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# Gender differences in the attitudes towards work among young students. Cognitive and motivational features

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## Abstract

Knowing and highlighting a link between gender and motivational and cognitive aspects that shape attitude towards work may be useful in streamlining the process of recruitment and selection in the corporate environments. This research aims to study gender differences on attitudes towards work among young students. The overall objective of this research is to highlight the link between gender and attitude towards work. In the research a number 90 subjects aged 18 to 24 years (45 female students and 45 male students) have participated. After statistical processing of data, the results do not confirm statistically significant differences between genders in the measured values of subtests of the AHA battery.

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*Keywords:* attitude towards work; level of aspiration; frustration tolerance; motivation for performance; cognitive style

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## 1. Introduction

The literature shows that gender differences regarding attitudes towards work have been investigated by numerous authors in various aspects: Fujimoto (2009) studied gender differences in terms of the working group orientation in Japan and USA. Their study revealed that gender differences are not an absolute determinant in attitudes toward work due to style of supervision and constants in the two countries. Several researchers studied attitude towards work in Germany and Poland. They found such national differences in work ethics, motivation, and competitiveness. The results of these facets of attitudes towards work were higher in Poland rather than in Germany (Maurer, Oszustowicz and Stocki, 1994). Another study investigated attitudes towards gender role and

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the influence that it has in future careers both for women and men. The expected working hours predicted both egalitarianism and equal financial earnings (Corrigall & Konrad 2007). Schuhfried (2006) mentions that authors such as Ebenhoh (1994), Kubinger (1995) and Forebort (2003) have demonstrated that the individual's abilities measured with the help of the AHA battery of tests have been a relevant predictor of successful or unsuccessful trainers in companies.

Regarding performance Vroom (1995) believes that an important role is played by the aspiration and the level of expectancy. Aspiration, expectancy and also valence, can be found in the theory developed by him. Perry, Przybysz and Al-Sheikh (2009) studied the aspiration and the expectancy for a population of young teenagers. The study results showed that there are differences in the issues mentioned above, between black and white populations and between genders, in the sense that the aspiration and the expectancy increased for female and black population, the latter category being motivated to choose a prestigious profession. Tackling the attitude towards work and performance, the level of aspiration and expectation plays an important role. Therefore, in defining the level of aspiration, we actually refer to the effort and mobilization of individual to achieve his goal. The components involved in building the expectation level are both cognitive and motivational.

Sigmund Freud (1921) is the one who first introduced the term "frustration". Frustration was defined as an incapacitating of the individual who is trying to get his subject of satisfaction that he aspires to. Sources that can prevent and block individual satisfaction can be both internal and external sources. Rosenzweig (1935), is the first to determine an index of resistance to frustration. Young (2009) believes that frustration can be an important catalyst for changes in careers and the decision to change it. The frustration is caused mostly by the continuous flow of our needs, desires and reasons as well as by the failure of accomplishing them. The occurrence of frustration is influenced on one hand by the reasons of obtaining satisfaction and on the other hand by the possibility of achieving them. Thus, we are in the following situation: on one hand, it is required a dynamic of the needs, desires and motivation to develop an individual, and on the other hand if this is not fulfilled, the individual will be frustrated. In this situation, the frustration actually represents the individual's inability to get personal satisfaction. In the personal evolution of an individual, a piece of frustration may have a decisive role in satisfying some desires, needs, but most of the times, they may have a puzzling effect on the individual personality. One factor that may increase or decrease the level of frustration, is related to the importance they attach to an individual purpose or a need accomplishment

Performance motivation can be translated as a strong achievement need. The first author who introduced the theory of the need for achievement was McClelland (1961). According to this theory people who want to have a high performance level and have a strong need for achievement tend to be perceived as very good and efficient in their operations. From the motivational point of view, the performance represents the fulfilment of a desire, a task and activity at a higher level. Achieving a level of performance in an activity may be closely linked to the improvement of self-esteem, but also to the personal satisfaction got by an individual after the task accomplishment. On the other hand, the reasons behind performance differ according to the individual and his interest in performance area. Hence, an individual can be motivated to get performance in a particular activity both intrinsic and extrinsic. The needs caused by both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation are quite varied and differ from an individual to another. Therefore, an individual can be intrinsically motivated to get performance in a particular activity because he needs to achieve his goal, but another individual can be extrinsically motivated to be prestigious, well-known and rewarded. In 1908, Robert M. Yerkes and J.D. Dodson formulated the motivational optimum law. The law sustains that the motivational optimum level to get performance varies depending on the task. Therefore, if an individual has either a higher or a lower motivational level, his performance decreases. Moreover, there is a relation directly proportional to the level of motivation and performance, thus the duties carried out by the individual being simple and common. In case of difficult tasks, it is settled a report of inverse proportionality. So, if an individual is too motivated, his performance will be low. According to this law, the motivation may have both a positive and negative aspect. The positive aspect could be decisive and the negative one destructive. We must notice that the motivational optimum can be influenced by a

series of aspects. One of this refers to the way in which we perceive the task. Therefore, an individual can properly appreciate the difficulty of the task and at the same time he can underestimate or overestimate it. In the last two situations, the individual will be either not motivated or over – motivated and this will affect his motivational optimum level.

The cognitive style refers to both the cognitive and affective characteristics of physicians involved in an activity. Briefly, the cognitive style refers to the way in which an individual perceives a task, but the result of its interaction with the task as well. The Cognitive style has been studied in many respects, but we're interested in research that aims the cognitive style and the difference between impulsive style and reflective style. Research of J. Kagan (1965, 1966) has been validated by other studies, and the results are useful to help us understand the different ways in which people can react in different cognitive tasks. Thus we may apply to a particular job, the right person in terms of cognitive style. Several researchers studied whether there is a possibility that performance differences between men and women in terms of dynamical and spatial tasks are due to cognitive styles (impulsivity vs. reflectivity). (Quiroga, Hernández , Rubio, Shih and Santacreu, 2007). Instead, Chapple & Johnson (2007) the authors found out that the relationship between attachment and impulsivity, and the relationship between discipline and impulsivity, differ according to gender. The cognitive style seems to be useful in the study of gender differences towards work, this being an aspect of one of the measured battery AHA, Schuhfried pre-evaluation. In the defining process of cognitive style, we will focus on the answer given by the individual in terms of impulsiveness\reflectivity.

## 1. Objectives and hypotheses

### 1.1. *The purpose of the research*

This research aims to study gender differences on attitudes towards work among young students. The overall objective of this research is to highlight the link between gender and attitude towards work.

### 1.2. *Research hypothesis*

General hypothesis of this research is that gender influences cognitive and motivational aspects regarding the attitude towards work.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. *Participants*

In this research have participated a number 90 of subjects aged 18 to 24 years, students of the Faculty of Psychology, University of Bucharest, of both gender (45 female students and 45 male students).

### 2.2. *Instruments*

The AHA battery consists of 3 subtests. The first subtest, “Surfaces Comparison”, measures impulsivity/reflexivity, the second one, “Symbol Coding” , measures the subjects level of aspiration and tolerance towards frustration and the third one, “Shape Difference” measures the motivation for performance. The first subtest measures values like accuracy, the decisional ability, impulsivity versus reflexivity. The second subtest measures the level of performance, the level of aspiration, the tolerance towards frustration and the discrepancy registry. The last subtest evaluates the motivational values for performance. The applicability duration of the first two subtests is of approximate 15 minutes, while the “Shape Difference” one requires at least

20 minutes and at most 45 minutes. All three subtests have been presented in a single form, although they can be selected individually. The test instructions, the participant's data recording and the scoring have been made automatically, with the computer's help, in standardized conditions. The errors caused by the test instructions and the method of scoring have therefore been avoided.

### 2.3. Working procedure

The participants in this research have performed three subtests of the test battery AHA (Attitude Towards Work) Schuhfried. The first subtest "Comparison of surface" measured impulsivity and reflex acts, the second "Coding Symbols" measured the level of aspiration and frustration tolerance of the subject, and the third subtest "Differentiation of forms" measured the motivation for performance. In the interpretation of the subtests, I had in mind a multitude of aspects. Regarding certain values such as precision and decision making, the tests presents the fact that the bigger the values are, the higher the accuracy is. A lower score represents impulsivity and a higher score, reflexivity. Regarding the level of performance, a higher score may refer to a good level of performance regarding coding tasks, but it may also show a good concentration ability. The level of aspiration variable shows if a subject has the tendency towards realistic or non-realistic objectives. The tolerance towards frustration represents whether the participant is influenced by the negative feedback received repeatedly or not. The maximum performance time has an illustrative goal. The discrepancy registry shows if the performance and prognosis correlate logically.

### 3. Results

In the first stage I applied the test of Kolmogorov-Smirnov for normal distribution. Normality of distribution was checked by gender. After applying the Kolmogorov Smirnov test for normal distribution, showed that the research variables are normally distributed. For  $p > 0.05$  variables are normally distributed: Exactitude.T ( $p = .672$ ), DecisivenessT ( $p = 1.648$ ), Impulsiveness vs Reflexivity ( $p = 1.069$ ), Performance level.T ( $p = .641$ ), Aspiration levelT ( $p = .820$ ), Frustration tolerance.T ( $p = 1.177$ ), Target discrepancy.T ( $p = .781$ ), Performance motivation.T ( $p = .997$ ), Working time.RS ( $p = 1.434$ ). Due to normally distributed data I applied the t test for independent samples in order to calculate the differences between the average for male and for female subjects

Table 1. Independent Samples Test AHA

|                                | t-test for Equality of Means |        |                 |
|--------------------------------|------------------------------|--------|-----------------|
|                                | t                            | df     | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| Exactitude.T                   | .892                         | 88     | .375            |
|                                | .892                         | 87.813 | .375            |
| DecisivenessT                  | -1.563                       | 88     | .122            |
|                                | -1.563                       | 87.879 | .122            |
| Impulsiveness vs Reflexivity.T | 1.738                        | 88     | .086            |
|                                | 1.738                        | 79.911 | .086            |
| Performance level.T            | -.037                        | 88     | .970            |
|                                | -.037                        | 81.162 | .970            |
| Aspiration levelT              | .568                         | 88     | .572            |
|                                | .568                         | 79.903 | .572            |
| Frustration tolerance.T        | .358                         | 88     | .721            |
|                                | .358                         | 83.409 | .721            |
| Target discrepancy.T           | -.021                        | 88     | .983            |
|                                | -.021                        | 82.590 | .983            |
| Performance motivation.T       | -1.931                       | 88     | .057            |
|                                | -1.931                       | 87.857 | .057            |
| Working time.RS                | -1.694                       | 88     | .094            |

As it can be observed in table 1, the results for dependent variables of sample AHA ( $p > 0.05$ ), the hypothesis of this research, that gender influences cognitive and motivational aspects regarding the attitude towards work not confirmed.

#### 4. Conclusions

In conclusion the research results have not confirmed the general hypothesis of this motivational aspects on paper, therefore, gender influences the cognitive and the attitude towards work. Thus, knowing the attitude towards work in terms of gender differences is a necessary and useful step in the process of selection and recruitment, as well as other specific activities of human resource management. Investigation of attitudes towards work has proved useful in terms of measuring several psychological aspects (impulsivity / reflectivity, aspiration level, tolerance to frustration, motivation for performance). The present study has shown that there are no gender differences regarding attitude towards work among students of Psychology Faculty.

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