GENDER STEREOTYPES IN ROMANIAN SOCIETY.
IMPLICATIONS FOR THE MEASUREMENT OF
MASCULINITY AND FEMININITY

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Abstract
Gender stereotypes represent an important topic approached by the specialists in the field of gender studies, due to their implication for the identity development and perception of others. Gender stereotypes origin in the social categorization, considered a necessary and adaptive component of the information processing, yet inducing a number of biases of the social perception, as prejudice and even discrimination (Tajfel, 1981). Concerning the measurement, the study of the stereotypes has been based on the assignment by the respondents of some traits seen as characteristic for the target group. Our sample consisted in 100 participants with different educational level and employment status, 50 women and 50 men, aged between 18 and 53. Based on the list of personality traits contained in Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974), in our study we tried to identify the extent at which the traits typically associated to masculinity and femininity in different cultures are considered differentially desirable for men and women by the Romanian respondents. We presented the manner in which traits were considered to be descriptive for the prototypes of the two categories presented, namely man and woman, and we discussed the implications for the measurement of masculinity and femininity in Romanian society.

Keywords: gender stereotypes, masculinity, femininity, Bem Sex Role Inventory

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Introduction

The stereotype is a central concept of the contemporary psychology, as it was proven by the continuous interest of the professionals after it had been introduced by W. Lippman (1922, as cited in Yzerbyt & Schadron, 2002). From the very beginning, the identification of the content of the existing stereotypes regarding various social categories has been in the forefront, matched with the analysis of the processes that underlie the formation and function of stereotypes. The research findings have highlighted the impact that stereotypes can have on processing the information relevant for social perception (Deaux & LaFrance, 1998).

Although there are a great number of concepts offered by various authors, a widely accepted definition is the one given by Leyens, Yzerbyt and Schadron (1994): "they are shared beliefs about personal attributes, usually personality traits, but often also behaviors, of a group of people" (p. 11). In the case of gender stereotypes, we can find the socially shared beliefs about the attributes and roles that men and women possess. They include beliefs about a variety of aspects: physical characteristics, personality traits, preferences for activities and professions, specific abilities and roles (Liben & Bigler, 2002).

The formation of stereotypes has the starting point in the process of social categorization, consisting in the persons' tendency to divide the social world into categories/groups, based on the perceived similarities and differences between them (Tajfel, 1981). It does not involve only placing individuals of the environment in classes, but also assigning a set of traits to the members of these classes and postulating a common "essence" with explanatory role. By classifying objects and individuals in distinct categories, it appears the phenomenon of similarity and contrast: categorization accentuates the similarities within the categories and the differences between them (Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1997).

The authors have raised the question of how a certain trait comes to be perceived as typical and is included in the stereotype corresponding to a category. Two hypotheses have been proposed, which are not mutually exclusive.

The attribution hypothesis implies that there is a process by which individuals learn the properties of the social groups, associate the categories with certain traits, based on their prevalence in the target group members: a

characteristic is even more strongly associated with the category as its central tendency is high and its variability is low, i.e. it is present in a large number of members at a high level (Dijksterhuis & van Knippenberg, 1999).

The second hypothesis, the categorization hypothesis, emphasizes the importance of comparison and contrast between categories: a trait characterizes a group as much as it differentiates it from other groups. Research reveals that the typicality of the traits depends on both the perception of the similarity of the members of that class on that dimension and the differences, the contrast between the categories, i.e. what is simultaneously common and differentiating for a specific group (Krueger, Hasman, Acevedo, & Villano, 2003).

The gender is one of those salient characteristics that the social actors use to rapidly classify a person. This process is a necessary and adaptive component of the information processing, but it induces a number of biases of the social perception, up to prejudice and even discrimination (Tajfel, 1981). The stereotypes are more than a set of traits assigned to a group of persons. They include an explanation, a theory on the fact that these individuals are similar to each other and in the same time are different from other groups. So the explanation and justification role of the stereotypes is clear: the individuals perceive certain associations between traits and social groups, but based on certain reasons that allow these associations. The social categories are often reduced to "natural" categories, especially when the groups can be identified by some physical characteristics, such as gender. The tendency to consider a category being "natural" rather than based on some specific features established by man, involves the belief in the existence of an "essence", suggesting that the observers will consider the categorization of a person as reflecting his/her true nature, identity (Rothbart & Taylor, 1992, as cited in Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1997, p. 106).

As people become aware of the existence of genetic differences between genders, the genetic essentialism bias appears, and genetic attributions for human traits and behavior variations are more likely to be seen as immutable, homogeneous and natural (Dar-Nimrod & Heine, 2011). However, the idea of stereotypes based on cognitive mechanisms, as well as motivational ones, explains at the same time the stable nature of the stereotypes and also the flexibility of their function. The stereotype includes a core, a number of central elements, but other aspects depend on contextual factors, on the conditions under which the updating of relevant information for the target group takes

place: the nature of the relationships between groups, the emotional state of the person, the reference framework provided by the comparison with the relevant groups, the exposure to the beliefs of others and to some members of that group (Coats & Smith, 1999). Therefore a certain situational variability occurs in the stereotypes functioning, both at the level of inter-personal and inter-group relationships.

Considering the measurement, the study of the stereotypes has been based on the assignment by the respondents of some traits considered to be characteristic for the target group. The method for measuring the content of the stereotypes has varied over time, trying to show certain aspects of the convictions of the respondents and to minimize the impact of possible sources of errors: the consensual dimension of the stereotypes is observed through a list of traits of which the subjects have to chose those specific to the target category; the perception of the respondents about the homogeneity of the group assessed was addressed when the subjects indicated the percentage of members of a group that possessed a number of traits; highlighting the subtypes the respondents create starting from the group of interest, as well as the attributes seen as characteristic to those subcategories (Leyens, Yzerbyt, & Schadron, 1994; Yzerbyt & Schadron, 1997; Coats & Smith, 1999).

The aspect referring to the content of the gender stereotypes and their impact on the social perception has been often tackled by the specialists. The research findings show that the individuals differentiate between men and women according to several characteristics. A great number of studies focused on identifying the beliefs referring to the personality traits, emphasizing to basic clusters of the traits that distinguish between male and female. The two groups of attributes are named agency and communality (Bakan, 1966, according to Moskovitz, Suh, & Desaulniers, 1994; Conway & Vartanian, 2000). The "instrumental" dimension of the personality is highly associated to men (independence, assertiveness, ambition, entrepreneurial spirit, resistance, dominance), while the "expressive" one is associated to women (affection, care, sensitivity to others' state and needs, empathy, kindness).

Cross-cultural studies provide a perspective that is mostly concordant with the indicated differentiation (Williams, Satterwhite, & Best, 1999; Williams & Best, 1988): the ideology of the highly differentiated gender roles was stronger in traditional cultures, while in the European and North American area, the dichotomy of roles was weaker and the respondents had more

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equalitarianist attitudes towards the roles of male and female. However, these differences were slightly changed by the local ecology of the investigated social groups (Wood & Eagly, 2002).

Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Hu (2002) presented a new perspective on the structure of the stereotype content - the stereotype content model - clearly applicable in the case of gender stereotypes. The model insists on the importance of the relationships between groups, based on the idea that the core dimensions of the stereotypes are the competence and the warmth. The competence refers to the ability of the target group to succeed in tasks associated with a high status; the competence of an out-group is bound to its capacity to enter the competition, to compete with its own group. The positive socio-affective orientation, the warmth of the members of an out-group is related to their intention to cooperate with the members of other groups and facilitate their performance. In the case of stereotypes about men and women, the typical traits of agency and communality are clearly associated with the two dimensions of the model - competence and warmth. In addition, the representation of the various groups involves a combination of these dimensions: in the case of women, the stereotype reflects a lower level of competence than in men and a higher level of positive social orientation, and vice versa in the case of men. This combination of the levels of dimensions is also present in the subtypes, the traditional one (the housewife) being associated with a high level of warmth and low level of competence and the non-traditional (the career woman, the feminist) with a lower level of emotional warmth and higher competence (Eckes, 2002).

Like any other cognitive schema, the gender stereotypes lead to the selection and interpretation of the information according to the existing beliefs (Wigboldus, Dijksterhuis, & van Knippenberg, 2003). Through the process of referential influence, defining the self will involve certain typical characteristics. The causal attributions made for the observed behaviors of the individuals depend on the representations of their own social categories, so, in lack of some factors to motivate the person to form an individualized picture of the other, the impression will be dominated by the characteristics consistent with the stereotype (Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010). Stereotypes may also direct the behavior in order to lead to the materialization of the expectancies (stereotypes threat and lift - Rydell, Rydell, & Boucher, 2010; Nguyen & Ryan, 2008).

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The persistent and pervasive nature of the gender stereotypes occurs also due to the fact that they operate implicitly (Greenwald & Banaji, 1995). The attitudes are not always consistent with the explicit beliefs related to stereotypes. All individuals are aware of the content of some widely used stereotypes and even if they do not consider them to be valid, their behaviors may be influenced by the stereotypes at the unconscious level (Devine, 2001). People generally believe that men and women are different in some ways and they build a series of "essentialist" explanations for these differences. Thus, expectations about the traits and behaviors of men and women arise. Our expectations are prescriptive (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Gender roles include not only expectations about how people think and behave (descriptive norms), but also expectations regarding how people should respond/react (injunctive norms), referring to the desirable and valued behaviors. Thus the gender stereotypes influence social perception, limiting our potential and performance in certain areas and distorting the impressions that we form about the others.

Objective

The objective of our study was to investigate the content of gender stereotypes based on the list of personality traits which comprise the masculine and feminine dimensions of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) (Bem, 1974). We were interested in identifying to what extent the traits typically associated to masculinity and femininity in different cultures are considered desirable for men and women by the Romanian respondents. Our investigation tried to partially replicate Bem's (1974) research, in order to raise the question regarding whether the items of BSRI reflect the views on gender specific to our society and whether BSRI can be a valid measure of masculinity and femininity in our culture.

Method

Participants
In this study, 59 Psychology students in their 1st and 2nd year of study, and 41 other individuals with different educational level and employment

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status, participated voluntarily. They are equally distributed in terms of gender, 50 men and 50 women, aged between 18 and 53. The average age is 24.86 and the standard deviation is 7.74. There are 11 persons aged between 30-40 , and only 5 people between 40 - 53, so we can consider that the results were mainly obtained on young adults. Full anonymity was assured to the participants.

Materials and procedure

     In order to point out the content of gender stereotypes in Romanian society, we have used the list of 60 personality traits from Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), (Bem, 1974): 20 traits form a cluster for masculinity, 20 traits for femininity and another 20 traits are neutral items, used as filler. We translated the items from English using retroversion in a panel of four specialists. Taking into account that Romanian language is gendered, the 60 items were formulated for both the masculine and the feminine gender resulting in two instruments - one used to asses the desirability of the traits in the case of men and the other in the case of women.

     Respondents were instructed: "We would like you to indicate how desirable it is in Romanian society for a man/woman to possess each of these characteristics. Note: We are not interested in your personal opinion of how desirable each of these characteristics is. Rather, we want your judgment of how our society evaluates each of these characteristics in a man/woman". The exact wording used by Bem (1974) in the development of the BSRI was utilized.

     The respondents were asked to rate the desirability of each of the 20 masculine, 20 feminine and 20 neutral characteristics using a 7- point scale ranging from 1 (not at all desirable) to 7 (extremely desirable).

     The respondents remained anonymous and were instructed to answer questions to the best of their ability.

     The study was realized in 2011 and had two steps: first we administered a set of measures containing the task referring to desirability ratings for the man, as prototype of the category. After a week, a second set of measures was administered to the same participants, containing the task referring to desirability ratings for a woman, as prototype of the category.
The data was analyzed with SPSS version 15.

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Results

We sought to emphsize the extent in which the features included in the list differentiate men and women in the opinion of respondents. The two sets of traits are presented in the reference literature as being cross-culturally associated with masculinity respectively with femininity, while the third set consists of neutral characteristics in terms of gender prescriptions, and it was not of interest for the analysis in this study. Therefore we conducted the comparison of attributions realized for each trait of the first two sets.

That is, a personality trait qualified as masculine if both male and female respondents' mean of desirability ratings of that trait "for a man" were significantly (p <.05) higher than their mean of desirability ratings of that trait "for a woman," and a personality trait qualified as feminine if both male and female respondents' mean of desirability ratings of the trait "for a woman" were significantly (p <.05) higher than their mean of desirability ratings of that trait "for a man".

The comparisons of the means of desirability ratings for each personality trait were conducted using paired-sample T-test, and the results, together with the corresponding effect-sizes (coefficient of determination, r square), are depicted in Table 1 (masculine traits from BSRI) and in Table 2 (feminine traits from BSRI).

What we can notice in Table 1 is that most of the traits in the list which form the cluster of masculinity show strong effect size for both samples of respondents, clearly differentiating men and women. According to male respondents, the features that mostly differentiate their own gender category from the opposite category are: *masculine* - r square = .71, *has leadership abilities* - r square= .53, *forceful* - r square = .48, *self-sufficient* - r square = .47, *acts as a leader* - r square= .35. According to female respondent, the features that mostly differentiate men and women on the dimension of masculine items in BSRI are: *masculine* -r square=.82, *forceful* - r square = .59, *has leadership abilities* - r square= .37, *willing to take risks* - r square= .34, *willing to take stand* - r square=33. We notice that the first three attributes are common to both male and female respondents.

For the male respondents there are only two traits which do not differentiate men and women, that is *independent* and *athletic*. For the female

respondents there are also two traits which do not differentiate men and women – *independent* and *analytical*. According to male respondents, the most desirable traits for their own gender category among the masculine BSRI items are: *masculine, self-reliant, has leadership abilities, strong personality, ambitious* and in the opinion of female respondents, the most desirable masculine traits for men are: *masculine, strong personality, assertive, self-reliant, ambitious*. In this case there are also similarities in the opinions of male and female respondents – the attributes *masculine, self-reliant* and *ambitious* appear among the first five traits assessed by both male and female respondents as the most desirable ones from a social perspective.

Many of the masculine traits, even though they are considered more desirable for men than for women, are also socially valued in the case of women. The following traits are appreciated as above average, so are important for women from the perspective of male respondents: *self-reliant, assertive, strong personality, make decisions easily, competitive*; from the perspective of female respondents, the most important attributes were *self-reliant, assertive, strong personality*. In Table 2, which comprises the traits included in the femininity BSRI scale, the results show that the overwhelming majority of attributes are considered by both male and female respondents as differentiating men from women, the effect sizes being generally strong. According to male respondents, the features that mostly differentiate genders on the dimension of femininity are: *feminine* - r square=.66, *gentle* - r square=.48, *loves children* - r square=.39, *cheerful* - r square=.24, *warm* - r square=.24. According to female respondents, the features that mostly differentiate are: *feminine* - r square=.79, *sympathetic* - r square=.56, *compassionate* - r square=.55, *cheerful* - r square=.48, *loves children* - r square=.43. We notice that, out of these first five attributes evaluated by female and respectively male respondents as differentiating categories of gender, three attributes are common, so once again there are similarities between male and female respondents.

According to male respondents, the most desirable traits for women among those considered to be feminine are *feminine, loves children, gentle, understanding, cheerful*, and in the opinion of female respondents, the most desirable feminine features for their own gender are the same ones as those in the opinion of man, so there is a very high degree of concordance too. There are also a considerable number of feminine traits presented in Table 2, which

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although attributed to woman by both samples of respondents, are considered to be important for man, too. According to male respondents, these traits which register a relatively high means of scoring, and thus considered socially desirable for men are: *understanding, warm, tender, loves children, loyal, eager to soothe hurt feelings* (see Table 2).

In addition to testing the significance of both male and female respondents' ratings of masculine and feminine traits "for a man" and "for a woman", we also wanted to look at how similar male respondents' ratings were to female respondents' ratings.

Thus, we compared auto-stereotypes and hetero-stereotypes through the second set of comparisons that assessed the degree in which male respondents and female respondents considered desirable the masculine traits and then the feminine ones, for the prototype of men and women respectively (Tables 3 and 4). For these comparisons we used independent T-test.

Comparisons indicate that the attributions are in the presumed direction, that is, there is a clear tendency of both categories of respondents to consider the cluster of masculine traits as being more desirable for men, differentiating them from women, and the set of feminine traits as being desirable for women and differentiating them from men. Exceptions also occur: the attribute "independent" has a higher mean when it is hetero-attributed by men and also a higher mean when it is self-attributed by women; the features *analytic, self-sufficient* and *individualistic*, which are masculinity items in BSRI, are considered by the female respondents to a greater extent desirable in the case of women. We notice that for some of these exceptions the gender difference of the desirability ratings is not significant.

Regarding the portrait of women (Table 4), the attribute *shy* is self-attributed by female respondents but also hetero-attributed by men. An interesting aspect would be that in the case of the list of feminine items, there are two attributes that male respondents self-assigned, respectively *eager to soothe hurt feelings* and *warm*.

Even if these exceptions appear, there are enough arguments in terms of homogeneity of stereotypes, the vision of male respondents being convergent with the one of female respondents regarding the social desirability of the personality traits in the case of men and women in our society.

Table 1. Desirability ratings comparisons made by male respondents and respectively female respondents for the man prototype and woman prototype - paired T-test results for the set of masculine BSRI items

Traits	Ratings by male respondents						Ratings by female respondents					
	For a man		For a woman		T-test	R square	For a man		For a woman		T-test	R square
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Self-reliant	6.00	1.06	5.16	.19	3.45**	.19	5.98	1.23	5.24	1.33	2.99**	.15
Defends own beliefs	5.56	1.29	4.36	.29	4.55**	.29	5.60	1.17	4.70	1.37	3.53**	.2
Independent	5.52	1.26	4.12	.01	-.94	.01	6.08	1.36	4.84	1.58	1.32	.03
Athletic	4.94	1.51	4.92	0	.07	0	5.24	1.42	4.62	1.46	2.92**	.14
Assertive	5.86	1.12	4.92	.27	4.26**	.27	6.04	1.02	5.16	1.41	4.05**	.25
Strong personality	5.90	1.34	4.72	.32	4.91**	.32	6.14	.98	4.90	1.74	4.83**	.32
Forceful	5.58	1.45	3.50	.48	6.82**	.48	5.90	1.03	3.56	1.73	8.55**	.59
Analytical	4.70	1.38	4.04	.11	2.52*	.11	4.78	1.35	4.96	1.22	-.72	.01
Has leadership abilities	5.98	1.18	3.84	.53	7.56**	.53	5.80	1.17	4.40	1.42	5.37**	.37
Willing to take risks	5.10	1.34	3.90	.28	4.42**	.28	5.14	1.16	3.98	1.40	5.06**	.34
Makes decisions easily	5.36	1.28	4.56	.19	3.47**	.19	5.08	1.02	4.62	1.42	2.12*	.08
Self-sufficient	5.66	1.28	3.86	.47	6.71**	.47	5.90	1.34	4.66	1.69	4.24**	.26
Dominant	5.00	1.74	3.24	3	4.61**	3	4.80	1.95	3.84	1.67	2.49*	.11
Masculine	6.08	1.15	2.38	.71	11.17**	.71	6.38	.83	2.36	1.53	15.04**	.82
Willing to take a stand	5.42	1.16	4.52	.21	3.70**	.21	5.78	1.01	4.60	1.42	5.02**	.33
Aggressive	3.42	1.72	2.36	.26	4.16**	.26	3.52	1.97	2.52	1.32	3.16**	.16
Acts as a leader	5.32	1.58	3.70	1.48	5.24**	.35	5.46	1.59	4.08	1.68	4.41**	.28
Individualistic	4.12	1.70	3.20	1.30	3.82**	.22	4.58	1.71	3.96	1.21	2.27*	.09
Competitive	5.22	1.31	4.68	1.47	2.11*	.08	5.58	1.03	4.42	1.41	5.40**	.37
Ambitions	5.70	1.01	5.14	1.30	3.05**	.15	5.82	1.13	5.26	1.25	2.79**	.13

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

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Table 2. Desirability ratings comparisons made by male respondents and respectively female respondents for the man prototype and woman prototype - paired T-test results for the set of feminine traits

Traits	Ratings by male respondents						Ratings by female respondents					
	For a man		For a woman		T-test	R square	For a man		For a woman		T-test	R square
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Yielding	4.26	1.45	5.56	1.05	-5.76**	.4	4.02	1.73	5.48	1.18	-5.03**	.34
Cheerful	5.02	1.39	5.88	1.18	-3.95**	.24	4.54	1.32	5.94	.97	-6.79**	.48
Shy	3.24	1.23	3.64	1.45	-1.53	.04	2.58	1.41	4.20	1.42	-6.50**	.46
Affectionate	4.74	1.44	5.46	1.40	-3.17**	.17	4.46	1.37	5.70	1.09	-5.40**	.37
Flatterable	5.38	1.25	4.98	1.25	1.82	.06	5.28	1.41	4.90	1.31	1.34	.03
Loyal	5.26	1.46	5.46	1.68	-.79	.01	5.00	1.85	5.54	1.31	-2.07*	.08
Feminine	2.58	1.75	6.02	1.43	-9.76**	.66	2.14	1.35	6.24	1.23	-13.85**	.79
Sympathetic	4.36	1.57	5.40	1.41	-3.28**	.18	4.28	1.61	6.06	.97	-8.02**	.56
Sensitive to the needs of others	4.48	1.26	5.24	1.31	-3.08**	.16	4.00	1.45	5.76	.93	-8.75**	.6
Understanding	4.88	1.30	5.58	1.12	-3.76**	.22	4.48	1.46	5.70	1.18	-5.05**	.34
Compassionate	4.14	1.42	4.92	1.42	-3.60**	.2	3.76	1.492	5.54	1.19	-7.77**	.55
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	4.48	1.43	4.78	1.43	-1.25	.03	3.90	1.55	5.20	1.27	-5.07**	.34
Soft-spoken	4.44	1.24	5.30	1.19	-3.59**	.2	3.98	1.44	5.44	1.23	-5.23**	.35
Warm	4.70	1.12	5.58	1.16	-3.95**	.24	4.20	1.39	5.46	1.29	-5.65**	.39
Tender	4.72	1.37	5.52	1.24	-3.92**	.23	4.38	1.63	5.68	1.23	-5.46**	.37
Gullible	3.48	1.68	3.66	1.82	-.62	0	3.22	1.46	4.00	1.73	-2.53*	.11
Childlike	3.34	1.68	3.92	1.63	-2.01*	.07	3.02	1.60	3.86	1.60	-2.98**	.15
Does not use harsh language	3.66	1.73	4.62	1.93	-2.75**	.13	4.24	1.82	4.84	1.85	-1.83	.06
Loves children	5.16	1.20	6.10	1.19	-5.69**	.39	5.26	1.27	6.38	.80	-6.14**	.43
Gentle	4.38	1.36	5.78	.95	-6.73**	.48	4.20	1.42	5.90	1.32	-7.04**	.5

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

Table 3 Gender comparisons of desirability ratings for the man prototype and respectively woman prototype - independent T-test results for the set of masculine traits

Traits	Ratings for a man						Ratings for a woman					
	by male respondents		by female respondents		T-test	R square	by male respondents		by female respondents		T-test	R square
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Self-reliant	6.00	1.06	5.98	1.23	-.08	0	5.16	1.58	5.24	1.33	.27	0
Defends own beliefs	5.56	1.29	5.60	1.17	.16	0	4.36	1.63	4.70	1.37	1.12	.01
Independent	5.52	1.26	6.08	1.36	2.12*	.04	4.12	1.61	4.84	1.58	2.25*	.04
Athletic	4.94	1.51	5.24	1.42	1.02	.01	4.92	1.45	4.62	1.46	-1.02	.01
Assertive	5.86	1.12	6.04	1.02	.83	0	4.92	1.46	5.16	1.41	.83	0
Strong personality	5.90	1.34	6.14	.98	1.01	.01	4.72	1.42	4.90	1.74	.56	0
Forceful	5.58	1.45	5.90	1.03	1.26	.01	3.50	1.71	3.56	1.73	.17	0
Analytical	4.70	1.38	4.78	1.35	.29	0	4.04	1.60	4.96	1.22	3.22**	.09
Has leadership abilities	5.98	1.18	5.80	1.17	-.76	0	3.84	1.75	4.40	1.42	1.75	.03
Willing to take risks	5.10	1.34	5.14	1.16	.15	0	3.90	1.66	3.98	1.40	.25	0
Makes decisions easily	5.36	1.28	5.08	1.02	-1.20	.01	4.56	1.50	4.62	1.42	.20	0
Self-sufficient	5.66	1.28	5.90	1.34	.91	0	3.86	1.49	4.66	1.69	2.49*	.05
Dominant	5.00	1.74	4.80	1.95	-.53	0	3.24	1.68	3.84	1.67	1.78	.03
Masculine	6.08	1.15	6.38	.83	1.48	.02	2.38	1.62	2.36	1.53	-.06	0
Willing to take a stand	5.42	1.16	5.78	1.01	1.64	.02	4.52	1.55	4.60	1.42	.26	0
Aggressive	3.42	1.72	3.52	1.97	.27	0	2.36	1.45	2.52	1.32	.57	0
Acts as a leader	5.32	1.58	5.46	1.59	.44	0	3.70	1.48	4.08	1.68	1.19	0
Individualistic	4.12	1.70	4.58	1.71	1.34	.01	3.20	1.30	3.96	1.21	3.01**	0
Competitive	5.22	1.31	5.58	1.03	1.52	.02	4.68	1.47	4.42	1.41	-.89	.05
Ambitious	5.70	1.01	5.82	1.13	.55	0	5.14	1.30	5.26	1.25	.46	.03

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

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Table 4 Gender comparisons of desirability ratings for the man prototype and respectively woman prototype - independent T-test results for the set of feminine traits

Traits	Ratings for a man						Ratings for a woman					
	by male respondents		by female respondents		T-test	R square	by male respondents		by female respondents		T-test	R square
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD			Mean	SD	Mean	SD		
Yielding	4.26	1.45	4.02	1.73	-.75	0	5.56	1.05	5.48	1.18	-.35	0
Cheerful	5.02	1.39	4.54	1.32	-1.76	.03	5.88	1.18	5.94	.97	.27	0
Shy	3.24	1.23	2.58	1.41	-2.48*	.05	3.64	1.45	4.20	1.42	1.94*	.03
Affectionate	4.74	1.44	4.46	1.37	-.99	0	5.46	1.40	5.70	1.09	.95	0
Flatterable	5.38	1.25	5.28	1.41	-.37	0	4.98	1.25	4.90	1.31	-.31	0
Loyal	5.26	1.46	5.00	1.85	-.77	0	5.46	1.68	5.54	1.31	.26	0
Feminine	2.58	1.75	2.14	1.35	-1.40	.01	6.02	1.43	6.24	1.23	.82	0
Sympathetic	4.36	1.57	4.28	1.61	-.25	0	5.40	1.41	6.06	.97	2.71**	.06
Sensitive to the needs of others	4.48	1.26	4.00	1.45	-1.75	.03	5.24	1.31	5.76	.93	2.27*	.04
Understanding	4.88	1.30	4.48	1.46	-1.44	.02	5.58	1.12	5.70	1.18	.52	0
Compassionate	4.14	1.42	3.76	1.492	-1.30	.01	4.92	1.42	5.54	1.19	2.35*	.05
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	4.48	1.43	3.90	1.55	-1.94*	.03	4.78	1.43	5.20	1.27	1.54	.02
Soft-spoken	4.44	1.24	3.98	1.44	-1.70	.02	5.30	1.19	5.44	1.23	.57	0
Warm	4.70	1.12	4.20	1.39	-1.96*	.03	5.58	1.16	5.46	1.29	-.48	0
Tender	4.72	1.37	4.38	1.63	-1.12	.01	5.52	1.24	5.68	1.23	.64	0
Gullible	3.48	1.68	3.22	1.46	-.82	0	3.66	1.82	4.00	1.73	.95	0
Childlike	3.34	1.68	3.02	1.60	-.97	0	3.92	1.63	3.86	1.60	-.18	0
Does not use harsh language	3.66	1.73	4.24	1.82	1.63	.02	4.62	1.93	4.84	1.85	.58	0
Loves children	5.16	1.20	5.26	1.27	.40	0	6.10	1.19	6.38	.80	1.37	.01
Gentle	4.38	1.36	4.20	1.42	-.64	0	5.78	.95	5.90	1.32	.51	0

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

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Conclusions

The participants tend to consider the typical masculine characteristics from BSRI as being more desirable for men and the typical feminine traits more desirable for women. This tendency is present in most studies on the topic of gender stereotypes' content (Williams & Best, 1988; Conway & Vartanian, 2000; Hegstrom & McCarl-Nielsen, 2002; Vogel, Wester, Heesacker, & Madon, 2003). There is a convergence of the social images of men and women that respondents have, both for the traits' cluster traditionally associated with masculinity and the one associated with femininity. The results are in accordance with the findings of an extensive study carried out in 25 states of the world by Williams and Best (1988) on the content of the gender stereotypes. The features associated to men in most cultures (19 of 25) were active, dominant, aggressive, daring, courageous, energetic, enterprising, forceful, strong, independent, stern, and the feminine traits were affectionate, emotional, sensitive, dependent, mild. One can note that these traits overlap to a great extent with those considered by our subjects being typical for men and women and differentiating them.

In another research on the desirability of the BSRI items, Konrad and Harris (2002) showed that, in the opinion of their male respondents, some traditional masculine traits continue to be more desirable in men compared to women: leadership skills and behavior, aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, independence, stamina, adopting a firm stance, the capacity of taking risks. However, the ambition and the ability to defend personal beliefs are highly valued in the personality profile of both sexes. Instead, the female participants felt that all the masculine traits, except for aggression, are to an extent as desirable both in men and women. Many of the feminine traits are also considered to be desirable in both genders, however the sensitivity to the needs of others, tenderness, affection, soft-spoken are more highly appreciated in women.

Some studies confirm the fact that the perspective on the personality traits valued in both genders is not so strongly dichotomized any more, the ideology of the genders being complimentary, based on the different roles and traits being replaced by a more egalitarian attitude toward gender roles. Auster and Ohm (2000) have studied the degree to which the personality traits of BSRI measurements are seen as socially desirable for male and female. The traits for

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which there have been differences in the assessments carried out by the participants for both men and women are: *leadership abilities, aggressive, strong personality, independent* (considered more desirable in men), while for the following items - *makes decisions easily, defends own beliefs, willing to take a stand and willing to take risks* - there are no longer significant differences between the degree of desirability in men and women. Most of the typical feminine traits continue to be regarded as more desirable for females. The authors compare their results with those of Sandra Bem in 1974, when she proposed BSRI, concluding that the desirability of the traits considered typical for men is increasingly higher in the North American culture in individuals of both gender. Özkan and Lajunen (2005) have examined the validity of BSRI in Turkish university students and the findings showed that there were significant differences between male and female participants only on two masculinity items. Peng (2006) has studied the construct validity of BSRI in Taiwan and has drawn the attention on a more complex structure of masculinity and femininity than originally reported. Another analysis conducted by Koenig et al. (2011) indicated the masculinity of leaders stereotypes, but demonstrated also that the masculine representation of leadership has decreased over time.

However, for our study it must be noted a clear difference in the manner in which traits were considered to be descriptive for the prototypes of the two categories presented, namely men and women. More specifically, both male and female respondents considered that the prototype of their own category is largely characterized by the traits corresponding to his/her gender role and at the same time he/she possesses many of the characteristics typical for the opposite gender category, while the representative of the other gender category is described in a much lesser extent by the traits of the typical dimension specific to the opposite group.

Thus, the male respondents assign to their own category to a greater extent the typical masculine traits, corresponding to the instrumental dimension of the personality (excepting two traits – *independent* and *athletic*) and at the same time the prototype of their own category is described by a wide range of feminine traits as well: *understanding, warm, tender, loves children.*

The female participants also consider that, excepting *flattery* and *does not use a harsh language*, the women generally have significantly higher degrees of typical feminine traits than men, but at the same time, many masculine characteristics are also greatly desirable in the case of the prototype

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of their own category. Such features would be: *self reliant, assertive, makes decisions easily, competitive.*

There is a tendency in each gender group of respondents to promote its own gender category during the assessments. The masculine and feminine traits being socially desirable, the participants assigned the characteristics typical for the opposite gender to a greater extent to their own category, also due to the need of creating a more favorable image of the in-group. At the same time it seems that there is a tendency to differentiate between the groups exactly on the dimension that is traditionally considered to be typical for that group. In addition, another possible explanation is that the portrayal of the gender prototypes in a manner less consistent with the traditional contents of the gender roles is based on the respondents' modern beliefs toward gender roles.

The effect of the inter-category differentiation was presented in several studies: the participants of the research conducted by Krueger et al. (2003) overestimate in a similar way the differences between gender categories at the level of relevant personality traits. The in-group bias was manifested by assigning to the in-group prototype the social desirable set of characteristics typical for the opposite category (male participants emphasized the femininity of men and female participants emphasized the masculinity of women) and this also appears in the study conducted by Rudman, Greenwald, and McGhee (2001). The authors noticed the implicit gender stereotypes of the male and female participants and showed that, in the case of male participants, their own category (a man) was quicker associated with the attribute of power/force than the other category (woman), but there were no significant differences in terms of response latencies, for the female respondents, when associating man to power and woman to power. Similarly, in the case of the attribute "warmth", female participants associated quicker their own category (woman) than the opposite category (man) to this attribute, while for male participants there was no significant difference between the response latencies when associating man-warmth, with woman-warmth. So, "both men and women have shown the strong effects of implicit stereotyping, but only for the tasks that had favorable implications for their own sex (and, by extension, for themselves)" (p. 1168).

These aspects draw the attention to the difficulty of setting the content of the gender stereotypes because every gender group has the tendency to assign some characteristics to its own category and to the opposite one so as to

ensure a positive image of the first, and this tendency occurs also in the case of implicit stereotypes.

Our findings are promising for the idea of using Bem Sex Role Inventory as a measure of masculinity and femininity for the Romanian participants, but there are some limitations. In the case of the masculinity scale there are items which were not considered by our male and female participants as differentiating between a man and a woman: *independent, athletic, analytical*. The femininity scale has more problematic items: *shy, easily flattered, loyal, eager to soothe hurt feelings, gullible, does not use harsh language*. At the same time our results have to be interpreted with caution, taking into account the limitations of our research, due to the small number of participants, opportunistic sample and omission of certain variables as age, level of education, ethnicity etc. So, our conclusions are valid only for these special groups which were involved in the study, but our findings can constitute a starting point for approaching the topic of the valid measures for masculinity and femininity in our culture.

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