

Analysis of perceptions related to gender stereotypes in secondary education – a gender comparison

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Abstract:

Breaking gender stereotypes and overcoming them continue to be a challenge in today's society. Gender stereotypes may have negative consequences during the school stage and can be also perpetuated in adulthood. To avoid the development of gender stereotypes, the educational environment (specifically physical education) can be used to teach values that avoid actions that perpetuate such stereotypes. However, before initiating an intervention program or an action by teachers, it is essential to know the students' perception regarding gender inequality and stereotypes and how they act in response to them. Thus, this study aims to recognize and describe the attitudes of secondary school students towards gender equality by trying to identify possible differences between men and women. Specifically, the opinions of 91 male and female students from 3rd and 4th grade (aged 15-16 years old) of ESO (mandatory secondary education) in Spain were collected through a questionnaire that was based on validated scales that exist in the literature. This questionnaire consists of 30 items that make up 3 levels of analysis: sociocultural, relational and personal. The obtained results allow us to conclude that there are significant gender differences, and boys and girls have different opinions regarding gender stereotypes in sociocultural, relational and personal aspects. In general, analysed boys are less likely to change stereotypes than the girls. This result suggests that gender stereotypes do not develop equally in men and women at the secondary school stage, which allows us to determine which aspects differ according to gender so that in the future interventions can be implemented to solve the appearance of these stereotypes. Finally, practical implications and pedagogical proposals are presented, which highlight coeducation as the main methodology.

Keywords: gender equality, stereotypes, secondary education, physical education, coeducation

Introduction

Education is a fundamental tool for eliminating gender stereotypes and achieving equality between men and women (Gallardo-López et al., 2020). Therefore, it is necessary to take special care in the treatment and work of activities, as well as in the making of certain comments, since we may be contributing to not being egalitarian and enhancing preconceived ideas about one gender or the other. With the intention of reversing these stereotypes, education must train and educate students in values (Prieto et al., 2018). This will ensure that in the future they do not contribute to the development of attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate gender stereotypes and inequality that sometimes take place in society (Martínez Romera, 2019).

Gender stereotypes can be developed and transmitted in different settings (family, professional, school, etc.). From the educational field, and specifically, from the subject of Physical Education, it is interesting to know how students perceive statements that talk about gender stereotypes or how these stereotypes that promote inequality are developed in order to solve them. Physical Education is a curricular subject that hosts, unfortunately, gender stereotypes (Preece & Bullingham, 2020). These gender stereotypes can develop, for example, when only men participate in contact sports and only women participate in dance and body expression activities. To foster change and achieve gender equality research in this area is essential (Anderson & White, 2017).

In our society, it still remains a challenge to educate under principles of non-discrimination for reasons of gender equality (Gallardo-López et al., 2020). In this context, the role of egalitarian educational approaches, among which coeducation stands out, becomes important. This is an important topic to be addressed among students and also in continuous teacher training. Since gender stereotypes and inequality are still present in the academic and social environment, this article has analysed students in upper secondary education with the intention of finding out their opinions on different gender stereotypes at the sociocultural, relational and personal levels. The main objectives are (i) to know if there is a difference in gender stereotypes between men and women, and (ii) to expose practical implications from the information obtained. The aim is to promote actions to ensure that these stereotypes are not perpetuated, since they foster gender inequalities. First of all, a theoretical

framework is presented in relation to the concepts dealt with in the article, followed by details of the method followed, the results analysed and the discussion, conclusions and implications derived from them.

Theoretical framework

Gender stereotypes in education

Gender stereotypes reflect the roles assigned to men and women by the society in which they live. These gender stereotypes are responsible for the unequal treatment to which they are subjected already from an early age (Alvariñas-Villaverde & Pazos-González, 2018), and can vary based on the social, cultural and historical structure in which they are sustained (Teijeiro et al., 2005). Gender stereotypes direct people's behaviours by setting limits on their freedom and restricting their natural spontaneity. According to (Ángel et al., 2007), within the study of gender stereotypes linked to physical activity, one of the most outstanding interpretations has been the identification of two sets of traits. On the one hand, instrumental traits, which are identified with masculinity, and, on the other hand, affective and/or expressive traits that are identified with feminine traits. This is closely related to the stereotypical typologies of "physically active male" and "physically passive female". The masculine is related to aggressiveness, independence and competitiveness, while the feminine is identified with order and submission.

This problem, which occurs throughout society, obviously also has its effects on the educational stage, finding in the centres situations of reinforcement of gender stereotypes or discrimination towards one of the genders depending on the activities proposed (Preece & Bullingham, 2020). The hidden curriculum contributes to this phenomenon. The hidden curriculum encompasses, among other actions, the way in which comments are expressed depending on who they are addressed to and depending on whether it is a man or a woman who carries out a given action.

We find many situations in the educational environment that do not contribute to equal opportunities, but rather, based on gender stereotypes, reinforce them and generate inequalities between the different groups that make up the class (Ángel et al., 2007). In another research, (Álvarez, 2019) argues that the media that surround all areas and have an influence on the thoughts and stereotypes that people possess, contribute to the existence of a perceived image of men and women associated with certain types of behaviors. Therefore, they do not leave the option that they are people who perform activities, but rather that they are genders that perform certain behaviors.

Below, in Table 1, we can see a series of aspects that historically have been associated with one gender or the other, and have therefore been permeating people's minds, contributing to the generation of gender stereotypes.

Table 1. Characteristics of the male and female genders during Franco's regime.

	MAN	WOMAN
MISSION	Directing.	Helping, collaborating.
SCOPE OF ACTION	External: work in offices, political world.	Interior: home.
CHARACTERISTIC VALUES	Discipline: to command and obey. Virility. Competitiveness. Conquer. Activity.	Submission. Femininity: sweetness, softness, purity of thoughts, of habit. Abnegation. Without own initiatives. Passivity. Sense of beauty.
NATURAL PURPOSE	Work	Maternity
HEROISM	To die for the homeland. To perform extraordinary deeds.	To live heroically: constant self-denial every day, doing well whatever you have to do.

Source: Sánchez (2012)

Gender stereotypes in the context of Physical Education

Gender stereotypes are present in society and Physical Education, as part of it, also coexists with them. In addition, the sports field has also experienced the development of these stereotypes that refer to the abilities (beyond biological differences) and the sports that people should practice according to their gender. According to studies such as that of Ángel et al. (2007) both males and females are interested in physical activity in Physical Education classes. However, studies such as (Currie et al., 2004) indicate that male practice is the majority as a global trend. If we look at the data on practice in recent years, in contributions such as the survey on sports habits, this trend is becoming more even, since the percentage of women who start practicing sports and remain in it is increasingly higher.

Gender stereotypes can also be observed in the media such as television and the Internet. According to (Serra et al., 2020) these stereotypes transmit an image of male and female athletes with well-defined and different characteristics. Along these lines, (Álvarez et al., 2004) argue that the media should be involved in eliminating these stereotypes, in order to make way for more egalitarian communication. In this sense, communication is a powerful weapon that influences Physical Education students (Krahe et al., 2021). Therefore, it is necessary to focus attention on people and their capabilities, beyond the activities they are supposed to perform or the image they are supposed to have.

In this sense, in which we talk about activities supposedly assigned to one or the other gender, (Unger & Crawford, 1992) establish that certain activities more oriented to strength, endurance, aggressiveness or risk,

are usually associated with men (rugby, boxing, motorcycling...), while those activities more oriented to relaxation, linked to flexibility or coordination, are associated with the female gender (rhythmic gymnastics, dance...). But not all activities are polarized, but also, as (Riemer & Visio, 2003) indicate, there is a set of activities that are perceived as neutral, such as swimming, tennis, ping-pong or basketball.

The keys to achieve that more sports are perceived as neutral and not stereotyped, passes through an adequate treatment of coeducation in the classroom (Gallardo-López et al., 2020; Valdivia-Moral et al., 2018). Through it, we first help each student to eliminate erroneous beliefs and discriminatory thoughts from their perception, so that subsequently their way of understanding reality and carrying out their actions is much more egalitarian, contributing to other people also being aware of these aspects. Logically, it is necessary that public authorities pay attention to these elements, promoting equal opportunities and fighting against certain gender stereotypes that still remain today.

The term coeducation, in a generalist concept that refers to the joint education of diverse, different and plural population groups, but a more particularistic use can refer to the joint education, in coexistence, integral and egalitarian of boys and girls (García, 2015). Following the proposal of this same author, we find that male and female gender result from the production of roles and cultural norms on how men and women have to behave. Boys perform risky activities, stereotyping socially established norms, entrenching masculinity as our society perceives it, and girls are encouraged to play at being mothers and caregivers of children. Therefore, it is necessary to become aware of the need for coeducational intervention from the earliest levels of education (Valdivia-Moral et al., 2018).

Method

Participants

The study population was the students in the 3rd and 4th years of Secondary Education in a Spanish private school. The sample corresponds to a total of 91 students. Of the total number of students surveyed, 47.25% were female (n=43) and the remaining 52.74% were male (n=48) aged between 14 and 16 years. More specifically, in third grade we found 46 students, of which 24 are boys (52.17%) and 22 are girls (47.83%). On the other hand, in fourth grade we found 45 respondents, of which 24 are boys (53.33%) and 21 girls (46.67%).

Instruments

In order to develop this work, a quantitative methodology was used, applying an opinion survey validated by (Buzón García et al., 2010) with the objectives of (i) finding out the thoughts, opinions and attitudes of secondary school students towards gender equality, coeducation and non-violent conflict resolution, and (ii) exploring whether there are significant differences between men and women at the sociocultural, relational and personal levels. The questionnaire used is composed of 30 items with a 5-point Likert-type response scale (1 being 'Strongly disagree' and 5 'Strongly agree'). The scale follows the Doing Gender theory (Rebollo, 2006; Unger & Crawford, 1992) which divides the set of items into 3 dimensions or levels that have been previously commented: the sociocultural, relational and personal levels, each composed of 10 items. At the sociocultural level, the aim is for students to consider aspects such as the distribution of responsibilities or social mandates while. At the relational level, they reflect on the interactions between teachers and students, between students themselves and between students and parents, addressing issues of leadership or gender violence. Finally, on a personal level, the aim is to find out the academic preferences and choices, aspirations and expectations of the students surveyed according to gender. Table 2 below shows the items of the instrument used for each of the analysis plans.

Table 2. Instrument used

SOCIOCULTURAL LEVEL
1. Household chores are better done by women.
2. Pink clothes and things are more for girls than for boys.
3. Soccer is a boy's sport.
4. It's normal for a boy and a girl to play the same things.
5. A girl alone should be afraid if she meets a group of boys.
6. Mothers are the ones who should take care of their sons and daughters.
7. Housework can be done well by both men and women.
8. Men drive better than women.
9. Soccer is a boys' and girls' sport.
10. Gays and lesbians are as normal and respectable as I am.
RELATIONAL LEVEL

11. It is impossible to get along with a woman.
12. Men are always stronger than women.
13. A girl should not go out with a guy other than her boyfriend.
14. Girls who don't date boys are narrow.
15. In teamwork, it is usually a boy who is in charge.
16. It is normal for boyfriends to take revenge on their girlfriends if they cheat on them.
17. Lesbians are less trustworthy than a woman.
18. Guys who cheat on their girlfriends are more macho.
19. With a partner it is better to pretend to be in agreement so as not to argue.
20. It is easier to insult a homosexual than a man.

PERSONAL LEVEL

21. I would be ashamed to admit or say that my father does the dishes at home.
 22. I believe that women should not be bullfighters or soccer players.
 23. Women who dress like men bother me.
 24. I like that it is only my father who works outside the home.
 25. I prefer that women be the ones who work at home.
 26. I believe that a woman should get married and be a mother.
 27. I think a kitchenette or a doll is a boy's and girl's play.
 28. It is understandable to be ashamed of homosexual friends and siblings.
 29. I believe that being a man is preferable to being a woman, it has its advantages.
 30. I believe that women can be firefighters, policemen, bullfighters or soccer players.
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Procedure

In order for the students to answer the surveys, after the meeting with the management team, the informed consent forms signed by the parents/guardians were collected in order to participate in the study, complying with the ethical criteria as the students were minors. Subsequently, a date and time was agreed with the teachers of both courses to proceed to answer the survey. At that time, both the content and the academic purpose of the information collection were explained, ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of the data, as well as its subsequent treatment only for academic and research purposes.

Statistical analysis

Data analysis was carried out using the SPSS statistical package in version 23. To this end, statistical tests were first performed to obtain descriptive statistics and the sociodemographic characteristics of the sample. Subsequently, the same software was used to perform the analyses of the comparisons according to gender. For this purpose, comparisons of means were carried out by means of T-tests for independent samples, obtaining information that allows us to verify the existence or not of significant differences between women and men in the different items and planes analyzed.

Results

Item analysis of the sociocultural plane

Regarding the sociocultural level, as we can see in Table 3, the highest mean rating of the entire scale in the group of men is found in the item "Men drive better than women" ($4.42 \pm .96$), while in the case of women the best rated item was "Gays and lesbians are as normal and respectable as I am" (3.84 ± 1.70). As can be seen, the men's valuation is focused on aspects where inequality is evident, while in the case of women, the most highly valued aspect tends to promote such equality.

On the other hand, taking into account the lowest mean scores, we see that in the case of men, the item with the lowest value is the statement "Mothers are the ones who should take care of their sons and daughters" ($2.02 \pm .79$), while in the case of girls the item with the lowest value is "Women do the housework better" with a value of $1.86 (\pm .99)$. As for the differences in means according to gender, it is observed that these differences appear specifically in statements 1, 2, 3 and 8 of the sociocultural dimension ($p < .05$).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics of the sociocultural questions.

	ITEM	GENDER	M	SD	P
1	Housework is best done by women	M	1.86	.99	***
		W	2.75	1.26	
2	Pink clothes and pink things are more for girls than for boys	M	2.07	1.18	***
		W	3.63	1.35	
3	Soccer is a boy's sport	M	2.49	1.37	***
		W	4.04	1.05	
4	It is normal for a boy and a girl to play the same things.	M	2.81	1.12	-
		W	3.17	1.19	
5	A girl alone should be afraid if she meets a group of boys.	M	2.49	1.10	-
		W	2.40	1.13	
6	Mothers are the ones who should take care of their sons and daughters.	M	1.72	.85	-
		W	2.02	.79	
7	Household chores can be done well by both men and women	M	3.40	1.38	-
		W	3.38	1.39	
8	Men drive better than women	M	2.19	1.24	***
		W	4.42	.96	
9	Soccer is a boys' and girls' sport	M	3.05	1.33	-
		W	3.52	1.24	
10	Gays and lesbians are as normal and respectable as I am	M	3.82	1.70	-
		W	3.85	.97	

Note: ***p<.001

Regarding the relational level (see Table 4), the highest mean score for women appears in item 11, which states that it is impossible to get along with a woman (3.19 ±1.68), while for men, the highest rated item was "Men are always stronger than women" (3.84 ±1.70). Looking at the lowest mean scores, we see that in the case of women, the item "Boys who cheat on their girlfriends are more macho" (1.05 ±.21) is the worst rated, while in the case of men, the least rated statement was "Lesbians are less trustworthy than women" with a value of 1.85 (±1.24). Again, there is a clear trend between men and women. As for the differences in means according to gender for this relational plane, we observe that these differences appear specifically in statements 12 (p<.01), 13 (p<.01), 14 (p<.05), 15 (p<.01), 18 (p<.001) and 20 (p<.001).

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the relational questions.

	ITEM	GENDER	M	SD	P
11	It is impossible to get along with a woman	M	3.19	1.68	-
		W	2.85	1.32	
12	Men are always stronger than women.	M	2.88	1.33	**
		W	3.67	1.19	
13	A girl should not date a guy other than her boyfriend.	M	2.14	1.06	**
		W	2.94	1.47	
14	Girls who don't go out with boys are narrow-minded.	M	1.91	.97	*
		W	2.50	1.27	
15	In teamwork, it is usually a boy who is in charge.	M	1.56	.63	**
		W	2.10	.99	
16	It is normal for boyfriends to take revenge on their girlfriends if they cheat on them.	M	2.60	1.14	-
		W	2.75	1.19	
17	Lesbians are less trustworthy than a woman.	M	1.47	.88	-
		W	1.85	1.24	
18	Guys who cheat on their girlfriends are more macho	M	1.05	.21	***
		W	2.02	1	
19	With a partner it is better to pretend to be in agreement so as not to argue	M	2.56	1.37	-
		W	2.73	1.27	
20	It's easier to insult a homosexual than a man	M	1.70	1.01	***
		W	3.85	.97	

Note: *p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001.

Finally, we find the personal plane (see Table 5). In this plane, we find that the highest means of both men and women appear in the item "I believe that women can be firefighters, policemen, bullfighters or soccer players..." being the mean value of women (3.56 ±1.64) and that of men (3.88 ±1.38). On the other hand, if we pay attention to the least valued statements, we find that in the case of women the lowest mean appears in the item "I think it is preferable to be a man than to be a woman, it has its advantages" (1.05 ±.31) while in the case of men the worst valued statement is "It is understandable to be ashamed of homosexual friends and brothers or sisters" (1.54 ±.68). Finally, once the comparison of means has been analyzed. Once we have commented on the mean values, we observe the results of the comparison of means in which we find that there are statistically

significant differences between men and women in statement 21 ($p < .05$), 22 ($p < .01$), 25 ($p < .05$), 26 ($p < .05$) and 28 ($p < .001$).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of the personal questions.

ITEM	GENDER	M	SD	P
21 I would be ashamed to admit or say that my father does the dishes at home.	M	1.53	.80	*
	W	2.10	1.29	
22 I don't think women should be bullfighters or soccer players.	M	2.95	1.33	**
	W	2.17	1.19	
23 Women who dress like men bother me.	M	2.30	1.23	-
	W	2.15	1.19	
24 I like that it's only my father who works outside the house.	M	1.53	.51	-
	W	1.81	1.16	
25 I prefer women to be the ones who work at home	M	1.74	.93	*
	W	2.29	1.40	
26 I think a woman should get married and be a mother.	M	2.79	1.32	*
	W	3.38	1.32	
27 I think a kitchenette or a doll is a boy's and a girl's game.	M	2.70	1.15	-
	W	2.42	1.49	
28 It is understandable to be ashamed of homosexual friends and siblings.	M	1.51	.91	-
	W	1.54	.68	
29 I believe that being a man is preferable to being a woman, it has its advantages.	M	1.05	.31	***
	W	3.79	1.57	
30 I believe that women can be firefighters, policemen, bullfighters or soccer players.	M	3.56	1.64	-
	W	3.88	1.38	

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Dicussion

Once the results of this research have been extracted, we have seen that men and women have different opinions on many of the aspects analysed. In relation to this, we found works such as that of (Buzón García et al., 2010) in which three student profiles are identified according to their attitude: sexist, adaptive and egalitarian, showing, as in our study, that the student body is sensitive to the culture of equality. In relation to this, Buzón-García et al. (2010) also indicate that the differences are found especially in female students at the social and personal levels, mainly in aspects related to the profession and social life of women. This differs in part with what was obtained in our study since, on the one hand, women are the ones who offer the worst evaluations in general terms, and therefore the ones who are furthest from the stereotypes, but on the other hand, the differences with men do not appear only on the social and personal level as in that study, but appear on all levels: sociocultural, relational and personal. In the aspect in which we can say that our research fully coincides with the aforementioned study is that there are stereotyped beliefs in secondary school students, especially in the case of men, if we consider the evaluations, they have given in the items analysed.

Another study on this subject, that of (Lajo et al., 2008) highlighted negative conclusions regarding the role of men, since the results indicated a higher score in aspects referring to the figure of women and the home, the family or the acceptance of lower paid jobs than those of men. In our study this tendency was also observed, since men showed a different opinion to women on some statements related to domestic tasks. Generally speaking, in our study, women rated the statements worse than men, which in this case is positive for them, since it means that they do not agree with the stereotyped statements that have been made. Therefore, the results and the differences found allow us to think that women are more sensitive and show a greater predisposition to change and break with these stereotypes and to be active in the struggle for gender equality, which has also been supported by other research ((Bravo & Moreno, 2007).

This is where school education is of vital importance. Education is not limited to academic knowledge, but seeks a comprehensive education of the student (Prieto et al., 2018). Among these values we find training in the struggle to not give rise to develop these gender stereotypes, perpetuate prejudices and entrench the inequalities that must be fought (Alvariñas-Villaverde & Pazos-González, 2018). However, it should be noted that it is important to know or identify the situation in which we find ourselves in order to act. Specifically, the study by (Gutiérrez et al., 2009) exposes that, if we do not try to eliminate these inequalities, the model of education that will be transmitted will contribute to developing an education that is not in line with the approaches of equal opportunities between women and men. On the other hand, if we manage to eliminate this type of barriers that have been built up, we will contribute to the students' understanding of reality in a more egalitarian way.

In this context, coeducation can be very useful, emerging to try to guarantee a society without conditioning in which all people feel free to choose and act independently of their gender without being judged. For this, it is necessary to help in the construction of their gender identity through egalitarian values and without prejudice (García, 2015). Some of the practical implications would be to highlight the importance of communicating in the same way to all students regardless of their gender or the activity to be performed.

Similarly, avoiding behaviors that have been perpetuated in society, in which girls repress certain manifestations that boys are allowed and accentuate those of attention and kindness, while men are urged to hide their feelings, trying to determine their behaviour. Therefore, it is important to encourage the identification, expression and verbalization of feelings through activities conducive to this. Always avoid sexist expressions such as "What a macho man" or "That's women's stuff". Last but not least, encourage cooperation and collaboration among all students, based on mutual respect. Body language can be a perfect tool to develop these practical implications among students.

Conclusions

The results obtained allow conclusions to be drawn for each of the levels analyzed. Regarding the sociocultural level, the results show that the opinions of men and women are different with respect to gender stereotypes, specifically in aspects such as household chores, colors of clothing, soccer as a male sport or driving skills, with women showing a more positive attitude. Subsequently, with respect to the relational plane, opinions are again more favorable in women, with differences in aspects such as strength, intentions to date or not, leadership role or their perception of homosexuality. Finally, we also find differences on the personal level, where men and women have different opinions regarding aspects such as tasks, professions and actions to be carried out by women, as well as the feeling of shame about the homosexuality of a friend or brother. Therefore, it is clear that there are aspects that are perceived differently with respect to gender equality by adolescents, and that these differences are shown both at the sociocultural, relational and personal levels.

However, the present study is not without limitations. In the first place, the number of participants is small and relates only to students in two grades. Therefore, as a future line of research, it would be interesting to extend the study to all grades of Secondary Education and Bachillerato. Similarly, one limitation is that the participants belong to the same educational center; therefore, in future research it would be interesting to extend the sample to different educational centers with different ownership. Finally, it would be interesting to know whether there are control variables that can affect these results, and to know whether after an intervention proposal the results would have been altered.

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