

Sexist Prejudice of Primary School Children in Different Urban and Rural Contexts of Spain

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Abstract: At present, a great deal of historical gender prejudice is still visible in society. It is essential to eliminate these invisible barriers that impede achieving real equality between men and women. This article seeks to provide a vision of the perception of primary school girls and boys regarding the masculine and feminine genders. A questionnaire was given to groups of schoolchildren in different locations, including rural areas and large cities such as Madrid, the capital of Spain. In addition to detect prejudice toward one of the two genders, some of the most often repeated answers were taken into account. On several occasions, one of the two sexes, or the two, was linked to intelligence or to the ideal of beauty. However, differences were not observed in all cases. Comments are made on the most relevant data regarding the predisposition among children to link girls with more passive attitudes than boys. For many years, society has fought to achieve real equality between the two sexes. However, there is still a great deal to be done, and the younger generations have the responsibility of succeeding in having the two sexes live together in a more egalitarian society. The role of education is to encourage this process.

Keywords: *prejudices; stereotype; gender; children; primary school*

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0 Introduction

The educational world is exposed to the continuous transformation of society. School children comprise a very diverse group that continues to show many

stereotypes transmitted by tradition. Schools must be aware of this situation and reconsider teaching and learning processes to achieve a more appropriate development in all spheres of society.^[1] However, despite progress made in recent decades, there is still much to be done.

Prejudices and stereotypes are the reflection of a cultural base that affects all social structures, including family, schools, and neighborhoods, among others.^[2] In this paper, we will focus on the preconception of primary school girls and boys regarding gender differences.

Gender violence is present in our society as one of the traditional reflections of the prejudices that have been modeled over time. Many studies have analyzed stereotypes of women, going back more than a century ago up to the present.^[3] There are also older studies on the topic that compares gender roles in the 1st year of life, finding no major differences.^[4] Other more recent studies state that many young people maintain these sexist prejudices in university settings.^[5]

There is no great deal of bibliography which refers to tests given to school children to determine students' prejudices or behavior.^[6] This present study used a modified form of the questionnaire prepared by the INTER Group (Grupo INTER) of the Spanish National University of Distance Education (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, UNED). Said test was adapted to the age of the primary school girls and boys involved and to the context in which the test was given. The objective was to reflect on the associations of ideas made by the participants with respect to certain groups. In this case, we were interested in the opinion they had of the masculine and feminine genders.^[7]

Finally, the answers of the girls and boys that are linked to the ideal of beauty and intelligence are also

considered. These answers are the ones that are most often repeated, and reveal, to a certain extent, the most relevant values transmitted by society to the students.

The aim of this study was to find out what the prejudices of girls and boys were in different contexts, depending on their gender. In some cases, the data obtained were not conclusive. However, a general view is offered of the participants' perception of the traditional stereotypes generated regarding men and women.

1 Materials and methods

This research was carried out in two different locations of Spain. On the one hand, some students were from Madrid, a large city, and the capital of Spain. On the other hand, children from the town of Tomelloso, located in a rural setting in the province of Ciudad Real (this province belongs to the region of Castile-La Mancha, bordering Madrid), were also participated. All of them were in fifth and sixth grade of primary school, aged 10–12 approximately.

The data were collected from a questionnaire in which the students had to finish a series of sentences that were incomplete, using one or more words, one or more adjectives, and saying what they thought about girls and about boys.

All research must ensure the reliability and validity of the instruments used. The questionnaire was given by several teachers, and it was essential to guarantee that they used the same words. Instructions were prepared regarding the indications they were supposed to give the students.

The answers of the boys were analyzed to find what their prejudices are regarding the masculine and feminine gender. The participants' answers were graded as follows: No prejudice, moderate prejudice, and strong prejudice.

Once all the data had been collected, SPSS and Excel software were used for statistical processing. The objective was to verify whether the distributions of frequencies of the answers were independent of each other. The Pearson's Chi-squared test was used, with different significance levels. A value of $P < 0.01$, 0.05, and 0.1 indicates that we can accept that there are significant differences with 99%, 95%, or 90% of confidence, respectively. Values of $P > 0.1$ indicate that the samples are statistically similar.

2 Results

The results of the tests given to the girls and boys of the last years of primary school are shown below. They are

presented from different points of view: First of all, the answers that show prejudice due to sex depending on participants' place of origin and gender. Subsequently, comments are made regarding some of the prejudices that are repeated the most. The connection that is made between girls and boys and intelligence and beauty are very common.

Figure 1 shows a graph with student prejudices according to their gender and their place of origin.

The two columns to the left show that the percentage of girls and boys with gender prejudices is very similar, about 40%. A fairly high percentage of participants relate men and women with two very different stereotypes. This similarity is confirmed with the statistical analysis, with Chi-square values greater than the significance level.

The last two columns compare the presence of sexist prejudices depending on the place of origin of the participants. In the case of the inhabitants of Madrid, the presence of prejudices is between 40% and 50%. The value is quite balanced with the percentage of students that do not clearly show a difference between the girl and boy stereotype. On the other hand, the inhabitants of Tomelloso that show prejudices are just over 30%. However, as in the previous case, the statistical calculation gives a Chi-square value greater than the significance level, so no significant differences are deemed to exist.

In general, girls are often described with adjectives such as "pretty," "clever," or others indicating weakness or a serene attitude, such as "delicate," "nice," "weak," "calm," "friendly," or "kind." On the other hand, the same students that describe the feminine sex with these qualities describe boys with adjectives indicating strength, a great deal of activity, or a subversive attitude such as "rough," "brave," "strong," "rapid," "athletic," "rebellious," or "mischievous."

If the prejudices shown by the inhabitants of different locations are compared, differences are noted when they relate boys and girls with intelligence. Figure 2a shows that the majority of the citizens of Tomelloso, namely 87%, do not establish any link of this type, 6.5% relate them moderately, and 6.5% strongly.

On the other hand, the inhabitants of Madrid [Figure 2b] show differences with respect to those living in a rural environment.

In this case, 73% of the participants from the capital of Spain do not relate their classmates (girls and boys) with the concept of intelligence.

On the other hand, 4.3% establish a strong connection, although a significant percentage, 21.7%, only do so moderately. The statistical calculations give a Chi-square value of 0.03.

Hence, we can conclude that there are significant differences between inhabitants from rural and urban areas (such as Tomelloso and Madrid) in relating school children with the concept of intelligence.

Finally, let us focus on the answers that relate the participants with the ideal of beauty. Note is first made of the differences that appear when there are references to beauty depending on gender. At last, the correlation made by the inhabitants of Tomelloso, depending on whether it is a girl or a boy, is highlighted.

Note that many of the answers obtained refer to the ideal of beauty. Figure 3 shows the relation made by students with beauty, for both boys and girls. More answers relate the feminine sex [Figure 3a] with the ideal of beauty than the masculine sex [Figure 3b]: 21% in the case of the girls and 9.4% in the case of the boys. Moreover, this inequality is confirmed with the calculation of the Chi-square value, when significant differences appear with a value of $P < 0.001$. When other variables such as gender or population are taken into account, no differences were detected.

Finally, Figure 4 shows the differences between the boys and girls from Tomelloso who relate persons with the ideal of beauty. The percentage of participants who do not establish this relation is very similar. However, girls who associate their classmates (girls and boys) with the ideal of beauty do so with strong intensity [Figure 4a]. For boys, the majority do so with moderate intensity [Figure 4b]. This inequality is confirmed by calculating the Chi-square value, 0.087. However, the significance level is low and is only corroborated with 90% confidence.

3 Discussion and Conclusions

After presenting the results obtained from the questionnaire mentioned above, the most relevant conclusions are highlighted below.

The first conclusive data are the percentages of sexist prejudices among the participants, both in the rural setting and city. In all cases, there are differences ranging from 30% to 40% in the perception of the girl and boy stereotype. The adjectives used to refer to the feminine gender are related to a position of weakness or passive attitude, as compared to men, whose attributes correspond to strength and activity. However, the

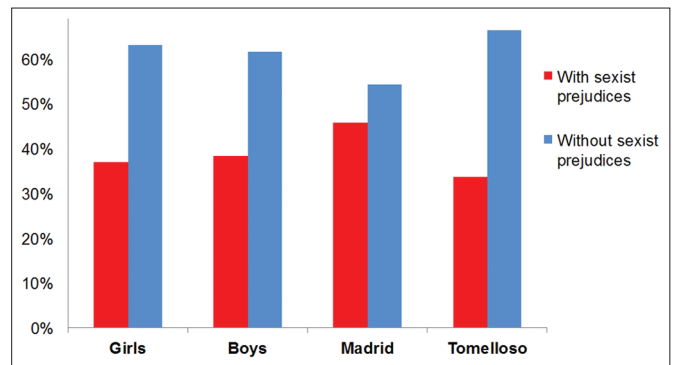


Figure 1. Sexist prejudices depending on gender and place of origin

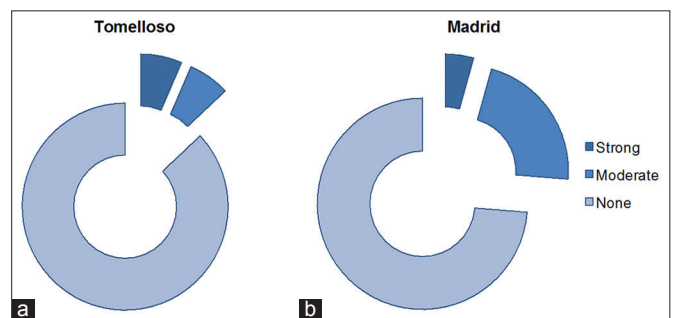


Figure 2. (a and b) Relation between the place of origin and concept of intelligence

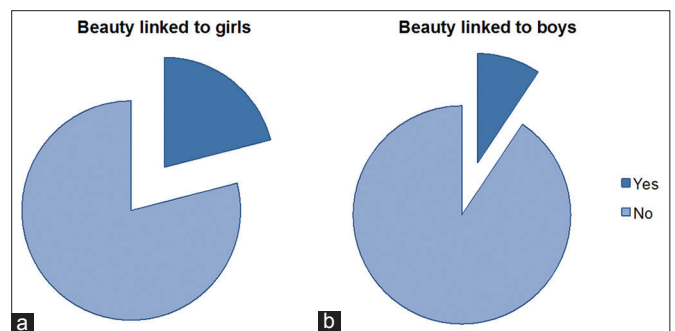


Figure 3. (a and b) Relation of answers about boys and girls with the ideal of beauty

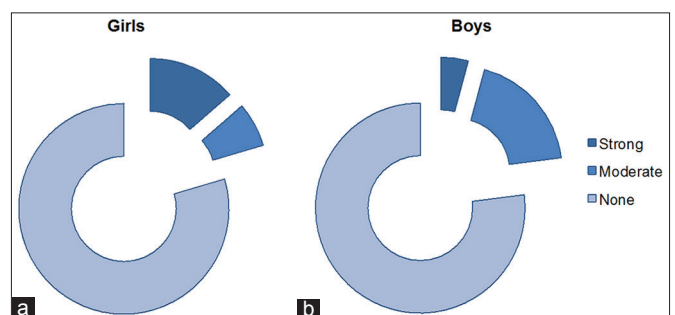


Figure 4. (a and b) Relation with the ideal of beauty in Tomelloso

statistical calculation does not sustain the existence of significant differences if the gender or place of residence of the students' answering the questionnaire is considered.

Some attributes are repeated often by the participants and with significant differences in certain cases. Reference is made to the relationship they establish between their peers and the notion of beauty and intelligence.

In respect to intelligence, there are some differences if the students' place of origin is taken into account. In Tomelloso, the number of children who establish this connection is very small. However, more than one-fourth highlights this quality when they refer to both girls and boys. In most of these cases, they do so with moderate intensity.

In respect to the relation that is established in the answers with the ideal of beauty, it is more evident in the case of the feminine sex. There is a greater tendency to have girls identified with adjectives such as "pretty" or "cute." This also occurs with the boys but in a smaller proportion.

Finally, significant differences are noted when the children from Tomelloso relate their classmates (girls and boys) with the ideal of beauty. The presence of this analogy is very similar in both the sexes, although girls establish a strong relation with this quality. Boys, however, establish a moderate relation.

In consequence, there are variations in the perception children have of their classmates, with differences

detected depending on the gender or place of origin. Despite the policies of equality fostered by governments, these gender prejudices continue to be transmitted, although a great deal of progress has been in this matter in the last century. Nonetheless, there is still a lot of work to be done. Future generations have the responsibility of achieving real equality between men and women, for which appropriate educational policies are required.

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