

PATRIARCHY IN THE SCHOOL: COVARIATES OF GENDER TRADITIONALISM IN ADOLESCENCE

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Gender traditionalism is one of the cultural traits of contemporary Romania which has severe consequences on the effectiveness of human resource allocation. How is this cultural framework produced and reproduced in time is a major question for any attempt at promoting gender equality. My research investigates the covariates of attitudes regarding gender equality of 2485 teenage students enrolled in high schools in Oradea surveyed in 2007. The results show that gender traditionalism correlates strongly with gender itself, religious membership, socio-economic status and educational achievement. Consequences for policies and further research are discussed.

Keywords: gender, traditionalism, attitudes, regression

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Introduction

Equal access to entitlements, including jobs or public offices between man and woman is not only a benchmark of modernity and a political and cultural objective but an issue of effectively making use of one's country's human resources. Romania is, obviously, one of the most patriarchal societies in the European Union. Pasti & Miroiu referred to gender relations, metaphorically, as being the „last inequality” in Romania (Pasti & Miroiu, 2003). In a more nuanced description one says that the socio-politic landscape of today's Romania is `an original overlapping of traditional patriarchy on a modern patriarchy assorted with equalitarianism in the public sphere` (Dascal, 2005, p. 108)¹¹⁶. International comparisons of value surveys are placing Romania constantly among the nations least available to offer equal opportunities to men and women (Voicu, 2007).

The school itself plays, according to Arenas, Rus & Rus (2005, p. 4) a crucial role in transmitting gender stereotypes, inclusively through noticeable hidden agenda mechanisms to be found, for example, in textbooks (Grunberg, 1996). In the IEA civic education survey of 1999, Romanian teenagers recorded among the worst in acceptance of gender equality among the 29 participant countries, better only than the subjects from Bulgarian and Lithuania (Torney-Purta, Lehmann, Oswald, & Schulz, 2001).

Theoretical background and aims of the study

My study aims to contribute to the understanding of the construction of representation of the relations between men and women in adolescence.

Assessing the equity of the distribution of authority among men and women reflect a certain culture of gender relations. The patriarchal, or traditional culture is widespread even in most modern societies (Brownson & Gilbert, 2002; Paterna & Martínez, 2006). This differentiated perception dims within more modern conceptions which have, among their core rules, gender equality. Therefore, searching for the covariates of intolerance towards gender equality means, in a good measure, to identify the factors associated with traditionalism.

Gender itself has to be one of the important predictors of attitudes referring to gender relations. The sexist conception is part of gender role internalized by boys following various socializing influences, regardless of social or economic position. This hypothesis is sustained by previously obtained results at international level (Peterson, 2003). Significant differences have been recorded, thus, among boys and girls in all 28 nations participating in the IEA survey on civic education (Kerr, Lines, Blenkinshop, & Schlagen, 2002).

¹¹⁶ In Romanian in the original text. Translated by the author.

Moral traditionalism is correlated with religious belonging and some religious denominations – the neo-protestant in Romania – are promoting a conservative attitude towards gender relations. North-American studies have systematically shown a link between the membership in fundamentalist religious groups and conservative attitudes concerning gender relations (Brinkerhoff & MacKie, 1984; Hoffmann & Miller, 1997). This is why I consider membership in neo-protestant movements an important factor behind gender attitudes.

The traditionalism of male priority should be associated with appartenance to deprived socio-economic categories. One's position in the social stratification is generating gender attitudes through interactional mechanisms within the families or the peer-group. Recent international comparisons show that teenagers from poor countries have more traditionalist gender attitudes than those from more developed countries (Gibbon & Stiles, 2004). Using IEA data, Petterson proves that accepting gender equality is stimulated by the index of socio-economic status of the parents (Petterson, 2003) which is best indicated by the parents' educational and occupational status. We expect that teenagers coming from families with low educational capital or those with parents with low status occupations to display sexist attitudes.

Another expected indicator of traditionalism is urban/rural residence. In Romania is almost a truism that rural population is attitudinally more conservative than the urban one. I expect students with a rural background to hold significantly less tolerant attitudes toward gender equality than those with an urban background.

Moreover, it is likely that family structure, more exactly the absence of one of the parents, to affect significantly the attitudes towards gender relations. Since in families in which one or both parents are absent is less probable the unfolding of interactions prone to transmit gender role prescriptions, it is plausible to expect significantly different distribution of gender attitudes in families with a non-intact structure.

It is important, at this level, to discern long term from short term effects. The absence of one the parents can be definitive, temporary or just recent. We have several indicators of the situation of temporary or recent absence of parents: divorce occurred in the previous year and migration for work of one or other of parents. I will try to ascertain the impact of these variables upon gender attitudes, contrasting them with the effects of more general measures of mother's and/or father's absence.

Since we associate one's position towards gender relations with the position on the traditionalism vs. modernity axis, we can attribute part of the variation in the dependent variable to cognitive sophistication, or to the presence/absence of cognitive constraints, beyond the influence of background educational resources. Similar theories make a link between moral conservatism or modernism and more or less modern attitudinal structures and the older distinction from social psychology, between persons with open thinking, as opposed to those with a close, dogmatic thinking (see Stes & Leik, 1993). These statements receive a support in Petterson's study (2003) where the covariates of educational results (and of socio-economic status as well) like exposure to media news and school climate resulted to be in positive relationship with the acceptance of women in public life. If we admit that one's cognitive potential is reflected in a certain measure in school results and in the type of educational institution in which is enrolled, it is plausible to suppose that all these variables significantly influence attitudes towards the equality between men and women. Due to the same reason we expect that one of the predictors of this variable is age: learning that comes together with age brings about a more complex and autonomous understanding of social relations.

Data and method

I have built a causal model of attitude towards gender equality of teenage students using the data collected in the 2007 survey of the research project *'Adolescents – future citizens. Longitudinal study of processes of social exclusion suffered by teenage students'*. I have used a random sample of 2961 students from grades 8-12 from high schools and vocational schools of Oradea, Bihor

county, Romania. The survey has included a set of items designed for the measurement of attitudes concerning gender equality adapted from the IEA survey questionnaire. In the technical report of the 1999 international survey, they were called simply „attitudes towards women” (Schultz & Sibberns, 2004).

Table 1. Distribution of answers to the tolerance items (%)

		Totally against	Partially against	Rather agree	Totally agree	DK/NA
1.	Women should run for public office and take part in the government just as men do	7,6	15,2	25,5	37,6	14,1
2.	Women should have the same rights as men in every way	3,1	8,8	24,2	54,3	9,6
3.	Women should stay out of politics	30,4	24,6	17,0	13,7	14,3
4.	When jobs are scarce, men should have more right to a job than women	28,2	26,4	16,8	12,1	16,4
5.	Men and women should get equal pay when they are in the same jobs	4,1	7,1	19,6	57,2	12,0
6.	Men are better qualified to be political leaders than women	15,9	17,4	23,3	23,3	20,2

Confirmatory factor analyzes underpin the face validity of the scales, extracting a sole component that corresponds, evidently, to attitudes towards women's. The sole inconsistencies concern the inverted items. In order to preserve the consistency of the scale measuring the attitudes towards the rights of the women, in comparison with the scale that had been used in the IEA survey, I have dropped two items (3 and 4), thus computing the subject score using items 1, 2, 5 and 6. The scale has an alpha greater than 0,7. The index of attitudes towards gender equality constitutes the dependent variable in my study. It has a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 16. The larger the score, the more tolerant is the subject vis-à-vis gender equality.

In the successive models I have built in order to test the theoretical propositions I have used the following independent variables.

- Gender (dummy, 1=male)
- Age (numeric)
- Urban/ rural provenience (dummy, 1= rural)
- Measures of socio-economic status
- Mother's education (one dummy for mother holding a less than high school certificate, and a dummy for mother with higher education)
- Mother's occupation (one dummy for worker or housekeeping)
- Index of material endowment of household (number of household appliances at the home from a list of 7)
- Index of cultural endowment of household (number of cultural items at the home from a list of three)
- Measures of family structure
- Number of siblings
- Absence of parents (one dummy for the absence of mother and one for the absence of father)
- Parents' migration for work (one dummy for mother's migration and one for father's migration)
- Parents divorced within the last year (dummy)
- Religious membership (dummy, 1=neoprotestant)
- Measures of cognitive sophistication
- GPA in previous half year
- The type of high school attended (dummy, 1=theoretical lyceum)

The hypothetical statements detailed in the previous sections have been tested first using ordinary least squares regression. Starting from the results of the linear regression I have deepened the hypotheses testing and the construction of the causal model using path analysis.

Results

Attitudes concerning gender equality

The relatively large number of missing values prevented me from imputing some values – computed through regression for example, or simply some indicators of central tendency – for the subjects which chose the DK/NA answers to the attitude items. Computing the score of attitude towards the women was possible on a subsample of 2488 cases, while 477 cases have at least one missing values per scale. While the index of attitude concerning gender equality has a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 16 the average for the 2485 teenagers used in the analysis is 11. Student collectivities seem to display a certain homogeneity concerning the distribution of the focus variable. ANOVA tests applied on classes and schools reveal, at both levels significant interspecific differences. They could indicate some biases generated by the conditions in which the data were collected.

OLS model of gender ideology

Multiple ordinary least square regression model in table 2 allows several interesting conclusions concerning the genesis of attitudes about gender equality.

Table 2. OLS regression of attitude concerning gender equality ($R^2=0,25$)

	Non-standardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
(Constant)	8,305	1,057		7,85	,000
Mother's education (higher education = 1)	,431	,159	,063	2,71	,007
Mother's education (less than high school=1)	-,441	,252	-,040	-1,74	,081
Religious membership (Neoprottestant=1)	-,528	,225	-,057	-2,34	,019
Number of siblings	-,188	,059	-,078	-3,18	,001
Gender (Male=1)	-2,488	,139	-,426	-17,93	,000
Age (in years)	,105	,043	,055	2,44	,014
GPA in previous half-year	,300	,081	,091	3,68	,000
Type of school attended (theoretical lyceum=1)	,348	,143	,060	2,43	,015
Father migrated for work during the previous year	-,432	,207	-,047	-2,08	,037
Variables not in the model (no significant effect on the dependent variable)					
Father's occupation (worker=1)					
Cultural endowment at home					
Father's education (higher education=1)					
Material endowment at home					
Mother's occupation (retired, unemployed, housekeeper, farmer =1)					
Urban rural background (small town=1)					
Urban/rural background (rural=1)					
Mother absent					
Mother migrated for work in the previous year					
Parents have divorced during the previous year					
Father absent					

Based on the standardized coefficient, the most important determinant of gender attitudes is gender itself. It accounts for approximately 15% of the variance of gender attitudes¹¹⁷. Boys have measures of tolerance regarding gender equality with almost half standard deviation smaller than girls while controlling for the variation of the other variables, the non-standardized effect being of almost two and a half points using the metric of the dependent variable. The strong effect of gender is proof of the fact that boys, regardless of socio-economic context, acquire strong sexist attitudes, in contrast with girls which display more tolerant views. We can talk easily of a macho culture that transcends all social boundaries and makes boys hostile to attempts of equalization of social chances of men and women.

According to the model, the background socio-economic status has a significant impact on the dependent variable but only through the educational resources of mothers. The model suggests that the more educated are the model the more likely are the teenagers to acquire the modern ideology of gender equality. However, parents' occupational status or the economic capital of the family does not influence the considered attitudes. The model suggests that mother's authority in the family, as well as the predominant family model acquired by the children, depends mostly on the mother's educational capital than on other measures of status.

The hypothesis that more educated women are more able to negotiate a fair distribution of authority in the family is plausible, but my data lack appropriate measurements needed to test the conjecture. The fact that the number of siblings correlates negatively with the acceptance of gender equality suggests again the importance of family roles, if we accept that a large number of children correlates with a precarious status of women, not only on the labor market but similarly in the family since caring for a sizeable family supposes the acceptance of dependency on a male or on extended family. It is certain that teenagers raised in families with many children tend to express patriarchal attitudes regarding the relations between men and women.

According to our expectations, membership in a neo-protestant church constitutes a predictor of conservative beliefs even after controlling for measures of social status. The causal mechanism may not be as clearly weberian as it may look after a superficial consideration. The strong relationship between the measures of socio-economic status and membership in neo-protestant denominations can be bases of a situation in which religion is a mere mediator. More robust methodologies (structural equations and/or longitudinal analysis) might bring clarifications in this matter.

Variables that measure the structure of the family and its eventual defects have a surprising behavior relative to gender attitudes. While most of the indicators of temporary or long term absence of one or both parents do not have a significant effect, the migration for work of father during the previous year produces an important decrease in the dependent variable. This merely suggests that, on one hand, absence of any parent does not influence children's gender attitudes while, on the other hand, father's migration for work is occurring more likely in patriarchal families in which is at work a traditional perspective on the relationships between women and men. Even this single significant parameter in the OLS model may indicate the mediation of a causal relationship, considering the circumstance that international migration for work is more probable in families with low socio-economic status (Pong & Ju, 2000; Toth & Toth, 2007).

My data contradict the hypothesis of rural or provincial traditionalism. Holding social and economic conditions equal, teenager raised in villages or in small towns have similar gender attitudes with their colleagues from larger, and presumably more modern, Oradea. However, we can suspect here a selection bias – opting for learning at one of the schools in Oradea can be indicator of modern attitudes and of availability for ascendant social mobility, at least at the level of aspirations, if we consider parents' aspirations or their answers to their children's socio-professional aspirations.

117 Computed comparing R2 of model with gender with R2 of model without gender.

On the other hand, the effect of cognitive constraints appears to be significant according to the regression model. Both school results and the type of school have a positive effect on the dependent variable. Students with higher GPAs and those from the more academically oriented theoretical lyceums perform better in accepting equality between men and women. Since these results are obtained after controlling for the effect of measures of socio-economic status and of educational and cultural resources in the family – which are all correlates of school achievements – one can say that accepting equality between women and men supposes a certain degree of cognitive complexity, which may be necessary to overcome the sexist prejudices and the patriarchal worldview that dominates traditional culture.

Conclusions

My article aimed at explaining the variation in attitudes of teenager students from Oradea about the equality between men and women. Multivariate analyzes of data from a random sample of students in grades from 8 to 12 in Oradea, show that attitudes about equality between women and men have a complex determination.

The most important cause can be identified in the large difference in attitude between boys and girls which is evidence of a generalized patriarchal culture. It is transmitted, through various socialization mechanisms, mainly to boys. This difference between boys and girls in the way they see gender equality attests potentially great difficulties in any attempt of promoting a culture of gender equality. Socio-economic status explains, as well, the more or less tradition attitudes of teenagers from Oradea. The paths through which teenagers of low status families become having patriarchal gender attitudes can be: 1) through membership in a neo-protestant religious movement, which involves a serious degree of moral conservatism besides a socio-economic status that lower than that of the majority; 2) through less successful educational careers, indicated by educational underachievement or by the type of school followed. My research suggests, however, that gender traditionalism is not reproduced intergenerationally in a simple manner but only in contexts that have a class meaning. Finally, gender attitudes depend, as my analyzes show, directly upon the degree of cognitive openness of the concerned teenager. The older ones, those with better educational achievement or those who are following an academic track are ready to accept women holding social positions similar to those of men.

On the other hand, the intactness of the family seems not be having an influence on the dependent variable, showing that the effect of interactions within the family require a more nuanced treatment.

Longitudinal models can clarify in future research the relationship between my dependent variable and other psychosociological measurements which, for reasons of methodological caution I have not used in the models in the present article.

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