

ARE GENDER STEREOTYPES STILL RECOGNIZED IN YOUNG CHILDREN OF NEW GENERATION?

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Abstract: *Everybody is talking about how young generation is more open, more aware of the diversity, more willing to try, to change, to cross barrier. They are described as iGen (Twenge, 2017) or Linkster Generation (Johnson & Johnson, 2012) and the specialist anticipate important differences in how this generation experience life. In the present research we were interested to check if well recognized gender stereotypes are still identifiable in children or if they are blurred in the light of technology. The results showed that the stereotypes are found both in 5-6 years old children and in 10-11 years old, with only minor differences. Also, the gender of the respondents is not a significant criterion in differentiated the frequencies of the stereotypes. Implication of the findings are also discussed as more in-depth research on the field are necessary.*

Keywords: *gender stereotypes; pre-school children; male and female;*

1. Introduction

There is a large agreement that everything around us and even in us is changing and the change is much faster than our ability to understand its consequences and to anticipate it course. The last two decades brought in our attention social, economic and political changes that transformed our world and the generations to come. The children born in mid '90s and later were labelled as iGen (Twenge, 2017), or Linkster generation (Johnson, & Johnson, 2012) and describe as spending all their teens age in contact with smartphones, social media and laptops. Their relationships are formed differently, they seem to be predisposed to anxiety and depression, but in the same time, are more open to tolerance, condemn inequality, have original planes for their career and reject social taboos.

In this light we were interested to check if well recognized gender stereotypes are still identifiable in children or if they are blurred in the light of technology.

1.1. Stereotypes in children

Children are exposed to behaviour models since they are born and their parents are the main agent in promoting learning, especially social behaviour. Children learn by imitation, and they observe their parents and significant others in order to form ways of communication and meaning of their day to day experiences.

One of the most important development tasks for preschool children is to make a positive commitment with colleagues while managing emotions in the interaction with and responding to the social expectations of people other than their parents. Disputes must be resolved so that the game can continue, enjoying each other and supporting interactions (Denham, 2007).

In middle childhood, groups are formed between children who live close to each other or go to the same school (pre-school). We can add that most of these groups are of the same ethnic origin and similar socio-economic status. Children's age is close, and children's sex is usually the same (Pellegrini, Kato, Blatchford & Baines, 2002).

A positive aspect of the relationship with children of the same age is that they open up new perspectives and each child can make judgment independently. In Bandura's conception, children get a clearer sense of personal effectiveness, and they can assess their abilities. This relationship helps children to live in society, but also provides emotional safety (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2010). Another positive aspect is that same-sex groups help children "incorporate gender roles into their own self-image" and teach them gender-appropriate behaviours (Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2010, p. 335). On the other hand, the negative aspects are the prejudices, which are unfavourable attitudes towards others, especially those with different ethnicity or race. Children tend to be subjective to those similar with them and consequently to hold a more favourable attitude (Powlishta, Serbin, Doyle & White, 1994 in Papalia, Olds & Feldman, 2010). Social relationships are closely related with self-concept, which develop with age. Between the ages of 6 and 12, children describe themselves using psychological characteristics as being friendly, kind or popular. Children see themselves in an extended social space that they define by their relationship with friends and compared the others behaviour to their own person (Lassú & Serfözö, 2015).

All these interactions shape the way children perceive what is considered "normal" behaviour, or "acceptable" so they will act or form opinion that fit with the expectation of others. Soon, they will be part of a social network and vectors of beliefs, values, and so-called social norms.

Stereotypes are "A set of shared beliefs about personal attributes, usually personality traits, but often also behaviours, of a group of people." (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1994, p. 11). Gender stereotypes, as well as other social stereotypes, reflect the perceptions of persons about what people do in their daily lives depending on their sex (Eagly & Steffen, 1984). Gender stereotypes refer to the psychological features and behaviours that are thought to occur with a differentiated frequency in the two gender groups (for example, men are more "aggressive," women are more "emotional"). Stereotypes are often used as a support for traditional sexual roles (e.g. women are nurses, men are construction workers) and can serve as socialization models for children (Ember & Ember, 2003).

Young children look for gender indicators - who should or should not do a certain activity, who can play with whom and why girls and boys are different. From a wide range of gender indicators gathered from their social world, children quickly form an impressive constellation of gender cognitions, including gender identities and gender stereotypes (Martin & Ruble, 2004).

Although biological gender differentiation is an innate process, patterns of behaviour, including the visible actions, interests, values and preferences associated with such biologic differentiation, seem to be largely governed by social learning conditions. And behaviours, interests and values are no stranger to stereotypes. And stereotypes are considered cognitive structures stored in memory that affect perception and group-level behaviour (Cernat 2005).

Adult stereotypes about their children can influence the development of gender in many ways. Adults can reward and punish children in a differentiated way based on their stereotypes (Mischel, 1966 apud Martin, 1995). In addition, stereotypes provide a standard against which children's behaviours are judged (Kohlberg, 1966 apud Martin, 1995). Children's self-concepts can also be influenced by adult stereotypes (Martin & Halverson, 1981). For example, a child starts to consider his/herself as feminine, because other people are looking at him/her this way.

Studies on gender roles in children have suggested that boys traditionally have an active stance and girls are passive (Adler, Kless & Adler, 1992). The role of boys includes tough play, competition with colleagues and a certain firmness designed to demonstrate independence and masculinity. Traditionally, girls' behavior includes focusing on relationship

and intimacy, emotional care and survival, as well as a preoccupation with the development of femininity.

Miller and Budd (1999) studied the stereotypical beliefs of UK children aged 8, 12 and 16 over certain professions and attempted to discover if children's stereotypes are reflected in their assessments of engaging in these occupations. The subjects answered questions about their views on who (men, women or both) had to do certain occupations and how much they would like each occupation to be their job. The results revealed that the youngest age group had stereotyped views on who should work in different domains, and in relation to their own preference. Manea (2013) evaluated pre-school children from Romania and France, asking them to assign 5 different situations to one of the two characters (a boy or a girl) according to the psychological and moral characteristics they consider specific for each of the two genres. The results showed that girls tend to be considered kind, friendly and diligent, while boys are usually considered intelligent and courageous.

2. Methodology

2.1. Objectives and hypothesis

The purpose of the research is to investigate the differences between age and gender of the respondents regarding gender stereotypes.

The research objectives are as follows:

1. The research aims to verify whether there can be noted gender stereotypes in children.
2. If they exist, we are interested in checking whether the stereotypes differ according to the age of the children.
3. The third objective is centred on identifying differences in gender stereotypes depending on the respondent's gender.

Hypothesis stipulate that:

1. There are differences in choices made by children for different activities formulated to illustrate gender stereotypes.
2. The younger a child, the more gender stereotypes.
3. There are differences in gender stereotypes depending on the respondent's gender.

2.2. Subjects

In the present research there were involved 53 subjects, of which 25 are children from pre-school, ages 5 to 6, and 28 pupils of the 4th grade, aged between 10 and 11, age average being 8.45 years old. Of the subjects, 22 were boys and 31 were girls, of which in the pre-school class: 11 boys and 14 girls, and 4th class subjects: 11 boys and 17 girls.

2.3. Instruments and procedure

The materials used were two dolls (a girl and a boy as in figure 1), a score sheet and a writing tool.



Fig.1.: Dolls used in questioning children about activities, characteristics and profession

Fourteen questions have been used to illustrate gender stereotypes, ten for day-to-day activities or characteristics, and four regarding professions for which there is unequal perceptions about the gender of those who choose those professions in society.

1. Which doll do you think cooks?
2. Which doll is stronger?
3. Which doll does clean the house?
4. Which doll goes to work?
5. Who dolls likes to go shopping?
6. Which doll does sport?
7. Which doll washes the laundry?
8. Which doll earns more money?
9. Which doll takes care of the children?
10. Which doll drives the car?
11. Which doll can be an engineer?
12. Which doll can be a doctor?
13. Which doll can be a cop?
14. Which doll can be an educator?

The data were collected during a couple of weeks, while the examiner went in the educational institutions to interact face to face with each participant in the research. Parents were asked to give their permission for their children, and the short interview took place in a quiet corner of the class. The children were invited to take a sit and received instruction. They had to choose one of the two dolls (girl or boy), or even both dolls, to show whom they consider as a fitting answer. Most of them did not report to the genre of doll in general, but they said: "In our family mother/ dad is doing this. Generally, 4th grade children responded very quickly to the questions by picking up the doll they chose but wanted to study the dolls before they started answering the questions and the kindergarten also benefited from additional time to play a little extra time with the dolls.

3. Results

3.1. Testing the occurrence of gender stereotypes in children

The frequency of responses was analysed using Chi-square test between answer that pointed to male/ female or both as an appropriate answer.

The "Both" option was more selected for the questions: Who does more sports? Who goes to work? Who earns more money? Who is taking care of children? and Who drives the car? showing the absence of stereotypes for these activities. A similar situation we encounter

for the police profession, where 24 children out of 53 responded "both" and for doctor (31 chose "both").

The share of answers for the other questions revealed differences. In the following five questions more than half of the answers was "girl": Who cooks? (46) Who cleans the house? (44), Who likes going shopping? (44) Who is washing the laundry? (47), and in the educator profession we have 35 answers out of 53. Only in two of the questions was found a higher rate of response for the male gender. These questions are: Who is stronger? (52 answer boy) and Who can be an engineer? (38 answer the boy). These differences indicate the presence of gender stereotypes.

3.2. Comparing gender stereotypes by age of the respondents

The results show that there are few differences between the two age groups, younger children seeing the female doll as the one who cleans the house and the male the one who go to work (some example with the results can be seen in table 1). They also see the medical profession as more feminine. Older children choose the woman as the one who wash the laundry, and see the educator profession as feminine. These choices may also be due to a longer life experience of four graders (they had more time to get in touch with female educators, doctors of both sexes, and find out that laundry is not a female affair).

Tabel 1 Gender stereotypes compared by the age of the respondent

5 – 6 years		10 – 11 years	
Who can be a doctor?			
	Frequencies		Frequencies
Male	1	Male	4
Female	12	Female	5
Both	12	Both	19
Pearson Chi – Square = .047			
Who goes to work?			
	Frequencies		Frequencies
Male	5	Male	1
Female	2	Female	27
Both	18	Both	27
Pearson Chi – Square = .04			

3.2. Comparing gender stereotypes by sex of the respondents

A selection of the results is presented in table 2.

Girls participants were choosing the "girl" option in the following questions: Who cooks? (30) Who cleans? (26) Who goes shopping? (31) and Who can be an educator? (24). The "boy" answer appeared in the following questions: Who is stronger? (30) Who can be an engineer? (23) and the choice of "both" is predominant when asked: Who goes to work? (27). The results suggest that girls have stronger biased perspectives and stereotypes about who should do the job or work in a particular field.

On the contrary, from the male perspective, choosing the "boy" option appears in the questions: Who is stronger? (22) and Who can be an engineer? (15). Choosing the "girl" option appears in the questions: Who is washing the laundry? (18) Who goes shopping? (16) Who cleans? (18) and Who cooks? (16).

Comparing the responses of boys and girls, we can see that boys have fewer gender stereotypes, answering questions more balanced, while girls tend to choose more unbalanced.

Table 2. Gender stereotypes compared by the sex of the respondent

Boy		Girl	
Who is cooking?			
Frequencies		Frequencies	
Male	2	Male	
Female	16	Female	30
Both	4	Both	1
Pearson Chi – Square = .035			
Who cleans the house?			
Frequencies		Frequencies	
Male	2	Male	
Female	18	Female	26
Both	2	Both	5
Pearson Chi – Square = .191			
Who likes to go shopping?			
Frequencies		Frequencies	
Male	1	Male	
Female	16	Female	31
Both	5	Both	
Pearson Chi – Square = .009			
Who goes to work?			
Frequencies		Frequencies	
Male	4	Male	2
Female		Female	2
Both	18	Both	27
Pearson Chi – Square = .220			

4. Discussions

Results revealed that half of the questions reflected the presence of gender stereotypes, while the other half did not. The activities such as home chores (cooking, washing, cleaning, going to shopping) received significant more selection as being a female activity, while being strong, becoming and engineer, are seen as more appropriate for males. The findings are in line with those of Manea (2013), and Barak, Feldman and Noy (1991).

The differences between age and the gender of the respondent, were only a few, meaning that between kindergarten and the end of primary school there are little change regarding stereotypes.

Our results showed that those in the pre-school level have more stereotypes than those in the 4th grade, but the differences appear for fewer situations than we anticipated. The results of this hypothesis correlate with the results of Miller and Budd (1999), who found that the younger the children, the more inclined are to use stereotypes when confronted with such choices.

The third hypothesis: There are differences in gender stereotypes depending on the sex of respondent, it is partially confirmed. Boys have fewer stereotypes than girls, their answers being distributed equally in almost all questions, while girls' choices are concentrated on just one answer.

The group of the present research was relatively small, and larger number would be more salient.

Other limitation that can be noticed is the unbalanced number of participants in term of gender and level of education. The place of testing should be in a separate room, where children can be more attentive about the question and only the researcher and the child are present. Also to give children time to think, because in most cases time was limited to 10 minutes, but also to be careful to not introduce any suggestions.

No data was gathered on the type of family to which they belonged, the level of parental education, which does not allow us to relate the results to family variables that can explain the choices of the children.

One direction that can add to understanding the development of stereotypes in children can be a repeated measure assessment, after the students enter every study cycle, until eighteen of age. Another track of research could relate to parents' opinion on gender stereotyping and their influence on children, since children have been taught by gender stereotypes from an early age (Martin & Halverson, 1981; Martin, 1995).

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