

SOCIAL GENDER ROLES IN PERCEPTION OF FEMALE AND MALE POLISH STUDENTS

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Abstract: The aim of the study was to reveal social gender roles in the perception of male and female Polish students. The social gender roles have been examined in the context of cultural consensus.

The Cultural Models Scenario has been used with 223 participants. The research method is based on series of brief scenarios that were created with an anthropological methodology. After in-depth interviews in Polish society, basic social roles were described in scenarios. In the first phase the group of respondents ($N = 104$) evaluated the gender social norms in the scenarios. In the second phase the following group with similar socioeconomical characteristic ($N = 119$) answered the questions while the opposite sex were introduced into the scenarios.

The results revealed that women were valued higher compared to men in, both stereotypical and non-stereotypical social roles. This confirms the consideration of Polish culture as female. Although women were assessed higher in the least valued social roles and most of the valued domains related to work – what prompts the masculinity of a culture. The masculine social role turned out to be perceived as clearly traditional – mostly limited to financial resources, particularly in the women’s perspective. The least recognized social role with strong negative social consensus was a 40-year old single man. A single man turned out to be the least socially approved which may explain the poor psychological functioning of single men in the context of social consonance.

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Introduction

The aim of the study is to reveal social gender roles in the perception of Polish female and male students. The social gender roles will be examined in the context of cultural consensus and cultural consonance (Dressler, 2018).

Polish culture is defined as both: “feminine” (Boski, 2006; Mandal, 2004) and “masculine” (Hofstede et al., 2000). The two, seemingly extreme ends, may be understood when analyzing the issue of social construction of gender and its cultural context. Masculinity in Hofstede’s approach (2010) is manifested in the diversification of social gender roles. At the same time, it means that both men and women are highly motivated towards achieving success understood as excelling in one’s field. Citizens of countries exhibiting high masculinity “live to work”, and their professional position is achieved by competitiveness, decisiveness and assertiveness. Despite the fact that in masculine cultures, women are confronted with greater social barriers in achieving professional success, they exhibit a greater variety of traits enabling them to overcome those barriers, which results in a relatively equal number of professionally active women in masculine and feminine cultures. In such a context, work constitutes the primary value both for women and men.

The “femininity” of a culture (Boski, 2006; Mandal, 2004; Mandal et al., 2012) reflects good adaptation and successful functioning of women in fields stereotypically reserved for men, especially in the public sphere of life. Women in Poland highlight their femininity more and have an inclination to evaluate behavior as typically extreme. On the other hand, men assume a unifying approach and prefer behavior which is sexually neutral rather than feminine (Mandal, 2004). The self-evaluation of psychological gender over the period of 10 years indicates the growth of femininity among women and men (Kuczyńska, 2002). Studies conducted over the 8 years period (Ochnik, 2012) revealed an increase in the number of androgenic people and a decline in the number of masculine people. This proves that traits associated with femininity are by and large accepted and incorporated into men’s self-description.

Therefore, social context is changing and social gender roles are transforming and reflecting those changes. Hence, the main question is whether the perception of contemporary social gender roles is stereotyped. The following question refers to the role of sex in social gender role perception. Are there differences in male and female students’ perception of social gender roles? This study combines a psychological approach and an anthropological methodology; therefore the perception of social gender roles will be examined regarding cultural consensus which leads to revealing the contemporary cultural model. Understanding the cultural model allows for interpretation of the well-being of an individual

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based on how their behaviours and attitudes fit to the cultural model and therefore determining what is their cultural consonance (Dressler, 2018).

Cultural consensus and cultural consonance

Cultural models imply a consensus within a society, that this is, indeed, is the way things ought to be (Dressler, 2011). They guide behavior and allow us to interpret the behavior of others (Dressler et al., 2015). Cultural models are shared at the aggregate level but are not simply an average of individually held beliefs (Dressler, 2018). Cultural models simultaneously exist within each individual who is a member of that culture, but not as perfect replicas or miniature versions of a pre-existing ‘culture’ that is somehow stamped onto or poured into the individual, for such a view would fail to acknowledge the fact that individuals are not simply empty receptacles but also active shapers of their culture.

Moreover, whereas cultural consonance analysis has up till now been primarily used to evaluate the personal experience of individuals in response to their own perception of their congruency with a shared model in some domain (Dressler et al., 2012) the negative psycho-social effects of a low cultural consonance have been partly attributed to an individual being judged by others as unable to live up to collective expectations (Dressler et al., 2012). Low cultural consonance has been correlated with various negative health outcomes (Dressler, 2018). Using cultural consonance analysis to explore not only an individual’s own perception of their beliefs and behavior in relation to a shared model, but also how they are evaluated by others, in terms of how closely they are perceived to *match* the cultural model, is thus a novel but logical extension to a more traditional approach of cultural consonance analysis.

Method

This study proposes a method of measuring people’s perceptions of ‘others’ in society in terms of how well these others are perceived to be able to appropriate culturally valued behaviors and lifestyles. This method grew out of the field of cognitive anthropology and is both applicable in different cultural settings (unlike many previous scales that to seek to measure attitudes toward particular differences) and scientifically replicable (unlike many qualitative case studies performed in a particular cultural setting).

After 30 in-depth interviews in Polish society, 10 main domains describing basic social roles emerged and have been incorporated into scenarios.

In this paper we present the following two phases. In the first phase (Stage 1) the group of respondents ($N = 104$, $M_{age} = 23,22$) evaluated the gender social norms in scenarios in the context of perceived social consensus. In the second phase (Stage 2) a group with similar socioeconomical characteristic ($N = 119$, $M_{age} = 25,83$) answered the questions while the opposite sex was introduced into the scenarios. The participants evaluated their answers to question on, how socially approved or respected the following behavior would be considered in Polish society, on a scale, where 1 – not at all respected, 2- not approved, 3 – socially approved, 4 – more than approved/highly respected.

The study was conducted with respect for confidentiality and anonymity. The study made use of the traditional pen and paper approach.

The research group

The research group consisted of 223 students, including 168 women (75%) and 55 men (25%). The students represented various majors (Architecture, Physiotherapy, Psychology, Management) as to reflect cultural diversity. In two stages of the study, two different but with analogic age and field of study, groups of students participated. (Tab. 1)

	Stage 1 N (%)	Stage 2 N (%)
Women	78 (75%)	90 (76%)
Men	26 (25%)	29 (24%)
Total	104 (100%)	119 (100%)

Source: Authors

Results

The consensus analysis was conducted for the Stage 1 ($N = 104$) by factor analysis with an extraction method: unweighted least squares. It showed a fixed number of factors (extract 2). The total variance

explained allowed us to establish cultural consensus (Factor1/Factor2) at a level of 9.42, and what denominates clear consensus based on all scenarios in Stage 1 (Tab. 2).

Table 2: Consensus analysis (*N* = 104) – Stage 1

Factor	Initial Eigenvalues Total	Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings Variance%	Cumulative %	Total	Variance%	Cumulative %
1	68.17	65.54	65.54	67.93	65.32	65.32
2	7.24	6.96	72.50	6.91	6.65	71.97
3	5.84	5.62	78.12			
4	5.06	4.87	82.99			
5	4.67	4.49	87.47			
6	3.91	3.76	91.23			
7	3.53	3.40	94.63			
8	3.37	3.24	97.87			
9	2.21	2.13	100.00			
10	2.64E-14	2.54-14	100.00			

Source: Author

The next step was to analyse the cultural consensus with regard to specific social gender roles described in the scenarios. Specific social roles emerged from domains revealed in the quality stage. The cultural consensus was over 90% and can be describe as strong. Due to the conducted analysis the direction of the consensus (positive vs negative) was shown (Tab 3). An additional scenario from Stage 2 was analysed (40-year-old single woman living with parents) and revealed no consensus for this gender role.

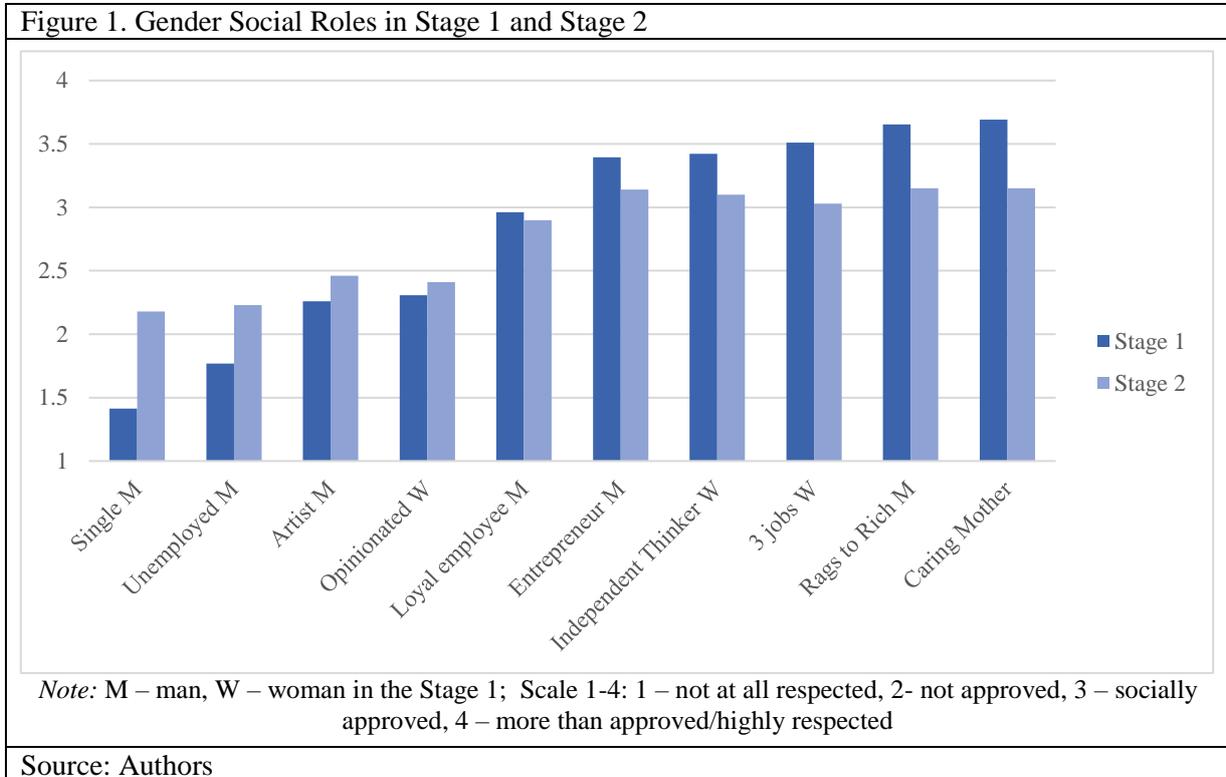
Table 3: Percentage of men and women in the Stage 1 (*N* = 104)

Domains in scenarios	Gender in scenario STAGE 1	Consensus
40-year-old Single living with Parents*	Man	89% NEGATIVE
Unemployed*	Man	96% NEGATIVE
Unambitious Artists	Man	80% NEGATIVE
Opinionated	Woman	60% NEGATIVE
Entrepreneur*	Man	100% POSITIVE
Loyal Employee	Man	70% POSITIVE
Independent Thinker	Woman	61% POSITIVE
Three Jobs and taking care of a Family*	Woman	96% POSITIVE
Rags to Rich	Man	81% POSITIVE
Caring Parent*	Woman	94% POSITIVE

Note: * the strongest cultural consensus

Source: Authors

The following step analysed the mean values of social roles with the different genders in Stage 1 and Stage 2. The least valued overall were single people living with their parents, unemployed persons, artists without financial ambition, opinionated persons, and loyal employees. The most valued in perception of participants were the roles of: entrepreneur, independent thinker, a person having three jobs to take care of a family, a person who went from “rags to riches” (achieved financial success), and a caring parent. (Fig. 1)



The final step was to conduct a two-way analysis of variance to understand if there is an interaction between the independent variables (Stage x Gender) and the dependent variable (gender social role described in scenario). The gender in the scenarios varied in Stage 1 and Stage 2 (compare Tab. 1). The second variable was the gender of participant evaluating the gender social roles depicted in the scenarios in Stages 1 and 2.

- 40-year-old single living with parents (Stage 1 *Single Man* vs Stage 2 *Single Woman*)

A two-way ANOVA showed that stage effect is strong and statistically significant ($F_{1,221} = 82.00, p = .001, \eta^2 = .274$). Single women were valued higher compared to single men. The stage-gender interaction effect turned out to be significant as well ($F_{1,221} = 4.71, p = .031, \eta^2 = .021$), although the strength of this effect can be described as very weak. Single women were valued higher by men whereas single men were valued higher by women. The gender effect was insignificant ($p > .05$).

- Unemployed person (Stage 1 *Unemployed Man* vs Stage 2 *Unemployed Woman*)

A two-way ANOVA showed that stage effect is statistically significant but weak ($F_{1,221} = 10.87, p = .001, \eta^2 = .049$). Unemployed women were valued higher compared to unemployed men. The gender and stage-gender interaction effects turned out to be insignificant ($p > .05$).

- A person having three jobs to take care of a family (Stage 1 *3-jobs Woman* vs Stage 2 *3-jobs Man*)

A two-way ANOVA showed that stage effect is statistically significant but weak ($F_{1,221} = 10.58, p = .001, \eta^2 = .047$). Women having three jobs to take care of a family were valued higher compared to men. The gender and stage-gender interaction effects turned out to be insignificant ($p > .05$).

- A person achieving financial success (rags to riches) (Stage 1 *Rags-to-Rich Man* vs Stage 2 *Rags-to-Rich Woman*)

A two-way ANOVA showed that stage effect is statistically significant ($F_{1,221} = 13.66, p < .001, \eta^2 = .060$). Rags-to-riches men were valued higher compared to rags-to-riches women. The strength of this effect can be described as medium. The analysis showed nontrivial but weak stage-gender interaction effect ($F_{1,221} = 4.33, p = .039, \eta^2 = .020$). Women valued rags-to-riches persons higher than men. The stage-gender effect was insignificant ($p > .05$).

- A caring parent (Stage 1 *Caring Mother* vs Stage 2 *Caring Father*)

A two-way ANOVA showed that stage effect is statistically significant but weak ($F_{1,221} = 12.18, p = .001, \eta^2 = .053$). Caring mothers were valued higher compared to caring fathers. The gender and stage-gender interaction effects turned out to be insignificant ($p > .05$).

The effects of stage, gender and stage-gender interaction turned out to be insignificant ($p > .05$) for the social roles of: unambitious artist, opinionated person, loyal employee, entrepreneur, and independent thinker

Conclusions

The research showed that the cultural model regarding social gender roles might be depicted as traditional. The masculine social role turned out to be perceived as clearly traditional – mostly limited to financial resources. This may lead to the conclusion that the masculinity crisis (Melosik, 2006; Zimbardo & Coulombe, 2016) emerged not only because of the expectation of standing out of the traditional role, but rather from strong social negative consensus of men in non-stereotypical roles. Considering that even the stereotype of the *modern man* consists of a mixture of traditionally masculine and feminine traits (gentle, emphatic, family orientated) (Mandal et al., 2012), the revealed cultural model showed that a man can be valued in aspects related to femininity as long as performs the traditional role of provider. Therefore, it might be difficult to achieve the *modern man* stereotype and perform anything other than the traditional role for men.

Additionally, this effect was stronger in the perception of female students as they valued higher financial success in men. Hence, modern masculinity might be trapped between pronounced expectations of feminine traits and non-pronounced (silent) but strong social consensus on the typically traditional role of the provider. Consequently, modern men are socially valued higher when fulfilling traditional roles, especially in the female perspective. Therefore, it seems that women are the ones who are interested in remaining *status quo* on traditional masculinity.

Even though women were valued higher in the least valued social roles, they were also valued higher compared to men in non-stereotypical roles. This partly confirms the consideration of Polish culture as female (Boski, 2006; Mandal, 2004; Mandal, et al., 2012), reflecting positive social adaptation of women in fields typically defined as masculine. Nevertheless, women were valued higher in the least socially valued roles. Referring to Stereotype Content Model (Fiske et al., 2002), women are perceived as warm but incompetent, therefore the feminine role is perceived within paternalistic prejudice.

Nevertheless, the least recognized social role with strong negative social consensus was a 40-year old single man. Research shows that single people are perceived more negatively than coupled people (Morris et al., 2016; Hertel et al., 2007; Morris et al., 2008). The negative perception of singles is the strongest toward older singles (over 40 years old) (Hertel et al., 2007; Morris et al., 2008). Age is one of the predictors of feelings of stigmatization at work in single people (Ochnik & Mandal, 2015), although gender differences are insignificant in the general feeling of stigmatization in single people (Ochnik & Mandal, 2016). Nevertheless, research on the well-being of childless, never-married singles over 30 years old showed better performance in women compared to men (Ochnik, 2016). A lower perception of a single man role (compared to a single woman) may explain the poor psychological functioning of single men (Ochnik, 2016) in the context of social consonance (Dressler, 2018). It seems that men not fulfilling the traditional role of financially independent provider are not recognized in the society, whereas there is no social consensus towards women in the same situation. Clearly, single men don't fit social expectations and the revealed cultural model. Surprisingly, the cultural model reflects more pronounced social expectations towards single men than women. Even though single women after 40 living with parents don't meet traditional criteria of femininity as having a family and giving birth, the social consensus towards them is not clear. Therefore, the revealed cultural model showed that single men may struggle with aligning with a cultural model as their cultural consonance is lower. This may result in higher anxiety and negative health outcomes (Dressler, 2018). Therefore, the lower cultural

consonance (compared to women) may theoretically explain lower psychological well-being (lower satisfaction with life and self-esteem, higher loneliness) (Ochnik, 2016) of never-married childless single men compared to never-married childless single women.

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