

Gender stereotypes: persistence and challenges

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Abstract

Purpose – The aims of this study are to identify and analyse prevalent gender roles and the persistence of sexist stereotypes among teachers in training in Spain, to determine the reasons for them and suggest solutions for eradicating sexist prejudices.

Design/methodology/approach – A gender role questionnaire was administered to 1260 workers from 54 different professions who were enrolled on a postgraduate training course to qualify as secondary education teachers. The instrument contained six variables for both quantitative and qualitative analysis: professional work, family (looking after children), feelings and emotions, household chores, body image and free time.

Findings – Household chores, looking after children and gender roles linked to body image were those most indicated by both men and women. It is concluded that men participate little in bringing up children and household chores and that women continue to shoulder the responsibility. Both are concerned about their body image, but women have little self-acceptance of and satisfaction with their bodies and a stronger sense of being judged by how they look. Gender stereotypes persist, despite extensive legislation in Spain since 2004.

Research limitations/implications – The study has limitations deriving from its choice of convenience sampling. Although it includes participants from six Spanish autonomous communities, the number from each region is not very high. Nevertheless, the sample is representative of almost all branches of knowledge (54 professions). Another limitation concerns the images used in the research instrument as a data collection strategy insofar, as they could not be obtained from a data bank specific to the research subject but instead had to be found in databases of general images. It can be inferred that a data collection strategy without any danger of bias would be to encourage each participant to design their own images, reflecting their perceptions and auto-perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes. The fact that there were no pre-existing studies using this type of research instrument in education sciences was a handicap for the investigation. Despite these methodological limitations, the results of the study may serve as a basis for implementing specific future actions originating from any area – but especially from the area of education – aimed at teaching people about equal roles in order to eliminate sexist stereotypes. This research was carried out as part of the Proyecto Diseño y Atención a las Oportunidades de Género en la Educación Superior (Project on Design and Gender Equality of Opportunities in Higher Education) funded by the Vicerrectorado de Cooperación al Desarrollo (Office for University Cooperation for Development) at the University of Alicante (Spain).

Practical implications – Spanish legislation has not been able to promote significant changes in the performance of traditional gender roles or to eliminate sexist stereotypes that perpetuate imbalances between men and women. The ideal and prevalent model of a Spanish woman is still that of a “self-sacrificing mother”, responsible for the household chores and childcare. She must combine this first job with a second profession, and, in addition, she must have a “desirable physical image”. The study puts forward various possible solutions for reducing and/or eradicating sexist attitudes with the participation of different social agents and in particular through education. The investigation could be of use when carrying out specific cross-sectional interventions on the subject of gender equality with students on postgraduate teacher training courses, for the purposes of encouraging the elimination of stereotypes and strengthening the capacity for critical judgement, positive self-concept and self-esteem.

Originality/value – The study may be useful for carrying out specific and transversal university training interventions in postgraduate teacher training on gender equality aimed at promoting the elimination of stereotypes, the strengthening of critical judgement capacity, positive self-concept and self-esteem.

Keywords Equality of opportunities, Gender roles, Gender stereotypes, Sexism, University education, Education policies

Paper type Research paper



1. Introduction

Centuries of human rights activism together with political, demographic and social changes have set the agenda for equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in various areas of society.

This lengthy period of transformation has witnessed substantial changes since traditionally marginalized groups have made inroads into the fields of education and employment from which they used to be excluded (Özbilgin, 2009). In countries such as Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden, these positive changes – especially as regards access to education and employment – (EIGE, 2017, 2020; World Economic Forum, 2017) have made recent generations of young women and men feel that equality of opportunity has to a great extent been achieved (Teigen and Skjeie, 2017; Thomsen *et al.*, 2017; World Economic Forum, 2018).

In the case of Spain, despite the progress made in equality, diversity and inclusion, in the area of education, many forms of inequality and discrimination continue to mark people's experience throughout their lives, and one of these forms of exclusion involves gender. This type of discrimination, which is intersectionally related to race, ethnicity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status, is often subtle and implicit and may be more harmful to well-being than direct discrimination (Buitendijk *et al.*, 2019). Gender differentials are maintained even within the university itself, for example in research, recruitment, promotion, grant funding, master's degrees, doctorates, etc. (CSIC, 2017; European Commission, 2016; Gallego-Morón and Matus-López, 2018; MECD, 2016). Nevertheless, many students in further education believe that their work and employment expectations are unaffected by bias or prejudice and therefore consider that discussions about inequality – and thus education on the subject – are irrelevant to their professional careers (Aguaded, 2017; Esteban and Fernández, 2017; León and Aizpurúa, 2020).

Equality between women and men is a fundamental right and a common principle of the European Union (UE), which is committed to it. In a communiqué issued on the occasion of the European Conference held in Berlin on 19 September 2003, the EU Education Ministers' Meeting established that one of the goals to be achieved in the European university education system was a reduction in gender inequality. Subsequently the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council (2006/962/CE) of 18 December 2006, on key competences for lifelong learning, indicated that the integrated guidelines for growth and jobs passed by the European Council in June 2005 urged that education systems should guarantee that gender equality be an integral part of any actions taken.

More specific policies were later designed with the aim of achieving equality. The European Council's gender equality strategy for 2014–2017 established five priority areas:

- (1) Combating gender stereotypes and sexism;
- (2) Preventing and combating violence against women;
- (3) Guaranteeing equal access of women to justice;
- (4) Achieving a balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making;
- (5) Achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures.

In order to implement the 2014–2017 strategy, the member States of the European Council faced a number of challenges including the infringement of the human rights of women, the persistence of gender-based violence, the limited participation of women in political processes and decision-making, gender prejudices and stereotypes, sexism, limited access to quality jobs, the absence of social and economic infrastructure enabling men and women to exercise the same rights (day nurseries, paid parental leave, payment of parental benefits, etc.) and budget cuts affecting organizations working in these areas.

With the aim of putting an end to these persistent gender gaps, the European Council designed a new *Gender Equality Strategy 2018–2023* dealing with equality between women and men in the area of dignity and rights in public, private and family life:

The new Strategy also addresses the implications of equality between women and men as regards dignity and rights, in public, private and family life.

The social significance of maternity and paternity leave and the role of both parents in the upbringing of children and as careers of adult dependents must be taken into consideration to ensure that both women's and men's human rights are fully and equally respected. The equal sharing of unpaid household and care work should be promoted to break down gender stereotypes, ensure women's and men's work/life balance, and get closer to real gender equality (Council of Europe, 2014a, b, p. 12).

2. Gender stereotypes before and after the equality laws in Spain

Between the years 1950 and 1975, the gender roles of Spanish women were, in particular, those of a submissive wife, a self-sacrificing mother and by profession "her work" as indicated on her identity card. Their gender-specific tasks, as collected and defined in the *Manual of Home Economics for High School and Teaching* (1958), were cleaning the home, raising children and caring for her husband. The woman was always ready and available for her husband, the owner and master of the house, and by extension, of his wife. Women, although they were of adult age, they were considered minors and needed their husband's authorization even to open a bank account. Since 1975, with the arrival of democracy, more and more women have been going to university. Labour integration is underway, although still very slowly, as many jobs are the exclusive domain of men. However, women are gradually entering all sectors and in 1999 there were 6.5 million women workers.

In the 1990s, women were excluded from the construction of knowledge as its subject and object and their presence in the scientific world was scarce. For its part, schools had a clearly sexist bias; the omission of gender in educational programming, the sexist nature of texts, the transmission of gender stereotypes or the definition of sexual roles through the hidden curriculum were all prevalent features of the time (Bonaf, 1998). In view of this reality, and in order to eradicate gender violence, inequalities and sexist stereotypes, equality laws are proposed in the educational field. Thus, Organic Law 1/2004, of 28 December, on comprehensive protection measures against gender violence, confers on the education system the obligation to educate in respect, equality and freedom. It also calls for the elimination of obstacles that hinder equality between men and women and training for the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts in formal education. The State Pact against Gender Violence (2018) continues to emphasise the importance of education for the prevention of gender violence, resulting in different actions in the areas of awareness-raising, protection of minors and training of the professionals involved.

Organic Law 8/2013, of 9 December for the improvement of educational quality (LOMCE), adds to Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on education, the fortieth additional provision which states that the basic education curriculum must consider learning about the prevention and peaceful resolution of conflicts in all areas of personal, family and social life and the values which underpin democracy and human rights.

In the university context, the Law on Effective Equality of Opportunities between Women and Men (3/2007) and the Organic Law on Universities (4/2007) urge universities to include the teaching of equality between women and men in their curricula, to design specific postgraduate courses and to promote specialised studies and research in this area. With regard to teacher training, Organic Law 3/2007 of 22 March on Effective Equality between Women and Men proposes an education for real equality between women and men, highlighting its integration into initial and ongoing teacher training (Art. 24) and into university curricula (Art. 25). The above mentioned principles were incorporated into the Organic Law on Universities 4/2007. These policies are aimed at improving:

- (1) The incorporation of women into the labour market because salary differences persist.
- (2) Work-life balance measures developed by the universities: flexible hours, reduction of working hours, paid leave and unpaid leave (Argüelles, 2011; Gala, 2010).
- (3) The institutionalisation of equality policies with the creation of equality units.

In the 21st century, Spanish women have gained in training; however, the quantitative increase in their participation in education (57% of women compared to 43% of men) has not contributed to overcoming, as expected, the conditions of inequality and discrimination. Their presence at university continues to be reduced preferentially to degrees related to care such as nursing or early childhood education, and their access to degrees in science, technology, mathematics and engineering (STEM) is still scarce (30%). In addition to personal, occupational and family reasons, women have difficulties in accessing positions of power and decision-making. In short, some progress has been made to date, but there is still a long way to go, as direct discrimination has given way to more subtle – but no less serious – forms of indirect discrimination, generating the ideological mechanism known as the veil of equality (Lagarde, 1993).

3. Theoretical background

The complexity of the multifactorial theory of gender identity (Spence, 1993) can be seen as a psychological construct linked to a multitude of variables for individuals and cultures. It involves a continuous process of socialization in which the stereotypes and roles socially assigned to men and women are internalized, resulting in differential behaviour. This socialization is not, therefore, a task limited to infancy – although in this stage it is a decisive factor – but an ongoing process subject to contextual changes and individual experiences.

Batliwala (2015) argues that parents, teachers and the media are the main agents of socialization that reinforce gender inequalities by encouraging “altruism” in women, whereby they place the needs of others above their own and thus become victims of a patriarchal system. This tallies with the study by Ferrer and Bosch (2013), who investigate the gender roles of Spanish women and conclude that their socialization is determined on the basis of “being for others” before or instead of “being for themselves”. This leads to the formation of a “false consciousness” (Sen, 1990) that plays a part in ensuring that inequality is not perceived by women as abuse or exploitation.

The domestic space is another important variable in the socialization of gender roles since it is the place where conflicts arise between personal interests and family interests. Thus equality can become an integral part of the home or decisions can result in inequalities (Tobío, 2012). Gutmann (2014) comes to the conclusion that men are becoming part of the family dynamics by resignifying their participation as the exercise of affection and love or even as a moral duty. In reality, however, decisions result in inequalities for women since they are the ones that carry most of the responsibility for ensuring the family’s well-being (Sen, 1990). The prevailing patriarchal ideology encourages discrimination and the sacrifice of women, and therefore a more far-reaching social transformation is needed (Batliwala, 2015).

Outside the home the body image stereotype prevails and is closely related to sociocultural globalization (Sepúlveda and Calado, 2012). Beauty and thinness in women and muscle definition in men are touted by the media as instruments for achieving personal success and have been associated with socially desirable characteristics (Perloff, 2014). If someone does not fit the model, this can lead to dissatisfaction with their body that may result in psychological and physical problems, as shown by Frenzi and Rodríguez (2015) in a clinical study carried out in Spain.

As regards features of expressivity and socialization (attributes for expressing feelings), women have traditionally been better at developing sociability, sensitivity and empathy, while men identify themselves with features of instrumentality (attributes for tasks) such as independence, power or control and ambition (Evans and Diekmann, 2009; López-Zafra *et al.*, 2009).

Twenge (2001) maintains that the acceptance of features of expressivity continues to be greater in women than in men, although other studies show results that point in the opposite direction. Echebarria (2010), for example, argues that today there is no differences between men and women, as regards the acceptance of features of instrumentality and expressivity, and suggests that they are adopted according to social, work and/or professional roles and not sex. Riquelme *et al.* (2014) believe that the presence of women in the labour market in professions labelled as male domains and in public contexts traditionally assigned to men has meant that differences in instrumentality tend to disappear. This does not happen with men because, given that they are less likely to take up jobs traditionally seen as female (Twenge, 2001), their features of expressivity tend to remain low. This is in line with the theory of role congruity put forward by Eagly and Karau (2002), which states that the roles established in society hinder the development of counter-stereotypical features of identity.

Gender disparities in career choice and subsequent performance do not stem from innate differences in abilities in boys and girls, but are strongly influenced by the social context, especially family expectations (Ferreira, 2017; OECD, 2015). Research has also revealed that there is a more stringent pattern of assessing women on the basis of their appearance, rather than their achievements and on their behaviour in the workplace, which is not the case for men (Cikara *et al.*, 2011; Heflick *et al.*, 2011). For example, women who work in a male-dominated job or who are ambitious and competitive are considered unfeminine, but if a man works in a predominantly feminine context, he is not considered unmasculine but is rather seen as the leader (Badgett and Folbre, 2003).

For their part, gender differences in leisure are indicative of enduring forms of gender inequality in the areas of work and care (Henderson and Gibson, 2013; Mattingly and Blanchi, 2003). For example, it is known that women have less time and quality of leisure because their total workload is greater, as they have more responsibilities in childcare and elder care (Chatzitheochari and Arber, 2012; Haller *et al.*, 2013). Thus, the gap in quality and leisure time is affected by social role expectations, as well as by the lack of policies promoting co-responsibility in the household or in childcare coverage measures (Craig and Mullan, 2013; OECD, 2009).

Given this background, the aims of this study are to identify prevalent gender roles and the persistence of sexist stereotypes among teachers in training in Spain, to determine the reasons for them and to suggest solutions for eradicating sexist prejudices. To allow for a more in-depth analysis, the following specific aims are also established:

- (1) To analyse future teachers' commitment to and involvement in the gender roles they play;
- (2) To identify the variables behind the persistence of gender stereotypes in the behaviour of future teachers and
- (3) To put forward feasible measures for preventing, ending and/or eradicating gender stereotypes.

4. Method

The design of the study is mixed, with the qualitative approach having the dominant status (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004; Onwuegbuzie and Leech, 2006) since the aim of the study is not only to identify but also to analyse preferred gender roles and the persistence of gender

stereotypes based on the perceptions of future teachers. Therefore, and in line with this initial approach, the qualitative method is primary and the quantitative one is secondary and complementary.

4.1 Sample

The investigation was carried out using purposive sampling. A total of 1350 Spanish students on the master's degree in teaching compulsory and higher secondary education, vocational training and languages during the academic years 2015–2016 and 2016–2017 were invited to participate in the study. This postgraduate course is aimed at training professionals who already have an official Spanish or approved foreign university degree in any subject and want to become teachers. The participants, who were given full details of the purpose of the investigation, were from the Spanish regions of Valencia, Murcia, the Basque Country, Madrid, Castile-La Mancha and Andalusia. Ultimately 1260 people volunteered to take part (575 men and 685 women), their ages ranging between 20 and 35. The sample comprised participants from 54 different professions (Table 1).

The most numerous groups in the sample were teachers in primary education, educational psychologists, graduates in physical activity science and history graduates, while the smallest groups comprised graduates in religious sciences, French studies, physics, humanities, social work, telecommunications engineering, industrial engineering and mechanical engineering.

4.2 Data collection instrument

To identify and explain the prevalent gender roles and sexist stereotypes that persist among future teachers, an ad-hoc instrument, *gender roles questionnaire*, was developed based on the principles of Athenstaedt (2003) and Katchel *et al.* (2016).

Athenstaedt (2003) argued that gender stereotypes are differentiated according to people's behaviour, physical characteristics and occupational status. Similarly, Katchel *et al.* (2016) argue that role identity is constituted by people's interests, attitudes and beliefs, behaviour and outward appearance, and that self-assessment is the best strategy for identifying aspects of femininity and masculinity. On the other hand, the determination of the variables of the questionnaire has been made taking into account the studies that have identified the most important variables in the socialization of gender roles: the domestic space (Tobio, 2012; Sen 1990), body image (Perloff, 2014; Sepúlveda and Calado, 2012), the features of expressiveness (Evans and Diekman, 2009; López-Zafra *et al.*, 2009; Twenge, 2001), career choice and performance (Cikara *et al.*, 2011; Heflick *et al.*, 2011; Ferreira, 2017) and gender differentials in leisure (Chatzitheorachi and Arber, 2012; Craig and Mullan, 2013; Haller *et al.*, 2013; Henderson and Gibson, 2013).

Stets and Burke (2003) maintain that the meanings of gender identity can be measured using the semantic differential scale, on which they are plotted between two polar opposites. Following this premise, in this study, we intend to carry out a contrastive analysis of female and male gender identity employing a strategy that has seldom been used in educational research: photography (Banks and Zeitlyn, 2015).

The questionnaire was made up of twelve images (in pairs), with each pair comprising a man and a woman carrying out the same activity, i.e. a scale of polar opposites. These represented six variables: family (looking after children), household chores, body image, professional performance, feelings and emotions and free time (leisure).

To design and validate the questionnaire we used the *experts' technique* from the Delphi method (Steurer, 2011). Three researchers from the *International Project on Design and Gender Equality of Opportunities in Higher Education* (<https://web.ua.es/es/proyectogenero/universidades-participantes.html>) participated in this process, which was carried out in two stages.

Table 1.
Professions/
qualifications of the
participants in
the study

Degree/Profession	Number of participants	% Sample
Business management	42	3.33%
Architecture	31	2.46%
Dramatic art	6	0.48%
Fine arts	24	1.90%
Biology	41	3.25%
Environmental sciences	11	0.87%
Physical activity science	90	7.14%
Marine science	12	0.95%
Religious sciences	8	0.63%
Audiovisual communication	9	0.71%
Interior design	9	0.71%
Social education	9	0.71%
Nursing	34	2.70%
French studies	8	0.63%
English studies	35	2.78%
Arabic and Islamic studies	8	0.63%
Arabic philology	9	0.71%
Classical philology	9	0.71%
French philology	9	0.71%
Spanish philology	22	1.75%
English philology	24	1.90%
Catalan philology	35	2.78%
Physics	8	0.63%
Geology	9	0.71%
History	65	5.16%
Humanities	8	0.63%
Electrical engineering	8	0.63%
Engineering in sound and image in telecommunications	8	0.63%
Telecommunications engineering	8	0.63%
Industrial engineering	8	0.63%
Information engineering	23	1.83%
Mechanical engineering	8	0.63%
Agricultural engineering	8	0.63%
Technical engineer of public works	15	1.19%
Hispanic language and literature	41	3.25%
Catalan language and literature	9	0.71%
Modern languages and their literatures	9	0.71%
Teacher in early childhood education	33	2.62%
Teacher in primary education	170	13.49%
Mathematics	18	1.43%
Music	16	1.27%
Human and dietetic nutrition	16	1.27%
Optics and optometry	9	0.71%
Pedagogy	24	1.90%
Journalism	18	1.43%
Psychopedagogy	99	7.86%
Psychology	33	2.62%
Advertising and public relations	9	0.71%
Chemistry	26	2.06%
Labour relations and human resources	12	0.95%
Sociology	9	0.71%
Social work	8	0.63%
Translation and interpretation	31	2.46%
Tourism	9	0.71%
Total sample	1260	100.00%

Stage 1: A total of 55 images were chosen, 30 of them from the archives of The Summer Agency and Tweetbinder and 25 from the copyright-free image search engines of Creative Commons Search, PhotoPin and Comptight, which provide advanced search options. From this set of images, the researchers each selected four pairs for each variable, achieving a 65% rate of agreement in their choices. A second selection process was then carried out (two pairs of images for each variable) with 80% agreement. To facilitate the comprehension and interpretation of each variable or study descriptor (Vanegas and Tabares, 2011), the researchers finally chose one pair of images for each variable, achieving 98% agreement in their choice.

Stage 2: A *focus group of experts* was formed in which the three researchers analysed the research instrument and suggested that the study would be enriched – especially as far as identifying the causes of sexist behaviours is concerned – if the participants were to identify both their self-perception of the roles and their perception of the opposite gender's roles. To this end, it was suggested that the questionnaire should include the following questions: what are women like? and what do you think are men like? to be answered only by the women, and what are men like? and what do you think women are like? to be answered only by the men.

Once the instrument was validated, its reliability was determined. According to Cooksey (2014) and Gwet (2014), it is essential to determine an instrument's reliability because different experts can interpret the same data in different ways. We calculated Fleiss's kappa, which measures the degree of agreement between experts. This is an extension of Cohen's kappa and is used when the number of experts is greater than two and there is a fixed number of elements (Cohen, 1960, 1968). In this test the correlation coefficients range between 0 and 1, where 0 means there is no agreement and 1 means perfect agreement. A Fleiss's kappa value of 0.7 or above is considered to show that the instrument is reliable. Our test resulted in a value of $k = 0.7$, which indicates that the strength of agreement between experts was consistent and that the instrument was therefore reliable.

Thus the research instrument comprised six pairs of images (with each pair showing a man and a woman carrying out the same activity) reflecting gender roles (Table 2).

4.3 Procedure and analysis

Over the academic years 2015–2016 and 2016–2017, a number of sessions were arranged that required the presence of the participating students, both individually and in groups, depending on when they were free. At the start of the session, they were informed that any information they supplied would remain anonymous and confidential.

Gender role	Description
Family (looking after children)	A mother and a father with a child, at home, washing the dishes and speaking on the phone
Feelings and emotions	A woman and two men watching a film and crying
Body image	A woman and a man, fairly thickset, wearing smart suits
Household chores	A woman and a man cleaning the house with a mop
Free time and leisure	A group of women and a group of men dancing
Professional performance	A woman and a man, tired, sleeping with their head resting on a laptop computer

Table 2.
Gender roles of the
research instrument

An EB-595Wi interactive projector and a computer were used to project the images (which were also provided in printed form). Specifically, participants were asked to choose and categorize pairs of images based on the activities they prefer to do on a daily basis and to describe and explain their feelings and perceptions about them. In this way, the participants' gender role preferences were identified as determined by the way in which each one (man or woman) has accommodated, preferred and participated in social life by exercising certain roles, involving both the affective (self-esteem) and cognitive (categorical thinking of the world) levels (Tajfel and Turner, 1986). This identification with gender roles, therefore, is a subjective, personal and desired experience that each individual has constructed based on the fact of being a man or a woman, and that, furthermore, reports the behaviours, activities and interests that are socially acceptable for men as opposed to women (Money and Ehrhardt, 1972). In short, participants had to describe, analyse and reflect on their preferences and the situations observed and also write and explain four significant or key words associated with each image. Although they were allowed up to an hour, 87% of participants completed the questionnaire in less than forty minutes.

When the data collection stage was finished, the information was analysed using two procedures: an analysis of the narratives from the questionnaire using Aquad 7 qualitative software and an analysis of keywords using R GUI software.

- (1) Analysis of the narratives: the information collected was transferred to RTF format and saved to the Aquad 7 program, which is qualitative analysis software (Huber and Gürtler, 2012) that enables units of text to be organized, edited, revised and counted. On the basis of an inductive review of the data (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994), comparative associations were established between the research questions and emerging themes, and inferential codes were created, categorized and validated using a triangulation process in which the three expert university professors took part.

At the end of this process, a definitive code map was compiled, and it was from this that the study's three main themes emerged: household chores, family roles (looking after children) and body image.

- (2) Analysis of keywords: Rgui (R) software was used for this purpose, with keywords being analysed according to the number of times they appeared. The criterion was to identify the most frequent words without exclusion parameters and then generate a graphic representation in the form of a word cloud.

5. Results

The analysis of the participants' narratives, with the Aquad 7 qualitative programme, has made it possible to create the definitive code map from which the themes and codes of the study are derived. The findings are grouped in tables, according to the emerging themes and presented with the codes, absolute frequencies (AF) and percentage of absolute frequencies. The codes – which represent gender roles and stereotypes – reflect the percentage of the total number of occurrences of the concepts found in each of the descriptions of the photographs, which are translated into the percentage of absolute frequencies (%FA) (Huber and Gürtler, 2012). Finally, to complement the analysis, the word clouds are presented with the results of the analysis of the textual corpus of the participants' narratives.

5.1 Role preference

Of the six gender role categories proposed in the instrument (family and childcare, feelings and emotions, body image, household chores, fun and leisure and professional performance),

the participants preferred the following topics: household chores (75.60%), childcare (65.85%) and body image (46.34%).

The images of the woman and the man doing household chores were those most chosen by both women and men (women = 47.56%; men = 28.04%), followed by those depicting looking after children (women = 39.02%; men = 26.82%) and finally those involving body image (women = 26.82%; men = 19.51%) (see [Table 3](#)).

5.2 Identification with roles

5.2.1 Theme 1: gender roles associated with the household chores. In the participants' narratives, six codes are identified: (1) household chores, (2) equality, (3) effort, responsibility, order and collaboration, (4) reluctance, (5) machismo and (6) happiness ([Table 4](#)).

The most commonly identified roles were household chores (woman image = 49.13%; man image = 52.12%) and effort, responsibility, order and collaboration (woman image = 21.97%; man image = 18.79%).

However, a big difference can be seen when the participants identify the images of the man and the woman associated with equality and machismo. There is a 20.60% presence of opinions that associate the image of the man doing household chores with equality, while only 10.40% connect the image of the woman to the same concept. Meanwhile 9.25% of the opinions associate the image of the woman with machismo, while none relate the image of the man with that item. There is also a sizeable difference between the results that connect the image of the man with reluctance (8.48%) and those for the image of the woman, in which reluctance barely registers (3.47%). Happiness is only associated with household chores in the case of the image of the woman (5.78%).

Regarding the sample as a whole, the words that most frequently appear according to the women's self-perception of the roles associated with household chores are "task, responsible, order, happiness, obligation and joy", while according to the men's self-perception they are "collaboration, home, cleaning, mop and man" ([Figures 1 and 2](#)).

5.2.2 Theme 2: gender roles associated with the family (looking after children). The emerging codes that participants link with the family are household chores, looking after

Themes	Women	Men	Total
1. Household chores	47.56%	28.04%	75.60%
2. Looking after children	39.02%	26.82%	65.85%
3. Body image	26.82%	19.51%	46.34%

Table 3.
Images selected by
participants

Codes	AF Woman image	AF Man image	%AF woman image	%AF Man image
Household chores	255	258	49.13%	52.12%
Equality	54	102	10.40%	20.60%
Effort, responsibility, order and collaboration	114	93	21.97%	18.79%
Reluctance	18	42	3.47%	8.48%
Machismo	48	0	9.25%	0%
Happiness	30	0	5.78%	0%
Total	519	495		

Table 4.
Gender roles
associated with the
household chores

Figure 1.
Women’s self-
perception of
household chores

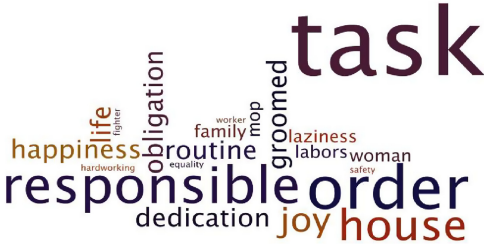


Figure 2.
Men’s self-perception
of household chores



Table 5.
Gender roles
associated with family

Codes	AF Woman image	AF Man image	%AF woman image	%AF Man image
Stress/saturation	117	42	17.18%	6.39%
Household chores	93	150	13.65%	22.83%
Looking after children	117	111	17.18%	16.89%
Multitasking	144	27	21.14%	4.10%
Relaxation/entertainment	0	78	0%	11.87%
Work/professional	37	14	16.29%	6.39%
Capacity/responsibility/control	75	51	11.01%	7.76%
Incapacity/irresponsibility/lack of control	24	156	3.52%	23.74%
Total	607	629		

self-perception they are “lack of control, disorder, new task, unusual, collaboration, sometimes and baby-sitter” (Figures 3 and 4).

5.2.3 Theme 3: gender roles associated with body image. Emerging codes in this theme include famous/posing, overweight, satisfaction/happiness, elegance/beauty, seriousness/unhappiness, body acceptance and social stereotype (Table 6).

The participants connect the image of the woman with someone famous (27.89%), though far fewer do so with the image of the man (13.69%). Emerging in second position is the code for “overweight”, which is highlighted similarly for both (woman = 19.72%; man = 21.23%). There is a notable difference in that the image of the man is associated with satisfaction/happiness (34.93%), which is in no case associated with the woman (0%), and the image of the woman is connected with seriousness and unhappiness (14.96%), which is in no case associated with the man (0%). The codes for elegance/beauty (woman = 17.00%; man = 14.38%) and social stereotype (woman = 10.20%; man = 6.84%) are more

Gender
stereotypes

1123

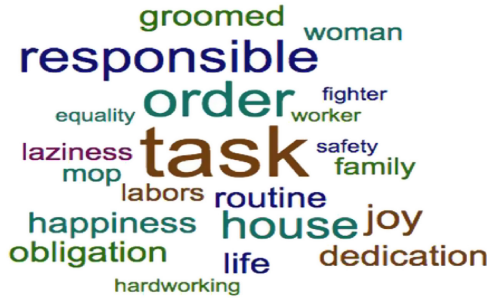


Figure 3.
Women's self-
perception of looking
after children

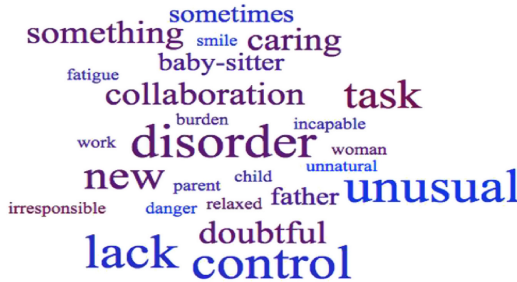


Figure 4.
Men's self-perception
of looking after
children of looking
after children

Codes	AF Woman image	AF Man image	% AF woman image	% AF Man image
Famous/posing	123	60	27.89%	13.69%
Elegance/beauty	75	63	17.00%	14.38%
Overweight	87	93	19.72%	21.23%
I do not accept my body	45	39	10.20%	8.90%
Satisfaction/happiness	0	153	0%	34.93%
Seriousness/unhappiness	66	0	14.96%	0%
Social stereotype	45	30	10.20%	6.84%
Total	441	438		

Table 6.
Gender roles
associated with
body image

frequent for the image of the woman than that of the man. Finally, “non-acceptance of the body” is indicated more often in relation to the image of the woman (woman = 10.20%; man = 8.90%).

For the sample as a whole, the most frequently repeated words according to the women’s self-perception of the roles connected to body image are “overweight, physical complex, rejection and stereotype”, while according to the men they are “happiness, joy, overweight, elegant, satisfaction and pleasing” (Figures 5 and 6).

6. Discussion and conclusions

6.1 Prevalent gender roles and the persistence of sexist stereotypes

The most significant findings from our study are that both male and female participants are in agreement in their selection of three types of role – household chores, looking after children and body image – above others associated with professional development, feelings and emotions and free time. Evans and Diekman (2009), Matud *et al.* (2014) and Sweeting *et al.* (2014), on the other hand, all conclude that men and women differ significantly in their consideration of typical gender roles, and that the most prominent in the case of men are related to work and supporting the family, and while in the case of women, it is those related to household chores and looking after children. Such different results suggest that changes are taking place in the features of expressivity and instrumentality traditionally associated with women and men, as highlighted by Echebarria (2010) and López-Zafra *et al.* (2009) in a transcultural investigation involving Spanish, German and US university students.

One of the main conclusions of the study is the failure of Spanish legislation on gender equality to promote significant changes in traditional gender role preferences and to eliminate stereotypes that perpetuate gender imbalances between men and women. The prevailing



Figure 5.
Women's self-
perception of
body image



Figure 6.
Men's self-perception
of body image

model of a Spanish woman continues to be the one described in the *Manual of Home Economics for High School and Teaching* (1958): “a self-sacrificing mother”, whose job is “her work”, the first and the last person responsible for the household chores and childcare. What has changed is that Spanish women, in the 21st century, must combine their first job with a second profession (preferably a teacher, secretary, nurse, hairdresser, beautician, care taker or cashier), which allows them to contribute economically to the household. And if to this is added that she has a “desirable physical image” (Sepúlveda and Calado, 2012), then the “ideal model of a woman” has been achieved, the one most valued and recognised by society. Based on this, it is possible to affirm that there is still a long way to go in the legal, educational and professional fields, as well as in the empowerment of women themselves, to eliminate gender stereotypes so deeply rooted in Spanish society.

6.2 Both men and women participate in household chores, but women are skilled at these and men are clumsy

The participants believe that equality has been achieved in the domestic sphere because both sexes participate in the household chores, but they add that women do these tasks with happiness and enthusiasm, while men do them with stress and reluctance, i.e. although men feel they are capable of doing chores, they experience rejection and conflicts. This reflects the existence of a *domestic gap* since household chores are not accepted as a man’s role but are seen as being exclusive to women (Lavee and Katz, 2002). The following narrative from a female participant throws light on the situation:

The man is not really involved in what he’s doing because he does it without wanting to and has even put on an apron so as not to get dirty. In fact it’s really strange to see a man wearing an apron in our society. Despite this, it seems like the household chores are shared. The woman, on the other hand, is involved in what she’s doing because we can see that she’s happy and relaxed. It looks to me as if she enjoys doing the housework and that she’s better at it (muj13).

From this it can be deduced that, although men may have a certain interest in participating in the household chores (Forste and Fox, 2012), this does not result in positive actions leading to conjugal wellbeing (Pedersen *et al.*, 2011).

6.3 Men and women both participate in raising children, but the women are responsible for doing it while the men “help”. A good mother gives up work to look after her children, while the father is the family breadwinner and therefore cannot give up work

As for roles connected with the family, the most prominent is looking after children. This task is accepted and taken on by both men and women. The participants indicate that men show greater incapacity, lack of control and irresponsibility when it comes to looking after children, but they nevertheless carry out the task in a relaxed way without stress, unlike the woman in the photo, who is tired and rushed off her feet.

It may be that the differences in roles follow more traditional lines once men and women become parents, but carrying out these roles is more marked in women. After the birth of her first child, a woman throws herself into the raising of children and may even give up work, and if she works outside the home, she takes on domestic, family and professional tasks all at the same time (Cohany and Sok, 2007; Domínguez-Folgueras, 2015; Dotti, 2014; Katz-Wise *et al.*, 2010; McIntosh *et al.*, 2015). Giving up work or working fewer hours has consequences in terms of less economic income on the part of the woman and greater dependence on the man (Schober, 2011). A male student notes that:

We see a man with his daughter in the kitchen at home. It looks like he is not in control of the situation, but he does not seem to be concerned about it, not overwhelmed at all, despite the fact that he’s surrounded by chaos. Also, I do not think he realizes that the girl could come to harm because she

could cut herself or fall over or hurt herself. We also see a woman with her son and she's very busy. She's probably cut down her working hours or started working from home and she has to work and look after her child at the same time. She looks overwhelmed, though she's no doubt got everything under control (man.30).

Women carry out a "double working day" as childminders and workers, using various strategies to dovetail their professional and family activities. In Spain many women choose jobs that enable them to prioritize the child-raising role because they feel responsible for the family, while others rely on help from family members, especially their parents, so that they can combine work with bringing up their children.

In short, men's involvement in household chores and looking after children is limited and only "collaborative" (Lawrence *et al.*, 2007) since they do not take on family responsibilities. This means that in practice the division of work in the domestic space – a variable stressed by Tobío (2012) as regards the construction of gender identity – continues to be unequal.

Following gender identity theory (Burke, 2006; Rossan, 1987; Stryker and Serpe, 1982; Owens and Serpe, 2003), it can be concluded that the prominence of the roles is the same in both women and men, but commitment to the roles, which is the basis of gender identity, is not.

6.4 Women and men both want to look good and be attractive, but a woman has to be attractive in order to be successful, while a man has to be intelligent

The results of the study show that there has been a change in conventional gender roles since worrying about body image has traditionally been associated with women and not men. Both are interested in having a good physical appearance and relate this to fame, beauty and attraction. The difference lies in the fact that men feel satisfaction and self-acceptance and have a positive evaluation of their body image, whereas women have a negative evaluation and little self-acceptance.

According to a female student:

The woman does not feel happy. At first glance this might be because of her weight, seeing that we live in a society that demands that women should be thin in order to please everyone else, to be successful and look good. The man, although he's also overweight, feels happy. The difference is that society does not pressurize the male sex in the same way as it does the female. For example, their image is not so important for a job. This way of thinking is encouraged especially by media such as television (wom.48).

The women also indicate that they feel they are judged more by their physical appearance than men are which matches the conclusions reached in studies by Cuadrado-Guirado and López-Turrillo (2014) and Heflick *et al.* (2011) that an attractive physical image gives women greater visibility. The body has become an instrument that is used indiscriminately by the media – as pointed out repeatedly by participants in the study – to the point where people construct the image, they present to society according to the image society presents to them (Batiwala, 2015; Torres and Toro, 2012).

Women's negative self-perception of their physical image is strongly linked to the social stereotypes associated with thinness and beauty in a society in which women's physical appearance is a relevant factor in their gender identity.

In short and considering all the data, our findings show that equality between men and women is only apparent since despite the fact that the participants have a high level of education, their gender roles are not equal and there is a predominance of stereotypes that affect women in particular. It can be concluded, therefore, that there has been no significant movement towards equality in the division of household chores and family tasks, and that legislation and education policies on gender equality in Spain have not had the hoped-for results and neither have they been sufficient to eliminate stereotypes.

The main implications deriving from this investigation are, first, that there is a definite presence of sexist attitudes among future teachers, and second, that the institutionalization of a “family ethic for women” still persists and needs to be modified and/or reversed. These results underscore the need to incorporate the gender approach cross-sectionally and compulsorily into school and university curricula. The study’s findings do not only contribute to identifying groups at greater risk but also those areas that need most attention, and it is towards these that interventions aimed at deconstructing and eradicating sexist attitudes should be directed.

6.5 Causal factors of the persistence of traditional gender roles and sexist stereotypes

Spanish legislation since 2004 has aimed to eradicate discriminatory practices in institutions, sexist stereotypes and gender-based violence, but the laws have been rhetorical, non-specific, weak and out of touch with reality. This has led to the persistence of asymmetries of power and inequalities between men and women in the home, in employment, the political administration and education.

Attempts to introduce non-sexist education have involved only piecemeal actions in primary and secondary education. Schools are still influenced by prevailing cultural patterns and are an instrument for transmitting and maintaining stereotypes via a curriculum that is both explicit (competences, content, activities and assessment) and implicit (expectations, symbols, rituals, rules, etc.). The curricular content, the examples given in class, the images in textbooks, the teachers’ expectations for girls and for boys and playground power relationships are just a few examples of the differential education constructed at school.

Neither do university curricula consider any compulsory subject involving gender equality, which is relegated to one or another optional subject. The problem is even greater in faculties of education since 90% of them only provide an optional course that is not generally chosen by students because they believe that equality has already been achieved and that learning from the gender perspective is therefore not important for their future professional careers ([Merma-Molina et al., 2017](#)).

Nevertheless, education is not the only institution that plays an influential role in the persistence of sexual stereotypes. A second key area – in which legislation is also lacking in strength and strictness – is employment. While it is true that there has been an increase in the number of women entering the labour market, there continues to be a gender pay gap. The idea of “equal pay for equal work” today in 2019 is utopian since women on average earn 5793 euros a year less than men, and men and women doing the same job receive different wages ([INE, 2018](#)). The situation in many households is critical because the woman works outside the home and also deals with the housework, thus having a double working day.

At the same time the “visible heads” of the big companies – those in senior management positions or with a place on the board – are still for the most part men, which mean that in Spain the “glass ceiling” metaphor is absolutely true. The *Harvard Business Review* ([Hansen et al., 2013](#)) reported that only 2% of prominent positions in the most important multinational companies are occupied by women as opposed to 98% by men. It is easy to see, therefore, how difficult it is for women managers to access senior positions, and not only in Spain but worldwide.

6.6 How can sexist prejudices be eradicated?

Gender equality does not come about by itself. It calls for collective action, political will and legislative tools. This means that viable solutions aimed at weakening sexist attitudes need to be put forward using education and other social institutions, following other countries such as Iceland, Norway and Finland.

6.7 Through education

To speak of diversity, we necessarily have to speak of equality. Starting on and following the path of higher education within the framework of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) from the point of view of “equality” means unavoidably taking into account the various collectives of university students that make up the classes, and one of these is women.

Equality, diversity and inclusion represent a challenge for Spanish universities because they have to generate and promote opportunities for women to play a role in cultural leadership. Efforts should not, therefore, focus only on tackling the problem of the number of women at university. Steps should also be taken to produce a different kind of knowledge and include and encourage inclusive and diverse research (Buitendijk *et al.*, 2019). The university as an institution also needs to respond to social demands by providing a quality education to its future professionals. This quality is also reflected in the promotion of equal opportunities and the fight against exclusion and discrimination as the main challenges facing the EHEA. The priorities are therefore:

- (1) To formulate tough education policies, especially from a preventive point of view, that take into account any new elements that may hinder gender equality – such as the mass media, information and communications technologies and social networks – along with the family (as being responsible for moulding traditional roles) and the influence of the patriarchal system on the construction of women’s and men’s subjectivity. Patriarchal ideology determines the behaviours and roles “characteristic of each sex”, with women having to avoid roles that are “typically male” and men roles that are “typically female” in order to make the two as different as possible. The result of this is that men, for example, do not show their emotions and appear weak if they do, and women cannot be aggressive or “coarse” because such behaviour “is not typical of their sex”. Education needs to overcome the female and male attributes imposed by the patriarchal society and construct new versions of femaleness and maleness that are neither exclusive nor rigid.
- (2) To systematically integrate the gender approach into the teaching of all university degrees, beginning with an awareness programme for university students to enable them to see that discrimination and stereotypes do exist. This should be followed up with (a) the design and development of preventive actions aimed at encouraging self-concept and self-esteem in women and strengthening the capacity for critical judgement in both men and women, (b) actions aimed at eliminating sexist language and (c) a review of how combining working life and family life is implemented in the university, including among students.
- (3) To train future teachers in the acquisition of strategies and good practices for eradicating gender stereotypes in boys and adolescents insofar as they relate to family life, equal responsibilities and the labour market and to design specific and/or cross-cutting educational programmes on gender equality and the elimination of stereotypes in postgraduate courses taken by future teachers.

Teachers are some of the main actors when it comes to updating teaching models on the basis of equality. Guaranteeing the quality of teacher training is therefore an obligation and a challenge for the Spanish education system in that it contributes to satisfying the right to an education of quality and equality. In countries such as Finland and Iceland, where coincidentally the quality of education has improved and advances have been made in the equality of gender opportunities, teaching is recommended as a career to the brightest students. In Spain the opposite is true insofar, as teaching has become a last resort for those who have not found anything better and for those who have failed at other courses.

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- (4) To incorporate a gender-equality approach in infant, primary and secondary education.

Education for gender equality of opportunities should not begin in young adulthood but at school, which is where ideas take shape and seeds are planted. It is important to teach girls to move out of their comfort zones, to shout, to occupy space, take risks and make themselves heard and to teach boys to be more empathetic, more emotional, to be more caring and collaborate more. Femininity and masculinity, the way they are traditionally understood, need to move in the direction of a more male femininity and a more female masculinity.

Primary and secondary education are therefore also the stages in which women should start to be drawn in the direction of traditionally male professions and vice versa, eliminating sexist stereotypes based on the sexual division of work that determine that girls, for example, choose professions involving care and boys choose technical professions involving the sciences or mathematics. It is not simply a question of having a greater presence of women in the workplace, but of the quality of the positions occupied by men as well as women.

- (5) To introduce changes in family upbringing. In Spanish families children are still brought up to see women as the weaker sex. One way of tackling this would be to educate in parenting, especially as part of compulsory basic education. Both school and family should be in agreement as regards boys' and girl's education and upbringing and should promote similar rather than contradictory values, such as autonomy and moral sensitivity for boys and girls rather than just girls and strength and independence for girls rather than just boys.
- (6) To include men as active partners in equality as well as beneficiaries of gender equality policies. Their role in both private and public areas is essential for improving equality, and therefore the socialization of men and boys needs to be dealt with in the education system without separating it from socialization in the home or on social networks.

6.8 Through other social institutions

Policies aimed at improving women's autonomy and independence are needed in order to undermine one of the main pillars of the patriarchy, i.e. dependence. Short-term and long-term political changes are therefore crucial. The former would include, for example, programmes that help families with dependent children that help the mother too, taking into account family size and differences in the consumer price index between autonomous communities, setting up work programmes to give mothers the choice of whether or not to work outside the home and doing away with legal provisions that implicitly or explicitly discriminate against people – both mothers and fathers – who leave work because of family obligations.

In the long-term more far-reaching reforms are needed to improve the economic security and autonomy of women who depend on income from men, the markets or the State, and this is a key factor for advancing women's independence and eliminating stereotypes. A labour market policy is essential for ensuring the employment, training or retraining of everyone of working age and setting the minimum wage to keep pace with changes in the standard of living.

In addition, all jobs dominated by men should be "opened up" to women, differences in earnings between men and women should be eliminated and anti-discrimination laws aimed at preventive action should be enforced. In short, achieving greater social and economic justice via the labour market would call for a policy of full employment for men and women, with good salaries and the elimination of labour markets segregated by gender.

For those women who need to combine work and family responsibilities, the "help" of men around the house is not enough. The public and private sectors should therefore make the job

of caring easier. This should involve flexible working hours, the provision of public nurseries, out-of-school activity programmes and paid family and sick leave. Accompanying these should be a scheme enabling equal access to education. Similarly, a more generous allocation of social resources and better employment agreements are needed to facilitate the task of caring, regardless of whether this is carried out by the father or the mother.

Women's empowerment is also important, especially in the areas of politics, the administration and education. Organic Law 3/2007—of 22 March, on effective equality between women and men – pays particular attention to balanced presence or composition, which refers to the presence of women and men in institutions and positions of responsibility in such a way that the total members of either sex neither exceed 60% nor fall below 40%. In 2019 for the first time in Spain, 52.4% of the central government was made up of women, and Spain is the fourth country in Europe with the most women Members of Parliament, behind Sweden, Finland and Belgium. However, the incorporation of women into other decision-making positions in public and private organizations had not enjoyed the same rate of growth.

Sexist attitudes could be reduced if there were greater control over the content published or broadcast by the media and if parents and schools were to encourage a responsible consumption since the media are extremely powerful when it comes to spreading cultural rules and values that legitimize the social order (León and Aizpurúa, 2020, forthcoming). Thus the greater the exposure to messages spread by the media, the greater the sexist attitudes and beliefs among consumers. Giaccardi *et al.* (2016) discuss the power of the media in the construction of maleness in teenagers, while Collins (2011) links media consumption to other components of sexism such as ideas of beauty and stereotypical views of the sexes. As socializing agents, the media help maintain traditional gender ideologies by representing men and women stereotypically (Greenwood and Lippman, 2010). Thus women are sexualized by the clothes they wear and relegated to stereotyped gender roles like housewives or defenceless victims. Attributed to men, on the other hand, are the active, dominant roles of “tough guys”.

All the possible changes mentioned in the preceding paragraphs are not transmitted from the top down but come about through the organization and mobilization of the people. It is therefore important to encourage women to participate more actively in these types of initiative. The welfare state is a productive space for activism, and although it serves the interests of patriarchal capitalism, it can also contradict them. Therefore, it has the potential to strengthen women's political and economic power. A movement for gender equal opportunities should join forces with other organizations of under-represented groups to achieve social, economic and political justice for all.

6.9 Limitations of the research

The study has limitations deriving from its choice of convenience sampling. Although it includes participants from six Spanish autonomous communities, the number from each region is not very high. Nevertheless, the sample is representative of almost all branches of knowledge (54 professions).

Another limitation concerns the images used in the research instrument as a data collection strategy insofar, as they could not be obtained from a data bank specific to the research subject but instead had to be found in databases of general images. It can be inferred that a data collection strategy without any danger of bias would be to encourage each participant to design their own images, reflecting their perceptions and auto-perceptions of gender roles and stereotypes. The fact that there were no pre-existing studies using this type of research instrument in education sciences was a handicap for the investigation.

Despite these methodological limitations, the results of the study may serve as a basis for implementing specific future actions originating from any area – but especially from the area

of education – aimed at teaching people about equal roles in order to eliminate sexist stereotypes.

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