

Definition and Dynamics of Gender-Specific Behaviours of Latvian Males and Females

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Abstract: To date, the various female and male social characteristics and social roles existing in different societies have been researched. Some aspects of gender similarities and differences have also been studied in Latvia, in the branches of family, legal, judicial psychology and management. Yet, the issue of gender peculiarities at a specific stage of personality development has not been sufficiently addressed, especially with regard to similarities and differences of gender behaviour in the youth, early and mid-maturity age groups. Hence, a study of this issue ought to be considered as justified and necessary. Consequently, the main aim of this research is to explore gender-specific behaviours of Latvian males and females in the youth, early and mid-maturity age groups. The theoretical grounds of this study, based on both classical theories and current research results, triggered the authors' scientific curiosity and contributed to the formulation of three research questions about gender similarities and differences in the behaviours of Latvian males and females at the ages of youth, early and mid-maturity. Quantitative methodology was used to conduct the present research. 168 respondents ($N = 168$) from different regions of Latvia aged 18 to 60 took part in Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI) survey. Statistical methods for data analysis: *Cronbach's Alpha coefficient* to determine the credibility and consistency of the indicators, *NPar Test* to determine the distribution of the obtained results, linear regression to analyse the differences in *Enter* results, descriptive statistics. On the basis of survey results, gender-specific behaviours of Latvian males and females in the youth, early and mid-maturity age groups were defined, and their dynamics were explored. In the course of the present research, it was concluded that resulting from the construction of social models for male and female gender-specific behaviours, the system of values, which is defined by the social culture and the accepted social norms, becomes the determinant.

Keywords: dynamics of gender-specific behaviours of males and females; age groups, psychology.

Introduction

The prevalent gender theories in modern social and humanitarian sciences include the gender social construction theory, understanding of gender as a stratification category and interpretation of gender as a cultural symbol. Various studies in the sphere of gender socialisation (Agustin, 2013; Crawford, Unger, 2004) claim that there exist certain traditional pre-conceptions of gender identity and certain peculiarities specific to feminine and masculine behaviour.

In the 20th century there was a prevalence of studies on gender differences rather than similarities (Cramer et al., 2001; Eagly, Karon, Makhijani, 1995; Rustin, Foels, 2012). Thus, developed a tendency to look at men and women as bearers of opposite and mutually excluding sets of features. Gender was considered a dichotomous characteristic, that is, disregarding the fact that both male and female sex contains in itself some features of the opposite. This became one of the causes for social psychology researchers' endeavours to pinpoint not only the gender differences, but also the similarities (Bem, 1974; Kohlberg, 1966; Maccoby, Jacklin, 1974).

L. Kohlberg (1966) in his cognitive-developmental theory argues that all information regarding gender-specific behaviour is reflected in our consciousness in the form of gender schemas. By focusing an individual's attention on certain things, gender schemas influence the way we process information and affect the memory, as it is easier for a person to remember the information which falls into some pre-existing framework of conceptions. Thus, cognitive categories, also called schemas, allow for reducing the amount of information an individual has to process. L. Kohlberg's studies do not confirm the premise that deviation from gender – role standards generate psychological inconsistencies.

Nonetheless, according to the new gender psychology of E. Maccoby and C. Jacklin (Maccoby, Jacklin, 1974), S. Bem (Bem, 1974; Bem, 1993), the main part in the development of psychological gender and gender roles is played by social expectations of a given society, which develop in response to a specific social and cultural matrix and find expression in the way the younger generation is brought up. The gender

we are born into can only help predict a person's potential behaviour. Yet, the chief determinant is the psychological and social gender which is acquired in the course of one's life and whose development is essentially affected by the variations in gender roles and the corresponding social expectations peculiar to the specific culture. The main aspect of this conception is the premise that there exists a male and female standard in general, and that there are also certain behavioural standards (genders) within male and female behaviour. S. Bem argues that male and female behaviour is grounded in preconceptions about masculinity and femininity that we have inherited from our culture: a set of social roles known as male and female gender roles. Hence, masculinity and femininity as focal measures of human personality were accepted as grounding premises of the present study.

Contemporary gender theory (Fagan, Hebson, 2006; Lips, 2014; Rustin, Foels, 2012) does not attempt to question the biological, social and psychological differences between specific women and men. According to this theory, the fact of there being any differences is not as important in itself as the socio-cultural evaluation and interpretation of these differences, as well as the building of a power system on the grounds of them. Thus, gender ought to be conceived not as a real social difference between men and women, but as a discourse that corresponds to certain groups of objects whose social roles are determined by gender- or biological differences according to economic positions or the belonging to certain ethnic or race communities.

It can be argued that currently in social sciences there is no balanced conception of gender. There exists no unbiased material which would allow for an accurate worldview and an understating that the society consists of women and men, without some accompanying traditional stereotypes on women or men arising in the human consciousness. Confusion is generated by the fact that the notions "femininity" and "masculinity" bear different meanings. The scientific community is not unanimous in what exactly these notions measure, and there is no uniform test for these concepts. On the grounds of the analysis of the afore-mentioned social psychological theories, it can be argued that the differentiation of the notions "sex" and "gender" precipitated a progress towards a new theoretical level of understanding of the social processes.

The main *aim of this research* is to explore gender-specific behaviours of Latvian males and females in the youth, early and mid-maturity age groups.

The following chapter describes the course of research, which was conducted with the aim: by adapting Bem Sex-Role Inventory, to explore and differentiate gender-specific behaviours of Latvian males and females at the stages of youth, early and mid-maturity.

Methodology

The conducted research was non-experimental and took place in 2016-2017 in real-life conditions in different regions of Latvia. The following research questions were proposed: (1) how can male and female gender-specific behaviours be defined in the youth age group? (2) how can male and female gender-specific behaviours be defined in the early and mid-maturity age groups? (3) are there any gender similarities and differences regarding male and female behaviours in the youth, early and mid-maturity age groups?

Within the framework of empirical research design, a set of instruments was created for deepening of the understanding of male and female gender peculiarities: a questionnaire was developed on the grounds of Bem Sex-Role Inventory. The questionnaire was drawn up to determine the place of masculinity and femininity in the cultural discourse, rather than on the level of individual's personality. In effect, it attempted to counter the beliefs that viewed masculinity and femininity as focal measures of human personality.

The questionnaire consists of 60 statements. The methodology contains instructions, a questionnaire form and recommendation for processing and interpretation of the obtained results. The gathered data were quantitative. A written survey was conducted with the goal of defining and exploring the dynamics of gender-specific behaviours among women and men from different regions of Latvia. The definition and dynamics of gender similarities and differences between male and female behaviours in the youth, early and mid-maturity age groups was grounded in S. Bem's (Bem, 1974; 1993) conception and was calculated by using the SPSS data processing programme.

Results and Discussion

For research purposes, three age groups of men and women were selected according to E. Eriksson's (Eriksons, 1998) classification of ages within the psychosocial development theory. The first group of respondents was made up of men and women aged 18 to 19 (youth age group); the second group comprised men and women aged 20 to 25 (early maturity); the third group of respondents consisted of men and women aged 26 to 60 (mid maturity). All in all, 168 respondents ($N = 168$ (100 %)) took part in the research, age: $M = 25.90$, $SD = 10.395$; sex: $M = 0.37$, $SD = 0.484$). Of those – 106 women ($n = 106$ (63.1 %), $M = 2.04$, $SD = 0.855$) and 62 men ($n = 62$ (36.9 %), $M = 1.88$, $SD = 0.791$). Non-probability sampling was used in the selection of respondents.

In the course of the research, the masculinity and femininity scale were measured: *masculinity* is manifested in personality's orientation towards target achievement beyond a situation of direct interpersonal interaction, whereas *femininity* is determined by contacts with other people, which are grounded in emotional intimacy and attachment. The figures of *Cronbach's Alpha coefficient* range from 0.743 to 0.784, which testifies of a sufficiently high consistency of the questionnaire: femininity scale – $\lambda = 0.743$; masculinity scale – $\lambda = 0.784$. Before measuring the masculinity and femininity index in different age groups, we determined the frequency distribution, the root-mean-square deviation and standard deviation in all groups of respondents, as well as the range of statistic data variation. For the feature under study, statistically significant differences according to normal distribution were detected within the entire group of respondents ($N = 168$). As a result, correspondence to normal distribution was established (*Kolmogorov-Smirnov's test*): $Z = 0.749$, $p = 0.615 > 0.05$.

The survey results indicate that in the age group of 18 to 19 years ($M = 0.54$, $SD = 0.237$) the masculinity index ranges from -0.05 to +1.00. It can be concluded that in this age group for both women and men masculinity is less pronounced than femininity. Whereas in the same age group of 18 to 19 years ($M = 0.59$, $SD = 0.192$) the index of femininity varies from -0.10 to +0.95 (Figure 1, 2). Thus, it was established that in this age group for both women and men femininity is more pronounced than masculinity.

In the age group of 20 to 25 years ($M = 0.57$, $SD = 0.213$) the masculinity index ranges between -0.15 to +0.95, while the femininity index in this age group ($M = 0.57$, $SD = 0.192$) varies from -0.10 to +0.90 (Figure 1, 2). Thus, it can be concluded that in this age group for both women and men masculinity is less pronounced than femininity. The indicators are almost identical if compared to the masculinity and femininity scale in the age group of 18 to 19 years.

In the last group of respondents of 26 to 60 years ($M = 0.56$, $SD = 0.198$) the masculinity index ranges from -0.15 to +0.95, which leads to a conclusion that in this age group for both women and men masculinity is less pronounced than femininity. The figures are practically the same as with the masculinity scale in the age group of 18 to 19 years. Whereas in the age of 26 to 60 years ($M = 0.62$, $SD = 0.179$) the femininity index varies from -0.00 to +0.90. In this age group the masculinity indicators are not marked, while femininity is pronounced (Figure 1, 2).

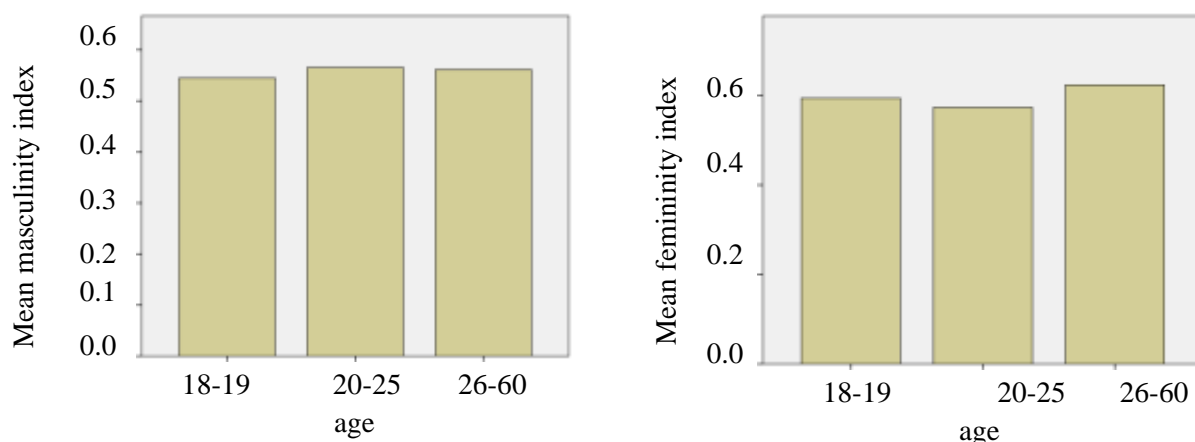


Figure 1. Mean masculinity and femininity index in the age group of 18 to 60 years.

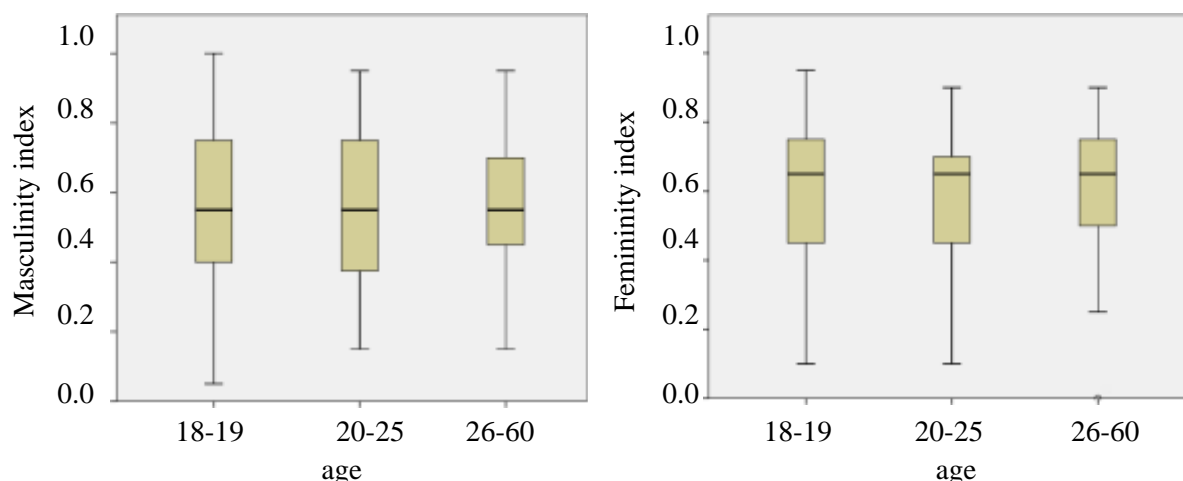


Figure 2. Masculinity and femininity index in the age group of 18 to 60 years.

To determine the impact of age and sex on the dynamics of masculinity and femininity index, the method of linear regression was used (Table 1).

Table 1

The impact of age and sex on masculinity and femininity index (n = 168)

Independent variable	B	SE	β	t	p
Age	- 0.004	0.004	- 0.063	- 0.865	0.471
Sex	- 0.550	0.095	0.432*	- 5.675	0.001

* $p < 0.01$; ** $p < 0.05$ $R^2 = 0.187$

The research results proved that the femininity and masculinity index is statistically different in $t = -5.675$, $p < 0.01$. The regression model explains more than 18 % of the general dispersion variables ($\Delta R^2 = 0.187$, $p < 0.01$). Thus, it was concluded that the independent variable “age” does not impact the masculinity and femininity index, whereas the independent variable “sex” affects the masculinity and femininity index ($\beta = 0.432$, $p = 0.001 < 0.01$).

Conclusions

As a result of the empirical research, the essence of male and female gender-specific behaviour was determined. The first – masculine gender group (high masculinity indicators) comprises the respondents’ personality characteristics such as propensity to risk-taking, aggressive behaviour, autonomy and independence for men and caution, tenderness, benevolent communication and care for women. Thus, the object-instrumental pattern of behaviour was distinguished. A male value such as the “normality of success or status” is determined by the rate of a man’s salary and success at work. The “norm of intellectual strength” envisages that a man ought to be knowledgeable, competent and always in control of the situation, which leads to problems in the sphere of interpersonal relationships. The “norm of physical strength” contains expectations that a man will be physically strong, masculine and will not shrink from danger. The norm of “emotional strength” purports that a man is not allowed to show his feelings or demonstrate emotional weakness and that he ought to solve his problems independently. The “anti-femininity norm” professes an idea that men ought to avoid activities and personality traits associated with women.

In addition, in the course of the research the second, feminine gender group (high femininity indicators) was established, which is characterised by features such as tenderness, femininity, goodness, loyalty, attentiveness to others, subjectivity and susceptibility, impetuosity, competition and dominance. Thus, the emotional-expressive pattern of behaviour was distinguished.

The research of Latvian female and male gender-specific behaviour and its dynamics permits to conclude that in the age group of 18 to 60 years significant gender differences were not established. Among the respondents aged 18 to 60, more similarities than differences were discovered: a much higher

femininity index than masculinity index. Gender differences are grounded in the idea that men are more masculine than feminine, and women are more feminine than masculine.

The final research results demonstrate a slight difference in men's propensity towards feminine behaviour in the age groups of 18 to 19 years and 26 to 60 years. In the course of research, more similar masculinity and femininity indicators were discovered in the age groups of 18 to 19 years and 26 to 60 years. On the grounds of the research results, it was concluded that no dynamic of differences in gender-specific behavioural patterns across the three age groups of men and women was observed: it is not age but sex which affects the level of masculinity and femininity.

In the course of research, it was established that across all age groups both men and women display a rather high index of androgyny: high indicators according to both masculine as well as feminine features. Thus, only a partial stereo typicality of gender behaviour of both sexes was revealed. More typified women and men were ascertained in the age group of early maturity ($n = 109$; $M = 30.06$, $SD = 10.814$): only 6 out of 39 men displayed high indicators according to masculine features, the other 33 – androgynous; one woman – high masculinity index; 6 out of 70 women displayed high femininity indicators of behavioural patterns, while the remaining 63 – androgynous.

The scope of research conducted in the sphere of gender psychology states: although on the average the characteristics typical of men and women actually do differ, in reality, the differences within men as a group and women as a group are much more pronounced than between men and women as such. It can be argued that the issue remains open: what culturally determined system of values or what standpoints to choose in order to create a measure for femininity or masculinity which would not legitimise the existing negative stereotypes on gender differences and similarities, and not be mistaken in the veracity of the new priority.

The obtained results indicate that alongside the rapid development of the industrialisation process and progressive technologies, a decrease in the psychological differences between men and women can be observed. Thus, the results of the present research demonstrate the adaptability of society to the changing life circumstances. This aspect warrants further and more in-depth study.

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