



A Study of Gender Stereotypes Among Secondary School Students

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1. Introduction

This paper outlines the findings of a research study, conducted within the framework of the University of the Balearic Islands' official master's degree in policies for sexual equality and the prevention of gender-based violence, with the collaboration of students from the subject 'social research methods and techniques' during the 2009-2010 academic year. One of its aims was to find out the degree to which secondary school students in Mallorca in the first to fourth years agree with gender stereotypes.

Gender stereotypes are agreed beliefs about the different characteristics of men and women in our society and, consequently, about the role that they should play in society (González, 1999). These stereotypes create a clear dichotomy between what is considered to be either 'male' or 'female' to such an extent that the characteristics that define these two concepts do not just differ but are actually opposing (Grañeras, 2003). This dichotomy is mainly due to the history of interaction between both groups (men and women) and to the role that each one plays in society; that is, the gender-based role they play. Thus, as Augusto, López and Martínez de Antoñana (2004) explain, gender stereotypes or traits thought to be male or female are accepted under the assumption that a person's gender is associated with a series of characteristics that differ for men and women. In some cases, when these stereotypes are taken to extremes, men and women can both encounter serious, persistent prejudice, with *prejudice* being construed to mean negative evaluative and affective reactions to a group or an unjustifiable attitude with a strong emotional component (García- Lago, 2002; Morales, 1999).

From the above, an interest was sparked off in finding out to what extent students in the first to fourth years of secondary school (teenagers aged 12 to 16, who are still in the evolutionary stage) agree with some of the gender stereotypes that exist in our culture.

2. Method

To carry out this study, a survey was conducted using multistage mixed sampling methods, stratified by ownership of the education centre (state/non-state), population density (high, medium, low), and the study year (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th year), selecting the initial clusters (centres) randomly through proportional allocation and the secondary units (students) through incidental sampling in the classroom. The sample is made up of 416 units of analysis (208 girls and 208 boys), with a sampling error for the whole sample of 4.7%. The questionnaire that was used included a list of 6 gender stereotypes. The students were asked to rate their agreement with them on a scale ranging from 0 (total disagreement) to 10 (total agreement).

3. Results

The results were analysed by means of an analysis of variance of each of the six items, using a *Sex x Year* factor model. Table 1 contains the results of the said analyses, where it can be seen that the interactive component is not statistically significant for any of the six variables. The main effect *Sex* is not statistically significant for any of the variables either. The main effect *Year* was the only component of the model that was statistically significant and this was maintained for the six stereotypes under analysis.

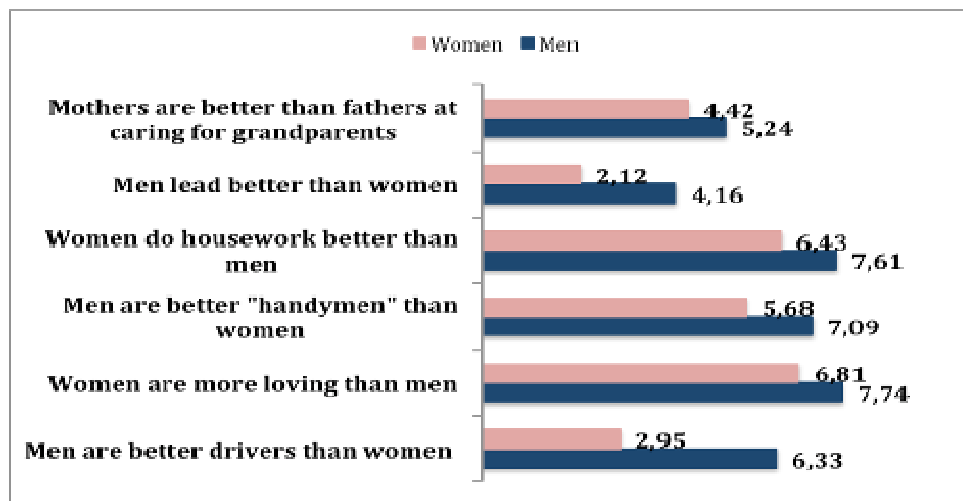
Table 1. Analysis of variance of the 6 items by sex, year and interaction between both.

Stereotype	Effect	F	GI1	GI2	Signif.
Men are better drivers than women	Sex	111.6	1		<0.001
	Year	1.0	3	403	n.s.
	Sex x Year	1.2	3		n.s.
Women are more loving than men	Sex	11.6	1		0.001
	Year	0.6	3	403	n.s.
	Sex x Year	2.3	3		n.s.
Men are better "handymen" than women	Sex	22.0	1		<0.001
	Year	0.7	3	401	n.s.
	Sex x Year	2.3	3		n.s.
Women do housework better than men	Sex	13.5	1		<0.001
	Year	1.4	3	399	n.s.
	Sex x Year	0.5	3		n.s.

Men lead better than women	Sex	43.0	1		<0.001
	Year	0.4	3	393	n.s.
	Sex x Year	2.3	3		n.s.
Mothers are better than fathers at caring for grandparents	Sex	5.9	1		0.016
	Year	0.5	3	402	n.s.
	Sex x Year	1.0	3		n.s.

The analysis of the principal component sex reveals that all the differences are due to the fact that it is the boys who show closer agreement with the gender stereotypes than the girls, as Figure 1 shows.

Figure 1. Level of agreement with the stereotypes by sex



4. Conclusions

We can conclude that, in the case of both boys and girls, between the ages of 12 and 16 there is no change in their perception of the gender stereotypes. This is surprising, since it is a stage characterized by numerous changes. Indeed, it is a period in which teenagers are influenced by numerous social agents (the family, teachers, their male and female peers, friends etc) and by different factors relating to their immediate surroundings (cultural norms and rules, the media etc). These are also all variables that influence the notion each person forms of him or herself. Thus if we accept the influence of teenagers' environment on the concept they forge of themselves and their identity, by extension we must necessarily accept the influence that the person's gender has as a social construct (Navarro, 2011). As a result, it is striking that the obtained data does not reflect any significant change in perception of the gender stereotypes analysed in the study.

On the other hand, differences were observed, depending on the sex of the participant, with the boys tending more generally to accept these conventional gender stereotypes, in keeping with the results of different research studies on the topic (López-Sáez and Morales, 1995, 1996). Nonetheless, even though statistical significance was obtained for all the stereotypes, these differences are not of the same magnitude in each case. There is just eight tenths of a difference regarding the phrase "Mothers are better than fathers at caring for grandparents", whilst there is more than a three-point difference in the case of "Men are better drivers than women". These results suggest the existence of underlying stereotypes of some kind, where some categories can lead to bigger differences than others in terms of each sex's perception of gender.

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