevant to Romania's context; minimization, due to the fact that there are other topics that have a greater importance; rejection, because it was seen as a hurtful and sensitive topic or it was seen just as a formalization that was mentioned in documents.

The promotion of equal rights between women and men in Romania is seen as a paradox by Hurubean (2013) because the policies and the projects implemented to achieve equal rights actually encourage gender inequalities that are encountered in patriarchal culture. In Romania there is that can be observed at the level of state and in the projects funded by the European Union which promote gender equality at a formal and superficial level, trying to solve the effects without understanding what causes gender inequality. (Hurubean, 2013, pp. 1-18)

There are evidence that support Hurubeanu's (2013) sayings regarding the fact that Romania has ignored, minimized or rejected gender equality. In 2012, Romania was ranked as being the country with the lowest score of the Gender Equality Index from the entire European Union. "The Gender Equality Index assesses the impact of gender equality policies in the European Union and by Member States over time. It is built around six core domains - work, money, knowledge, time, power and health - and two satellite domains: violence against women and intersecting inequalities and it is based on EU policy priorities." Romania's Gender Equality Index was in 2012 33,7 points. Other countries that had a lower score were Slovakia (36,5 points), Portugal (37,6 points), Greece (38,3 points), Bulgaria (38,5 points) and Croatia (39,8 points). On the other pole there are countries such as Sweden (74,2 points) and Finland (72,7 points). The most prominent inequalities between men and women are related to time dimension (the difference between work, household activities, social and cultural activities) which has a score of 17,4 points; power dimension with 20,7 points; knowledge dimension with 28,2 points and also the money dimension with a score of 38,4 points. Moreover, using the Gender Barometer from 2000, when asked if there is a real equality of rights between women and men in Romania 50% of the respondent said that there is not, and only 36% consider that there is gender equality.

According to G. Hofstede, G. J. Hofstede and M. Minkov's (2010) study on the cultural models present in different countries, the masculinity-femininity dimension is measured through the masculinity index (MAS) which is measured on a scale from 0 for the most feminine country to 100 for the most masculine country. *A society is called masculine when emotional gender roles are clearly distinct: men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success, whereas women are supposed to be more modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. A society is called feminine when emotional gender roles overlap: both men and women are supposed to be modest, tender, and concerned with the quality of life. (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010, pp. 140)*

Romania has a score of 42 points, which means that both values, feminine and masculine are encountered, but the feminine ones are more predominant. The most feminine countries are Sweden, Norway, Latvia, And the Netherlands and the most masculine countries are Slovakia, Hungary and Austria. However, we can observe some characteristics in Romania's culture that show that it has a patriarchal culture. For example, in the 2000 Romania's Gender Barometer 63% of the respondents claimed

that it is women's duty more than men's to undertake the housework and 70% declared that it is men's duty more than women's to be the main breadwinners in the household. Out of the total respondents, 83% consider that man is the head of the family and another 78% of the respondents believe that a woman have to follow her man. When asked if men are as able as women in raising children approximately 50% of the respondents said "no".

Because of the fact that Romania has a patriarchal culture, there is perpetuated the idea that women must access social and professional positions that men occupy. In order to do that, women have to adopt the same qualities that men have, such as ambitious, aggressive, ferocious. Besides that, there are also promoted pieces of clothing that resemble with the ones that men wear in order to emphasize the idea that equality refers to masculine standards. (Hurubean, 2013, pp. 5)

### **Socialization**

Gender roles are learned through socialization. *Socialization means that both girls and boys learn their place in society and once they have learned it most of them want for things to stay the way they are. In male-dominated societies most women desire the domination of males.* (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 151) Socialization starts in family and continues further in school and in peer groups. In order to achieve gender equality the change must start from the transformation of the collective mindset which can be done by internalizing values through socialization and education.

Children as young as 1 year and 6 months have toys preferences that are sex-stereotyped. From the age of 3 they start to have preferences about their play groups and play in groups of the same sex. Girls play more with dolls and soft toys, they like to dance and dress up and boys play with cars and tools and they like to tumble. Between the ages of three and five boys like to climb, to play in the sand, to play with blocks and girls are more likely to spend their time doing arts related activities. Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit and Cossette (1990) research revealed the fact that more girls than boys own dolls, 85% versus 68% and more boys than girls had tools, 37% over 17%. Moreover, according to the parents' statements boys wore more blue and girls wore more pink. (Pomerleau, Bolduc, Malcuit, & Cossette, 1990, pp. 362) Also, children that are 4 years old have acquired a lot of knowledge about gender and are no longer flexible about what each sex is allowed to do. In the set of the three studies conducted by Leinbach, Hort and Fagot (1997) the overall results showed that children assigned items

such as bear, eagle, angry face to males and butterflies, hearts, flowers and a small bird to females. (Leinbach et al., 1997, pp. 128)

There are also other elements that contribute to the internalization of gender roles such as mass-media (TV shows, commercials), children's books, toys. TV commercials that are related to food portray acting or narrating women if the commercial is about food that can be cooked at home, meals such as breakfast and dinner that are about to be served with family or about a diet product. In contrast to these kinds of commercials, the ones advertising fast food products portray men that consume those products. The commercials that use women cooking reinforce stereotypes that women should take care of home and family and the ones that depict men are emphasizing the fact that they are only buying the products that they need to eat in order to satisfy their appetites. (Farris, Davis, & Compton, pp. 74-80) Moreover, *In catalogues and in stores, special sections are reserved for sex-stereotyped toys. Girls sections contain dolls and accessories, doll houses, arts and crafts kits, toy beauty sets, and housekeeping and cooking toys. Building sets, sports-related toys, transportation toys, workbenches and tools are featured in the boys sections.* (Pomerleau et al., 1990, pp. 365)

### **Male and Female rewarded and unrewarded work**

Men and women are biological different and there are statistical evidences that show that physical distinction between the two sexes exists all over the world and are the same. On average, men are taller and stronger and women have a better finger dexterity or a faster metabolism. Despite the biological characteristics' universality, the social roles of men and women differ in each society, traditional or modern, depending on the behaviors that are associated and suitable to females or males. In spite of the particular differences between men and women in various societies, there is a common trend among most societies that men are more focused on the achievements in the public area, outside the home and women focus on the private area. Men are more assertive, competitive and tough and women take care of the household chores, children and are more sensitive. (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 137) In industrial and post-industrial societies women's work has not been valued enough due to the fact that it was not financially rewarded. Notwithstanding, women's work such as preparing the food and taking care of the family members, has a direct impact on the concrete economic, public dimension because it helped the labor force of man to reproduce. (Frader, 2004, pp. 26)

According to the IBM research, rewarded occupations could be ordered from the most masculine (which are mostly filled by men) to the most feminine (which are mostly filled by women) in the following order: sales representatives, engineers and scientists, technicians and skilled craftspeople, managers, semiskilled and unskilled workers and office workers. (Hofstede et al., 2010, pp. 150) In Romania, the most occupied work areas by women are public administration, education, health and social work (62,9% for women and 37,1% for men) and also in feminized domains such as commerce, hotels and restaurants (55,5% for women and 44,5% for men). In traditional male domains the percentage of men that occupy those position is 91% for constructions (9% for women) , 77,8% for transports and telecommunication (22,2% for women). It can be observed that men occupy a greater percentage in the feminine areas, whereas women occupy a lower percentage in the men areas. (Andonie & Fainisi, 2012, pp. 24)

Regarding the unrewarded occupations, Coltrane notices that the most time consuming tasks that American women do in the household, according to several large-sample national surveys in the United States, are meal preparation or cooking, housecleaning, shopping for groceries and household goods, washing dishes or cleaning after meals and laundry. Three of these five activities are related to food and are performed firstly by women. The commercials that promote these activities are contributing to the continuation of the labor division. (Coltrane, 2000, pp. 1210)

In 1991, American women were spending more hours doing household chores than men, even though are employed, in spite of the fact that women do less housework tasks than in the past and men do more tasks than they did in the past. In Blair and Lichter's research, National Survey of Families and Households, the household labor is conceptualized by two distinct dimensions: numbers of hours and types of tasks assigned to each member. The study was conducted on 3190 married or cohabitating couples which had to provide information regarding the time they and their partner spend doing household tasks such as: preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning house, outdoor tasks, shopping, washing and ironing, managing bills and auto-maintenance. As a result, females spend approximately twice or third the number of hours that men spend doing household tasks. The average married women spends 32 hours and the average married men spends only 20 hours per week doing these tasks. Women spend most of their time preparing meals (28,7%) and cleaning the house (22,8%) in comparison with males that spend only 15,7 % and 10,2%

of their time doing these tasks. In contrast, men spend more time doing outdoor tasks (30,8%), doing auto maintenance (9,9%) and managing bills (8,2%) then women do (5,1%; 0,4% and 4,7%). (Blair & Lichter, 1991, pp. 91-113)

In 2000 in Romania, according to the Gender Barometer, women were the ones that performed mostly the following tasks in their households: shopping (52%), cooking (86%), cleaning (81%), wash the clothes (88%), does the dishes (81%), does the ironing (88%), looks after the child daily (69%), supervise child's homework and spare time (64%), go with the child to the doctor (68%), collect the child from school (66%). Contrariwise, men wash the family car (81%) and repair the plumbing (77%). Another study called "Work has feminine gender" made in 2011 has shown that women are the ones who do the following household tasks in a greater proportion: shopping (38%), cooking (79%), cleaning (77%), wash the clothes (85%), does the dishes (76%), does the ironing (87%), looks after the child daily (65%), supervise child's homework and spare time (51%). The husband is the one that repairs the broken things in the house (80%). (*Munca are genul feminin*, 2011)

### **Male and Female Traits**

When talking about masculinity and femininity the discourse is often built on dichotomous adjectives such as public-private, active-passive, strong-weak, autonomy-dependence, rational-emotional, superior-inferior, permissive-restricted, and so on and the traits associated with women are not as valued as the ones that describe men, because they are universal standards. These categorizations are present everywhere; in family, in school, in the public are, in mass-media, in books toys, etc. (Hurubean, 2013, pp. 6-7)

The most used instrument to measure gender stereotypes personality traits is the Bem Sex-Role Inventory. The scale uses traits that are perceived as more desirable for men or for women. "Feminine characteristics are: affectionate, cheerful, childlike, compassionate, does not use harsh language, eager to soothe hurt feelings, feminine, flatterable, gentle, gullible, loves children, loyal, sensitive to the needs of others, shy, soft-spoken, sympathetic, tender, understanding, warm, and yielding. Masculine characteristics are: acts as a leader, aggressive, ambitious, analytical, assertive, athletic, competitive, defends own beliefs, dominant, forceful, has leadership abilities, independent, individualistic, makes decisions easily, masculine, self-reliant, self-sufficient, strong personality,

willing to take a stand, and willing to take risks. These characteristics provide a good representation of prescriptive gender stereotypes, at least as they existed in the early 1970s." (Prentice & Carranza, 2002, pp. 270) Nowadays the Bem Sex-Role Inventory no longer shows great differences between men and women because there is a general trend that women adopt masculine roles, but prohibits men from adopting feminine roles. For example, women can work at the same time in the house and outside the house, but men should not only work in the house. (Twenge, 1997, pp. 316)

People in the United States use different traits to describe men and women; men are associated with agency or instrumental traits and women are associated with communion or expressive traits. For example, men are rated more highly with traits such as mental competence, assertiveness, confidence, independence, forcefulness, aggressiveness and dominance and on the other hand, women are described as emotional, caring, kind, warm and responsive. (Ridegeway, pp. 56) Spence, Helmreich and Stapp's study (1975) created a Personal Attributes Questionnaire made of 55 bipolar attributes that were selected from the Sex Role Stereotype Questionnaire by Rosenkrantz. In this study, groups of students had to rate the ideal or typical male and female according to the bipolar traits. Obviously the female valued items were expressive and the masculine valued traits were instrumental. Some of the male valued traits were independent, active, competitive, outspoken, dominant and aggressive and some of the feminine valued traits were kind, gentle, tactful, creative, emotional and considerate. (Spence, Helmreich, & Stapp, 1975, pp. 31)

Regarding the traits associated with femininity or masculinity in Romania, women are perceived as being as smart or clever as men (62%); as more caring (73%), as more practical (42%) and as more sensitive than men (82%). Also, men are seen as more violent than women (76%).

### **Methodology**

This research is a pilot study, a trial run; a study that is done at a small-scale version in order to explore the area of gender inequalities and stereotypes and also to pre-test the instrument and make improvements based on the results for further researches. A total of 50 students from Cluj-Napoca's Babes-Bolyai University participated at this study with ages between 18 and 25 years old. The method used to collect data was quantitative and the instrument used in this research was the online auto-administrated questionnaire. To select the respondents it was used a non-probabilistic sampling method: the convenience sample where there were

selected the individuals easiest to reach. The reason behind the option for this type of sampling is due to the fact that the study is exploratory and also because the survey was shared through Facebook to students.

The study aims (1) to explore the conceptions of masculinity and femininity among college students, (2) to describe how the rewarded and non-rewarded activities are divided between their family members and (3) to describe their opinion regarding the way that some activities should be shared between men and women. In order to find answers to these three purposes the questionnaire was divided in three parts.

For the first part, there were selected a series of 18 characteristics that were either labeled as feminine or masculine based on the Bem Sex Role Inventory (1971), previous research such as Helmerich and Stapp's study (1975), Deborah A. Prentice and Erica Carranza's study (2002) and Gender Barometer (2000). The characteristics used in this study were mostly selected based on Prentice and Carranza's study, where they selected out of 100 adjectives the ones that were typically associated either with men or women in America's society. Another reasons why the characteristic used were drawn from their study was because it was conducted on over 200 University students and it was also recently conducted. The 9 feminine traits selected were: warm and kind, loyal, sensitive, friendly, patient, polite, cheerful, cooperative, emotive and the masculine adjective used in this study were aggressive, dependable, ambitious, assertive, decisive, disciplined, rational, competitive and intense. Respondents were asked to rate first of all how typical these 18 characteristics were among the men that they know and after that they had to repeat the same procedure for the women they know. They rated each characteristic on a 5-scale point (each scale was scored from -2 to +2) where -2 meant very atypical and 2 meant very typical.

The second part of the survey focused on the respondents' perception about how their family members divide different activities such as: washes/fixes family car, repairs the plumbing, does the cooking, cleaning, dishes, washes/irons the clothes, looks after the child daily, supervise child's homework and spare time, go with the child to the doctor and collects the child from school. Each respondent had to estimate if each activity was performed by just men, just women, both men and women or if there was another person paid to do that particular activity. The third part included questions about how respondents perceive men and women's roles and also how they should be divided based on gender. This

part included questions such as whose duty is to be the breadwinner of the house or who should undertake the housework.

### **Results**

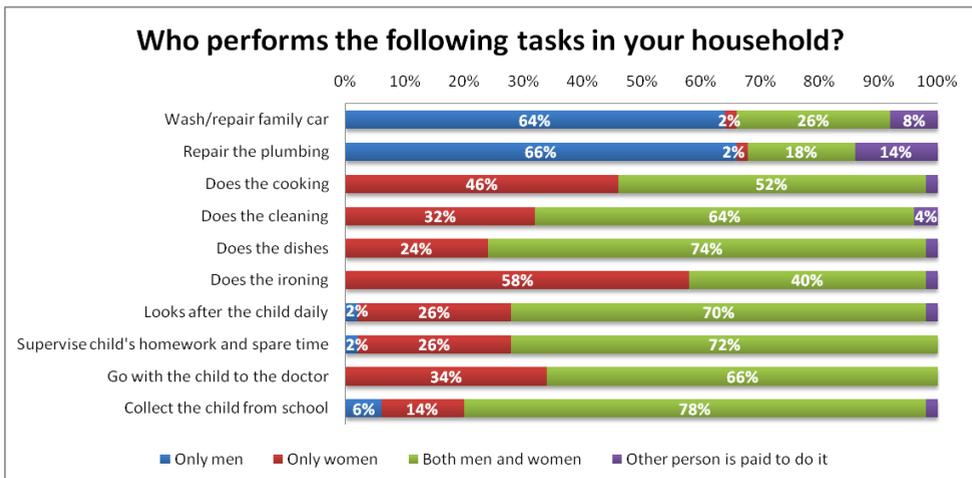
The majority of the college students that participated at this study (62%) consider that rights gender equality does not exist and only 26% of the respondents believe that there is gender equality in Romania. There is a directly proportional difference between how men and women answered separately at this question. Only 15% of the women believe that there is gender rights equality in Romania compared to men where 70% of them agree with this statement. The same pattern can be noticed in the Gender Barometer (2000) where 33% of the women with unfinished college believe that gender equality exists compared to 62% of the men. Even though there exists differences between the answers of women and men regarding gender equality, when it comes to nominate whose duty is to undertake the housework and to be the main breadwinner all the respondents considered that both women and men should be involved in the housework and also both should be breadwinners.

Based on the set of 18 characteristics it was created the profiles of women and men using the mean ratings of each characteristic. Taking into consideration only the traits that had the mean greater than 1, women are perceived as being typically kind and warm, sensitive, polite, cheerful and emotive and men are perceived as being typically competitive. Also both men and women are considered to be friendly. Splitting the results by gender, women consider that the women they know are also typically loyal, cooperative, dependable, and ambitious and men consider that they are also typically decisive, besides the characteristics listed above. When rating a characteristic for the opposite gender group men as well as women rate the characteristic lower than they do it for their gender group.

Analyzing separately the answers given by female and male students, there can be remarked some differences between how women or men rate some characteristics for men respectively for women they know. First of all, women rated emotiveness and sensitiveness as being more typical for women than men. The difference between the means for each group was 1.53 for emotive and 1.38 for sensitive. Women also consider that the adjectives warm and kind, cooperative and patient are more typical for the women they know compared to the men they know. The mean differences were 0.78 for warm and kind, 0.65 for cooperative and 0.55 for patient. Men also rated the characteristics patience and emotive as being more typical for

women they know and the mean differences is 1.1 for patient and 0.7 for emotive. On the other hand, men rated the following adjectives as being more typical for men they know compared to women: rational, decisive and assertive. However, the mean differences between how typical men perceive these characteristics for men and women they know take values lower than 1 as following: 0.9 for rational, 0.7 for decisive and 0.5 for assertive.

From the set of questions regarding the division of different activities between family members, it has resulted that nowadays both women and men share most of the tasks such as cooking 52%, cleaning 64%, washing the dishes 74%, look after the child daily 70%, supervise child's homework and spare time 72%, go with the child to the doctor 66% and collects the child from school 78%. However, there still are tasks that are mostly done only by men like washing and fixing the family car 64% and repairing the plumbing 66% or tasks done only by women such as washing and ironing the clothes 58%. Even though men and women share their tasks nowadays, there still are families where only women perform some of the activities that in other families are shared.



After analyzing the respondents' answers there can be draw a series of conclusions. The majority of the college students included in this research is aware of the fact that gender inequalities still exists, but compared to women, men are less aware of this subject. Even though the majority of the respondents consider that gender inequality exists in Romania, in their families most of the tasks are performed by both men and women.

Compared to previous studies, women's role is no longer seen as traditional as it was in the past, but there still are families where some of the housework activities are still done only by women. Another attenuation of gender differences can be also seen in the way that respondents characterized women and men using the set of 18 adjectives. Despite the fact that some of the traits are more typical for women (kind and warm, sensitive, polite, cheerful, emotive) or for man (competitive, decisive, rational and assertive), most of the adjectives have the same scores for men and for women or they are neutral (take values around 0). The existing differences in characterizing each gender group seem to be the result of how men and women perceive their own sex group and not the way that they perceive the opposite group. As a conclusion, gender inequalities still exists and have to be diminished and solved, but compared with previous studies it can be seen an improvement among the last two generation.

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