

A study of collected narratives on gender perceptions in the 27 EU Member States

Synthesis report



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Synthesis report

**A study of collected narratives
on gender perceptions
in the 27 EU Member States**

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Abbreviations

Country abbreviations

AT	Austria
BE	Belgium
BG	Bulgaria
CY	Cyprus
CZ	Czech Republic
DE	Germany
DK	Denmark
EE	Estonia
ES	Spain
FI	Finland
FR	France
GR	Greece
HU	Hungary
IE	Ireland
IT	Italy
LT	Lithuania
LU	Luxemburg
LV	Latvia
MT	Malta
NL	Netherlands
PL	Poland
PT	Portugal
RO	Romania
SE	Sweden
SI	Slovenia
SK	Slovakia
UK	United Kingdom

Thematic abbreviations

EDU	Education
PRO	Professional career
CFR	Childhood, family life and relationships
HEA	Health
LEI	Leisure
VIO	Violence
ID	Identity
SOC	Societal context



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Introduction





1.1. Background and objectives of the study

The ‘Study of collected narratives on gender perceptions in the 27 EU Member States’ has been commissioned by the European Institute for Gender Equality with the aim of mapping the persistence of stereotypical gender attitudes and perceptions.

The study has as its central objective the collection of real-life stories related to gender perceptions in the form of narratives. The specific aim with this study is to map stereotypical gender attitudes/perceptions through stories and put these in their narrative form and original language in an online database.

These narratives have been analysed with a view to identifying how stereotypical gender perceptions influence people’s lives, as well as to provide background information on possible obstacles for increased gender equality in various contexts and on how stereotypical gender perceptions can be overcome.

For the purpose of this study, gender perceptions are defined as “people’s perceptions with regard to (asymmetric) gender roles and attributes of ‘femininity’ / ‘masculinity’”.

It is the purpose of this Synthesis report to make a broad, rather than a detailed and focussed analysis of the narratives. The analysis will seek to identify belief systems, patterns and norms of behaviour that reinforce gender stereotypes, including how these may evolve over time. The study wants to point to possible ways of how and why people change their ways of thinking about gender. In this context, the study looks for triggers of change such as key actors or factors that have contributed to breaking a pattern of stereotypical gender perceptions.

1.2. Structure and use of this report

The report has the following structure: the present chapter is followed by a short introduction of theories on gender stereotypes, briefly sketching the theoretical framework of the study. Chapter 3 contains a presentation of the methodological approach and the analytical framework of the study. In Chapter 4, the sample is described and an overview of the collected narratives provided. Chapter 5 presents the dimensions of gender

stereotypes that can be recognised in the stories and tries to identify the norms and values that underpin the stereotypes. Chapter 6 looks into how people deal with gender stereotypes, emotionally and in their actions. Chapter 7 sets out to explore the effects of gender stereotypes. The evolution of gender stereotypes over time and across generations is covered in Chapter 8, while Chapter 9 takes a closer look at the changing meaning of ‘masculinity’. The focus of Chapter 10 is on the actors and factors that trigger or prevent gender change. Chapter 11 considers the influence of culture and traditions on gender stereotypes. Chapter 12, finally, presents some conclusive observations of a general nature, considering the collected materials, and provides some suggestions for further work based on this research.

The present report provides the results of the analysis of all stories that have been collected in the study, whereby the unit of analysis has been the quotes from the stories. The full stories have been collected and stored in a database in their original language and only selected text fragments were translated to English for analysis purposes. The database is made available for researchers through MAXQDA software, which allows storage, retrieval and analysis of texts, based on code words.

The findings from the research are illustrated with text fragments from the collected narratives. Such quotes are labelled with a code that allows identifying the respondent, and sometimes also the specific story. This code, for example BE_M_53, represents the following information: the first two letters refer to the country the respondent is from (the official abbreviation of the country name is used), the letter F or M stands for female or male respondent, the number indicates the age of the respondent. For some quotes, an additional three-letter code is added which refers to the specific topical domains as listed above in the list of abbreviations (and described in more detailed in Annex 3).

1.3. Scope of the study

For the purpose of the study, the available resources were to be concentrated on empirical work rather than on theoretical reviews and discussions, as the primary goal was to collect the narratives related to gender perceptions. As a consequence, the theoretical part of this report is limited. However, it may still serve as background information on the study of gender perceptions and gender roles and as a general framework against which the study results can be presented.

This report is based on a broad rather than a focussed analysis of the collected narratives. An in-depth

thematic analysis following the eight broad thematic areas (according to which the stories have been grouped) has not been undertaken. Rather, an overall analysis was performed.

While the analytical chapters in this report have been structured to address the different issues, including a description of the patterns that can be recognised in relation to gender stereotypes in the EU, their effects, inter-generational differences and the changing role of masculinity, possible approaches and barriers to changing gender stereotypes, these present different perspectives on the same reality: the gender perceptions contained in the collected stories offered by EU citizens. For this reason, some reflections on the same themes might be made in the different sections of this report, as they have featured as important aspects in people's stories.

The full collection of life stories that has been compiled provides for a rich database that constitutes a valuable resource for further research. The analysis that was undertaken revealed a number of interesting findings that can feed into policy and other work for gender equality. While the present study offers a 'snapshot' view of existing gender perceptions in the EU, the materials allow for more and deeper analyses, focussing on specific topics or themes. Further scientific analyses, including longitudinal studies, on the subject of gender stereotypes are needed in order to deepen the understanding of how gender stereotypes relate to persisting inequalities and of how breaking stereotypes can advance gender equality.

2. Theoretical framework on gender stereotypes





The present chapter provides a brief introduction to some existing literature on gender stereotypes and may serve as background information against which the research findings can be reflected upon.

2.1. Scope of the theoretical framework

The study of gender stereotypes crosses the boundaries of a number of disciplines. While it is grounded in psychology and sociology, other disciplines like anthropology, cultural analysis and even psychoanalysis have contributed to its development. As such, any investigation into gender stereotypes should from the outset consider a multidisciplinary approach.

This chapter will (1) provide a general overview of the existing approaches to the study of gender roles, stereotypes, perceptions and attitudes, whilst focusing on "change" and (2) highlight the gaps and issues that existing research has left unresolved. The identification of such gaps will assist in situating the study in the existing body of knowledge.

This study takes at its starting point Deutsch' proposition that future gender research should focus on investigating the situations in which people's interactions become less stereotypically gendered (Deutsch 2007) and on factors/triggers producing change towards more egalitarian attitudes and behaviour (Moskowitz, Gollwitzer, Wasel, & Schaal, 1999). Such factors and triggers have been identified as individual (i.e. role models), structural (i.e. legislation/accountability), and environmental/contextual (Devine, Plant, & Buswell, 2000).

Although this study applies a qualitative methodology, a brief review of the recent and most relevant quantitative studies is also provided. Quantitative studies have provided the basis for more of an in-depth examination of gender issues, which should provide 'richer' and more contextualised information.

2.2. Gender roles and gender stereotypes

The concept 'gender' was coined precisely to indicate those differences between women and men that are not biologically rooted, but constructed socially. The

core objective of gender studies is then precisely to analyse the mechanisms that are at work in societies for the construction, socialisation and transformation of gender differences, as opposed to biologically rooted studies that appeared to legitimise differences. The present study is to be seen against the theoretical background of gender studies because it aims at looking at the societal construction of gender.

Stereotypes are deeply ingrained in our societies and consciousness. They spring from particular historical, cultural and social contexts. The perceptions about masculine and feminine "nature" vary over time and across different countries. A number of theorists believe that perceived gender roles originate from the bases for the development of gender identity. Prominent psychological theories of gender role and gender identity development include evolutionary theory (Buss, 1995), object-relations theory (Chodorow, 1989), gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) and social role theory (Eagly, 1987).

Evolutionary theories of gender development take biology as their starting point. Functionalists (Shields, 1975) propose that men and women have evolved differently to fulfil their different and complementary functions, which are necessary for survival. Similarly, socio-biologists (e.g., Buss 1995) suggest that behavioural differences between men and women speak of different sexual and reproductive strategies. These have evolved to ensure that women and men are able to reproduce efficiently and effectively. In contrast, object-relations theorists focus on the effects of socialisation. Nancy Chodorow (1989) emphasises the care giving role of women in the development of sex differences. Chodorow asserts that the early bond between mother and child affects boys and girls differently.

Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981) postulates that children learn how their cultures and societies define the roles of men and women and then internalise this knowledge as a gender schema. Alice Eagly (1987) offers an explanation of gender development that is also based on the role of socialisation. Eagly's social role theory purports that the sexual division of labour and societal expectations based on stereotypes produce gender roles. She distinguishes between the communal and agentic dimensions of gender-stereotyped characteristics. The communal role is characterised by attributes such as raising children and showing emotions, attributes which are commonly associated with women. The agentic role is synonymous with being assertive and independent, commonly associated with public activities, and thus with men. Behaviour is strongly influenced by gender roles when cultures approve of gender stereotypes and have explicit expectations based on those stereotypes (Eagly 1987). Eagly suggests that gender roles are reflected in gender stereotypes.

2.3. Nature of gender stereotypes

In societies, patterns, norms and structures can be recognised. Societies can be characterised and compared based on descriptions of such social patterns, norms and structures. The members of a society are also aware, more or less consciously, of how their society functions, how they are expected to behave, what the rules are to respect. Such rules can be formal (like laws) or informal rules (like social norms about what is considered polite behaviour). Violations of the rules, if detected, will normally be sanctioned by society. Sanctions may again be formal (like a court sentence) or informal (like exclusion by peers).

Considering gender, patterns can also be recognised in how women and men respectively tend to be, how they tend to behave, the roles they occupy in society, how they look. For describing such patterns, setting off women against men, one necessarily has to look for the more common denominators within each group, the similarities (rather than the differences) within the groups, which unavoidably results in over-generalisations, denying the rich variety that exists within each group. Such over-generalisations lead to stereotypes: general categories that provide rough descriptions for each group, women and men. However, since such conceptions of how women and men are broadly thought of to be, to look, to behave, to act, this is also how society will tend to expect them to be, to look, to behave, to act. And people know they will be perceived by others and assessed against these expectations, which here may be called 'gender norms' (the social expectations in relation to people's gender). Therefore, since norms in general are of a prescriptive nature, so are gender norms. This dual reality of gender stereotypes is important: they have a descriptive and a prescriptive character (Prentice & Carranza, 2002).

The problem with gender stereotypes is that precisely because they are general beliefs, over-generalisations, they frequently lead to gender discrimination: people are treated unjustly by others, because these others are led by gender stereotypical beliefs instead of basing their acts on facts that are true and correspond to the individual case (Kite, Deaux, & Haines, 2008). In order to be able to recognise such gender-based discrimination where it occurs, as well as to avoid it, it is important to be aware of the existence of gender stereotypes, of their content, of the areas of everyday life where they come into play, of the mechanisms in which they influence

choices and decisions and of how precisely they lead to discrimination. Research on gender stereotypes contributes to this knowledge and is therefore necessary.

It is however important to keep in mind that gender stereotypes are over-generalisations of social patterns that exist. Stereotypes follow the evolutions in society, albeit with some delay. Stereotypes will therefore always exist, and breaking down the gender stereotypes themselves is only possible to the extent that society also changes.

2.4. Content and transmission of stereotypes

Stereotypes are "over-generalised beliefs about people based on their membership in one of many social categories" (Anselmi & Law, 1998). Gender stereotypes vary along four dimensions: traits, role behaviours, physical characteristics, and occupations (Deaux & Lewis, 1984) and are commonly presented as binary (Talbot, 2008). For example, whereas men are regarded as aggressive and competitive, women are more likely seen to be passive and cooperative. Traditionally, men have been viewed as breadwinners whereas women have been viewed as caretakers/housewives. Physical attributes and occupations have also been considered consistent or inconsistent with masculine or feminine roles.

Some authors claim that society continues to contribute to gender stereotyping and sustain this claim with research from various spheres like organisations, video games, academia, medicine (Agars, 2004; Dill & Thill, 2007; Hamberg, 2008; Van den Brink, 2011). Society transmits gender roles and shapes opportunities and expectations for both genders. Some approaches focus on early childhood as crucial in the formation of gender stereotypes (Eccles, Jacobs, & Harold, 1990; Fivush, Brotman, Buckner, & Goodman, 2000), whereas others underline the lifelong process of production and reproduction of gender roles (Clegg, 2001). Anyhow, there is ample research that demonstrates how, from a very early age, children are exposed to stereotypical gender perceptions. Parents not only transmit simplistic labels and automatic messages about what a feminine woman and a masculine man should be like, but also convey implicit and often unconscious messages through their own behaviour and activities. Moreover, the stereotypes introduced in the family and social environment are often reinforced by images in the mass media as well as widespread education practices (Low & Sherrard, 1999).



2.5. Changing gender stereotypes

Traditional, theoretical approaches assume that stereotypes do not change much over time (Luciano Arcuri & Mara Cadinu, 1998). While some studies seem to point to the persistence of stereotypes over long periods of time, other research was able to link societal changes to changes in stereotypical gender perceptions (Seguino, 2007). Structural approaches argue that the reduction of gender differences and the perceptions of differences are the main triggers leading to change. The representatives of the structural approach claim that gender differences are caused by the different social roles occupied by men and women (Gerstel & Sarkisian, 2006; Sarkisian & Gerstel, 2004). Women act as women because they occupy social positions, which require feminine behaviour. On the other hand, men occupy social positions, which require physical strength, leadership, competence, and autonomy (Deutsch, 2007). Consequently, gendered behaviour and attitudes are tightly related to different social roles occupied by men and women. Social representation theory takes the group as the place where social meanings are developed, shared and expressed (Moscovici, 1988). The social representation perspective also postulates that social changes can trigger changes in stereotypical perceptions. Camussi e.a. (Elisabetta Camussi & Leccardi, 2005) explain that feminine and masculine stereotypes may best be studied as social representations. These authors add that studying feminine and masculine stereotypes from a social representations perspective implies an attempt to overcome the opposition between static and dynamic gender stereotypes. They also promote qualitative research as the method of choice stating that qualitative research techniques enable a researcher to investigate the nature of speech, which (unlike, for instance, in the survey research) does not rely on predetermined items/statements. Qualitative research, according to the authors, proves a space for the analysis of natural language.

According to the social representation theory, stereotypical gender perceptions should have changed over the last forty years. A number of studies show that women's roles have indeed changed while those of men less so; that is they have remained relatively stable. One explanation why some stereotypical gender perceptions have not changed fundamentally despite societal changes has been that some stereotypes persist in order to act as a barrier against the uncertainties of new gender roles (E. Camussi, Montali, Colombo, Pirovano, & Grosso Gonçalves, 2009). However, other studies (Diekman & Eagly, 2000) show that stereotypes do adapt to social change and the stereotypes

concerning women notably have themselves evolved towards a 'fluidisation' of gender. Diekman and Eagly are able to demonstrate that not only have women's roles changed, but it is increasingly accepted for women to use male qualities. On the contrary change is not as rapid in what the role of men is concerned, meaning that men are more reluctant to develop female characteristics (Diekman & Eagly, 2000). In this context, it is interesting to refer to a more specific study about the costs associated with stepping out of a stereotypical role. Doucet and Merla (2007) traced the problems of house-husbands, i.e. the lack of legitimacy with which house-husbands were confronted (70 Canadian and 21 men in Belgium). Men who take paternity leave will have to pay the price in terms of lack of recognition, daily reactions expecting them to be inadequate and the absence of institutional recognition, among other things.

Another perspective on change of stereotypes is offered by Kite, Deaux and Haines (2008). They suggest that changes in gender stereotypes are possible citing their findings in social cognition. Firstly, they assert that gender stereotyping is automatic, just like a habit. Such a habit can be broken by developing cues for control or by formulating chronic egalitarian goals as suggested by (Moskowitz et al., 1999). They also underline that "understanding how gender stereotypes contribute to personal identity and self-esteem may be critical in understanding the conditions under which stereotypes are changed." (p.223) But in their final analysis, the authors conclude that stereotype change is possible when: 1) there is legislation that holds people accountable for their actions; 2) there is increased knowledge about the conditions of activation; 3) there are role models and egalitarian norms.

2.6. Quantitative studies

There are many quantitative, longitudinal studies, which attempt to capture factors causing change in gender roles, perceptions, stereotypes and attitudes towards more egalitarian and non-traditional attitudes and behaviour patterns (Amato & Booth, 1995; Berridge, Penn, & Ganjali, 2009; Bolzendahl & Myers, 2004; Brewster & Padavic, 2000; Brooks & Bolzendahl, 2004; David A. Cotter, Joan M. Hermsen, Seth Ovadia, & Reeve Vanneman, 2001). Most of them emphasise that there has been a revolution in gender roles, perceptions and stereotypes over the last 50 years (Blau & Kahn, 2006). The main factors linked to the change are: the development of feminism and non-traditional attitudes towards gender roles and perceptions, the impact of the medical advancement (notably the

contraceptive pill), increased levels of female educational attainment, and the growth in the number of women employed in higher employment positions (Berridge et al., 2009).

In these quantitative studies, the views and attitudes of people were studied. Most of the studies conclude that the main determinants for egalitarian attitudes are education levels, employment positions and status, family characteristics (Berridge et al., 2009). These studies give empirical evidence that women with higher education, with higher employment status and full-time workers are more likely to hold more egalitarian views. This, in turn, suggests that these attitudes lead to changes, which have implications for individual behaviour and opportunities leading to the different functioning of society and people within the society. However, these studies looked mainly at the macro-level and were conducted in the United States. Their conclusions, therefore, cannot necessarily be applied to the European context. Furthermore, information gained from the quantitative studies is limited, since it does not provide any deeper explanations why changes happen.

2.7. Added-value of the study: qualitative research in 27 Member States

The research on understanding change and its triggers is scarce. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to capture real life stories and to collect real life examples, which could contribute to a better understanding why change occurs, what the main actors and factors impeding/promoting change are. The existing quantitative studies merely identify what factors are considered to be relevant for the change. However, they are limited in providing the deeper level explanations and 'richer' information about the change. The present (qualitative) study may contribute in filling this gap.

Furthermore, the vast majority of the studies about change in gender-related perceptions, attitudes, and roles are carried out in the United States or in a limited number of European countries (e.g. Germany, the UK). Other European studies concern themselves with specific aspects of gender stereotypes such as gender stereotypes in occupation or in the media (Elisabetta Camussi & Leccardi, 2005; Hoebeke, 2008). By covering all 27 Member States, the study results will work towards a richer understanding of the phenomenon and possible ways to tackle it.

People's relation to gender stereotypes is not constant (or 'fixed') but rather 'fluid' and subject of on-going (re-) negotiation. This makes exploring the issue really challenging, but at the same time also very interesting.

3. Methodological approach and analytical framework





The present chapter presents the methodological approach that was followed in the course of the study, explains the methodological choices that were made when balancing the potential against the limitations of the methodological options.

3.1. Methodological approach and choices made

Researching gender stereotypes and different factors that create, impose, support and reproduce such stereotypes in all 27 EU countries is a complex challenge. The choice of a qualitative research approach consisting of the collection of people's stories in the form of narratives allows capturing the variety of areas of life affected by gender stereotypes and the richness of nuances where people's perceptions and experiences are concerned.

In line with social researchers advocating for the re-appropriation of the significance of substance and content to studies of the social construction process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995; McCracken, 1988; W. Miller & Crabtree, 1992), a depth-interviewing approach was adopted for the study, using open, direct questions to elicit stories and case narratives. In this approach, the interview is framed as an occasion for narrative production, in which the respondent becomes the story-teller (Shaw, 1999).

By collecting stories of people's life experiences, the followed approach comes close to 'life course sociology', applied in social work and clinical research. Through life course analysis, life course sociology makes 'change and development' the central focus of the work (Morgan, 1985), which is also the central concern of the present study. However, the aim of the present research was not to gain insight in people's complete lives, but rather to explore those areas, periods or points in the respondents' lives that were marked by gender-related elements.

By opting for the collection of 'life stories' as the methodological approach, the research leans on the principles of grounded theory in the sense that the possibility of 'serendipity'¹ is provided for (R. L. Miller, 1999). Indeed, the respondents could come up with their own concerns, topics, and stories, which may fall outside prepared topics. By taking an open stance to the research

subject, the approach allows new theory construction based on the data collected. While the core team for this reason decided not to place this study into a too strict theoretical framework, which would restrict the research and direct the researchers to certain types of findings, a limited literature review and desk research were nevertheless performed in order to get a deeper understanding of the gender stereotype-related issues and to define relevant concepts. The main results of this work are reflected in Chapter 2 above.

This means that not only does the research want to provide an analysis that rests on the theoretical foundations already laid out in gender theories, it also leaves space for new elements to be added or existing perspectives challenged. By doing so, this research can contribute valuable data that can serve as a baseline study in future longitudinal research on the subject.

Although the (topical) coding system to be used for the analysis was largely predefined, the approach followed for constructing the coding system remains compatible with the grounded theory approach, although does not strictly follow its logic, among others due to the fact that the fieldwork was performed in 27 EU Member States, thus 23 official EU languages. The pre-defined part of the code list was constructed based upon existing knowledge, sourced from feminist and gender theories. This list was subsequently complemented with additional codes based on the first fieldwork.

To build the online database and to analyse the collected data, the study team used the software MAXQDA², which allows storage, retrieval and analysis of texts, based on code words.

All national, decentralised data collection, as well as national analyses, have been undertaken in the national languages, in order to be able to grasp the full wealth of the stories provided by the respondents. In addition, to enhance the usability and accessibility of the data, quotes from the collected stories were selected, translated to English, and also coded and stored in the same database. Thus, the constructed database contains two 'layers' of data: (1) the full stories about people's life experiences in relation to gender in the national language from all EU Member States, (2) as well selected fragments from each of these stories, translated into English. The fragments selected for translation had to give a good representation of the whole story, while prioritising those parts of the story that contained relevant information to answer study's objectives.

1 Serendipity: the faculty or phenomenon of finding valuable or agreeable things not sought for (Source: Merriam-Webster dictionary)

2 www.maxqda.com (a free reader of this software, which allows access to and analysis of a constructed database, is available for download from the software website).

This together with the topical coding of the full stories and the selected quotes was done by the national researchers. In total, 23 researchers (22 women and one man) have contributed to the data collection work. All the researchers are well-skilled in qualitative social research and possess good gender expertise.

The field work itself consisted of eight qualitative (open-ended) face-to-face interviews in every country, equally balanced between female and male respondents and four age categories (18-24; 25-40; 41-60; over 60). The youngest age group respondents were higher education students in a social sciences/humanities field. This selection criterion was decided in the assumption that younger people have less 'life experiences' to provide an account of and therefore to gear the selection of respondents towards a population group that is likely to be more socially reflective than average. All respondents were to live (at the time of the interview, but not necessarily all of their lives) in urban areas, had to be country nationals, and speak the country language. No other criteria for the sampling of the respondents were defined.

The researchers have identified potential respondents by circulating notifications about the study mostly in their own circles. Subsequently, a 'long list' of candidate respondents (usually second or third degree contacts or acquaintances of the researchers) was established. Then the first selection based main selection criteria (notably sex and age) was made. These persons were contacted by the researchers and invited to participate in the study. In explaining the project's aims to respondents, the use of the terms 'gender', 'gender stereotypes', 'gender perceptions', 'gender roles' were avoided. Rather, it was announced that the study deals with 'the roles of women and men, how these change, and which similarities and differences exist across Europe'.

Each respondent was invited to share with the interviewer (at least) two stories, examples or anecdotal situations where they felt their being a woman or a man had played a role at a certain point in their life. At the end of the 1 to 3-hour long interviews, the respondents were given the opportunity to interpret their own stories within the redefined guidelines. This process involved determining the temporal dimension of the story, the 'scaling' of the story on a number of qualifying aspects and the identification of key actors in the stories.

In addition, the socio-demographic details about the respondent were collected by the researcher. All stories were transcribed, anonymised, and the main theme of each story was determined by the researcher. From each story, those sections were selected that capture the essence of the story. These quotes were translated to English, while keeping as close as possible

to the spoken language. Subsequently, all stories and all quotes, with the related socio-demographic information about the respondent and with the self-interpretation by the respondent, were uploaded in the database by the national researchers and coded with topical codes.

After a quality control (and corrections where needed), all quotes were read and coded with analytical codes (see below) by the core team. Finally, the national data sets were merged in one central database, to allow for an aggregate analysis.

3.2. Analytical framework

Two distinct (deductive) approaches have been adopted for the analysis of the data, each based on a set of codes. The so-called 'topical codes' allow to analyse the (rich) content and substance the respondents have offered through an open interview, in a relatively systematic fashion. The analytical codes help to structure the data according to the analytic 'problems' or, in other words, form the analytical framework that is directly aimed at answering the specific research objectives.

The codes contained in the **topical code list** are based on previous theoretical work on the subject of gender stereotypes, on the gender expertise of the core team researchers, and complemented by codes that were found missing in the list by the researchers. Eight broad themes were predefined, covering the main areas of life that could be addressed by the stories: education; professional career; childhood, family life and relationships; health; leisure; violence; identity; societal context. Whereas the topical code list was largely predefined, words were added based on the two pilot rounds of fieldwork performed by the core team members as well as during the first two weeks of fieldwork by the national researchers. After that point, the topical code list was closed for further additions. The list of topical codes, organised according to broader themes, is included in Annex 3 (together with the indication of the number of coded fragments for the respective codes).

The **analytical code list** has been derived from the research objectives and was complemented with codes aimed at gaining the best possible understanding of mechanisms that lead (or not) to changes in gender perceptions. The analytical coding of the English language quotes was tested by each of the core team members individually, each for one country. Subsequently, the experience was discussed, as well as the difficulties and/or hesitations about which situations (fragments) to attribute or not to specific codes. By doing this, a coherent



and shared understanding of the codes and how they would be used was built up.

The overview below presents the analytical codes, as well as those situations/realities that were aimed to be captured with them. The research team consciously decided to keep these codes quite broad, in order to be able to grasp the particularities and to understand the complexity of issues once the detailed analysis of all fragments coded with the respective codes is performed.

The socio-demographic information about the respondents as well as the self-interpretation of the stories by the respondents themselves provided further insights to deepen the analysis.

Lastly, the short country reports drafted by the national researchers and reflecting their own, qualitative interpretation of their national work, has served as input for the analysis.

Code	Fragments aimed to be captured deal with:
Change	Constraining; enabling; barriers/obstacles; opportunities; results of gender stereotype change
Dealing with stereotypes	People's reactions to gender stereotypes/ stereotyped situations: 'fight; flight; freeze (no action)'; (ab-)using of stereotypes (tapping into the stereotype); other forms of 'dealing with'
Dimensions of stereotyping	Personality traits; societal roles; skills and competences; physical appearance; emotions
Effects of stereotypes	In which areas are people's lives affected by gender stereotypes (where are results and impacts situated): physical; psychological/emotional; relational; personal development; material; other
Autonomy versus control	Whether and the extent to which people have (or not) control or decision-making power regarding their own life choices / situations
Perceptions of inequality/ unfairness	Focus here is the inequality/unfairness: when does something become perceived as such (and when not)? This code aims at identifying what makes the difference; when something is accepted as a 'difference' and when it becomes perceived as unfair or unequal. Also coded here are situations the researchers tend to see as an inequality, while the respondent did not – in order to (try to) clarify the perceptions.
Inter-generational differences	This code captures those fragments of texts that indicate how gender perceptions have changed from one generation to the next.
Norms/social patterns and values	Norms and social patterns are concepts that are near to each other, whereas values are clearly a different notion. The codes are put together because it is not possible (too arbitrary) to attribute story fragments to either one or the other since it is not always clear whether a respondent reflects what society expects (norm) or whether it is an internalised stance (value).
Culture and tradition	Context-specific elements that can be explained as rooted in the history of the society (it is recognised there might be overlap to some extent with 'norms').

3.3. Limitations, challenges and encountered difficulties

The topic of the study as well as the methodological choices made to respond to the initial objectives raised for the study consequently lead to some limitation of the study that need to be recognised as such. Due to

limited resources and the wish to cover all EU Member states through face-to-face interviews in the national language, the sample size per country had to be limited to eight respondents. That in turn led to a decision to apply only basic sampling criteria, leaving out characteristics such as urban or rural living environments, ethnic background, sexual orientation or any other possibly relevant factors.

Inevitably, the 'simplification' of the sampling rules for the selection of respondents has produced an effect of homogenisation and has possibly led to an effective

reduction of the diversity within the sample. As a result, the sample which for example shows a bias in terms of educational attainment and employment status (as presented in the next chapter) very likely represents 'the European middle class whites' rather than a cross-section of the European population. For this reason the study unfortunately does not allow for an analysis from an inter-sectionality point of view.

The researchers, readers of this report and those who will use and interpret the data in the future need to be conscious that the sample per country is quite small and therefore does not allow to make in-depth country comparisons or to formulate generalisations.

It is also worth considering that the study in itself is a 'construction' in various ways. Indeed, the narratives are constructed understandings of gender and gender roles in society, 'perceptions' of gender differences and not (necessarily) real differences which can be analysed in different ways (for example by psychological tests). In this respect, not only the discourse on behalf of the respondent, but also the formulation of the questions and any interventions of the researcher during the interview may be regarded as contributing to the way the perceived gender stereotypes have come to being. And while this research deals with the perceptions of the respondents, by engaging in the analysis of these perceptions, the researchers bring in also their own perceptions. The attempts to interpret and to reflect the results of the study in an orderly fashion, as done in this report, are constructions which may seem to present gender stereotypes as solid and fixed rather than as fluid, negotiated and under constant reconstruction in people's everyday lives. This dynamic reality becomes clear when reading through the variety of stories contained in the database but may get a bit lost in the static and (inevitably) partial reflection of the results in the form of a report.

The national researchers generally reported that recruiting the respondents and running the interviews went smoothly. Some did however note that it appeared more difficult to find men willing to participate in the study than women, since men often stated they had not reflected about the issue much and thus thought they would not have stories to offer. This difficulty appeared even more among the oldest age category.

4. Sample description and overview of collected narratives





The present chapter provides a description of the sample of respondents who were interviewed.

4.1. Number of respondents and narratives per country

In each country (27 EU Member States), eight respondents were to be interviewed and asked to offer a minimum of two stories. This approach yielded a minimum of sixteen stories per country. In total, 514 stories were

collected from 216 respondents, which correspond to an average of nineteen stories per country. In one country, 31 stories were collected from the eight respondents.

Table: Number of collected stories per country (N=514)

AT	BE	BG	CY	CZ	DE	DK	EE	ES
16	21	17	16	20	17	16	19	26
FI	FR	GR	HU	IE	IT	LT	LU	LV
16	22	21	31	21	17	16	16	20
MT	NL	PL	PT	RO	SE	SI	SK	UK
16	21	17	22	18	18	19	17	18

In total, 216 persons were interviewed for the study. There have been a few exceptions to the standard of eight respondents per country. In the UK and the Netherlands, seven instead of eight interviews were performed due to last minute cancellations by respondents. However, as can be seen in the above table, the minimum of 16 stories per country was met also in the UK and Netherlands. Lastly, ten (rather than eight) interviews were performed in Spain. The reason for doing two more interviews in this country has been the fact that during the interviewing of two respondents, these appeared to be gender specialists. These respondents offered strikingly insightful stories which were considered as atypical and potentially biasing the Spanish results. The stories from the gender experts were however kept in the database, but in the analysis considered separately.

4.2. Sample description

In every country, two persons (one woman and one man) were to be interviewed in each of the following four age categories: 18-24, 25-40, 41-60, and over 60 years of age. The youngest respondent in the sample was 18 years old (a Portuguese man), the oldest respondent was a 91 years old French woman.

In principle the sample was to be equally balanced between men and women and across the four age categories, and there have only been minor deviations.

Table: Number of respondents per age category (N=216)

	18 - 24	25 - 40	41 - 60	Over 60	Total	%
women	27	27	28	29	111	51%
men	26	26	27	26	105	49%
Total	53	53	55	55	216	100%

The respondents were asked of which level their highest obtained diploma is. The overview in the table that follows clearly shows that the majority of the respondents

who participated in the research are highly educated: 70% of the respondents have a university level degree, and up to 10% even a doctorate degree.

Table: Level of education: highest obtained diploma (by sex of respondents; N=216)

Education level	women		men		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
Pre-primary or primary	1	1%	-	-	1	0.5%
Lower secondary	5	5%	4	4%	9	4%
Upper secondary	14	13%	18	17%	32	15%
Non-university higher education	11	10%	8	8%	19	9%
First stage of higher education (Bachelor)	33	30%	30	29%	63	29%
Second stage of higher education (Master)	38	34%	28	27%	66	31%
Advanced academic degree (Ph.D.)	7	6%	15	14%	22	10%
Other	2	2%	2	2%	4	2%
Total	111	100%	105	100%	216	100%

Half of the respondents (51%) reported to be living in couple (married or cohabiting).

Table: Marital status by sex of respondents (N=216)

	single	married	divorced	widow(er)	cohabitating	other
women	29	35	20	5	16	6
men	27	47	10	1	12	8
Total	56	82	30	6	28	14

Respondents were asked how many children, for whom they are responsible, are living in their household. Answers ranged between zero (for 58% of the respondents) and five children (1 respondent: a 57 years old housewife from Luxembourg). 15% said to have one child in their household for which they are responsible; 17% have two, 6% have three, 2% have four.

Two of the respondents are single women with children, for whom they were responsible, both worked full-time. No single men with children in their household for which they are responsible were interviewed for this study.

The majority (63%) of the respondents had a paid job. The spread of the respondents over the various employment categories was well balanced between the sexes.

Table: Employment status of respondents (by sex of respondents; N=216)

Employment status	women	men	Total
Full-time employee	45	43	88 (41%)
Part-time employee	12	10	24 (11%)
Self-employed	9	12	21 (10%)
Unemployed	2	1	3 (1%)
Student	20	22	42 (19%)
Pensioner	16	15	31 (14%)
Housewife / -man	3	-	3 (1%)
Other	4	2	6 (3%)



68 respondents (or 31% of the sample), of which 32 women and 36 men, reported to live in a household both with partner in paid employment.

4.3. Spread of narratives over thematic areas

As explained above, eight broad themes had been defined to which people's stories could be related: education (EDU); professional career (PRO); childhood, family life and relationships (CFR); health (HEA); leisure

(LEI); violence (VIO); identity (ID); societal context (SOC). Each story was attributed to one of these themes by the responsible national researcher. Although naturally one and the same story often touched upon various themes, the most prominent theme in the story was in such cases indicated. The two themes most frequently addressed were 'childhood, family life and relationships' (35% of all stories) and 'professional career' (24% of all collected stories, but double as many times told by women than by men).

The overview of the distribution of the stories over the different themes for the total sample and by sex of the respondents is shown in the table below.

Table: Number of stories per theme, offered by women and by men

	CFR	PRO	EDU	ID	SOC	LEI	VIO	HEA	Total
women	82	82	35	22	23	13	10	4	271 (53%)
men	96	41	24	28	21	23	6	4	243 (47%)
Total	178 (35%)	123 (24%)	59 (11%)	50 (10%)	44 (9%)	36 (7%)	16 (3%)	8 (2%)	514

Considering the age of the respondents, it appears that the number of stories offered by the different age categories was balanced, with each category having contributed about a quarter of the stories (23% by the youngest group; 24% by the group aged 25-40; 27% by those aged 41-60; 25% by those over 60 years of age). The stories told by the youngest age category were quite balanced over the different themes, with the

themes 'childhood, family life and relationships' and 'education' being addressed most often. The main theme dealt with by the age group above (25 to 41 years old) was 'professional career'. For those older than 40, the theme 'childhood, family life and relationships', clearly prevailed (with 43% of the stories offered by these respondents relating to this theme).

Table: Number of stories per theme, by age category of the respondents

Age:	CFR	PRO	EDU	ID	SOC	LEI	VIO	HEA	Total
18 to 24	28	20	26	17	11	14	4	-	120
25 to 40	35	41	7	14	9	12	5	2	125
41 to 60	62	32	12	8	9	8	4	3	138
Over 60	53	30	14	11	15	2	3	3	131
Total	178	123	59	50	44	36	16	8	514

The table below, which presents the number of stories for each theme originating from the different EU countries, shows that there has been some variability in the coverage of the themes across the countries.

Table: Number of stories per theme, by EU country

Country	CFR	PRO	EDU	ID	SOC	LEI	VIO	HEA	total
AT	5	4	1	2	2	1	1	0	16
BE	8	9	1	1	1	0	1	0	21
BG	8	3	2	2	1	1	0	0	17
CY	5	4	3	0	4	0	0	0	16
CZ	7	7	5	0	0	1	0	0	20
DE	4	5	2	5	0	0	1	0	17
DK	4	7	4	0	1	0	0	0	16
EE	5	8	0	2	2	2	0	0	19
ES	11	5	1	1	2	5	1	0	26
FI	6	2	1	4	1	2	0	0	16
FR	10	7	1	0	1	2	0	1	22
GR	7	7	5	0	0	1	0	1	21
HU	11	5	2	5	4	1	2	1	31
IE	6	2	3	3	4	1	2	0	21
IT	10	2	1	0	0	3	1	0	17
LT	9	5	1	0	1	0	0	0	16
LU	6	4	1	1	0	3	1	0	16
LV	3	3	4	8	0	0	1	1	20
MT	10	4	1	0	1	0	0	0	16
NL	4	3	3	4	4	0	1	2	21
PL	5	2	3	3	2	2	0	0	17
PT	4	6	3	1	2	4	2	0	22
RO	5	3	2	2	4	1	0	1	18
SE	3	7	4	0	1	3	0	0	18
SI	11	3	1	0	0	3	0	1	19
SK	7	2	2	2	3	0	1	0	17
UK	4	4	2	4	3	0	1	0	18
total	178	123	59	50	44	36	16	8	514

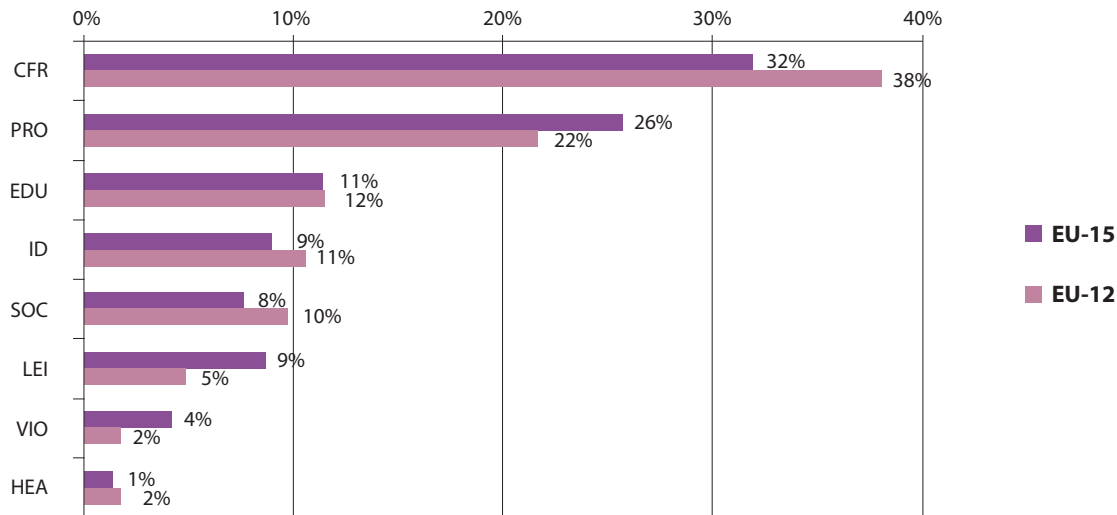
Grouping the EU-15 and EU-12 countries³ together shows that the variability in how frequently the re-

spective themes were addressed in both groups of countries is rather limited. The chart hereunder shows the distribution of the stories over the eight thematic areas, expressed in percentage of the total number of stories originating from each country group. As can be seen from this chart, the largest difference in how often a theme was addressed is 6%, recorded for the theme 'childhood, family life and relationships' and addressed most often by the EU-12 respondents.

³ EU-15 refers to the composition of the EU as of 1 January 1995: Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. EU-12 refers here to the 12 countries that joined the EU most recently: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia.



Chart: Number of stories per theme by 'old' and 'newest' EU member states (EU-15 and EU-12), in percentage of the total number of stories originating from each country group

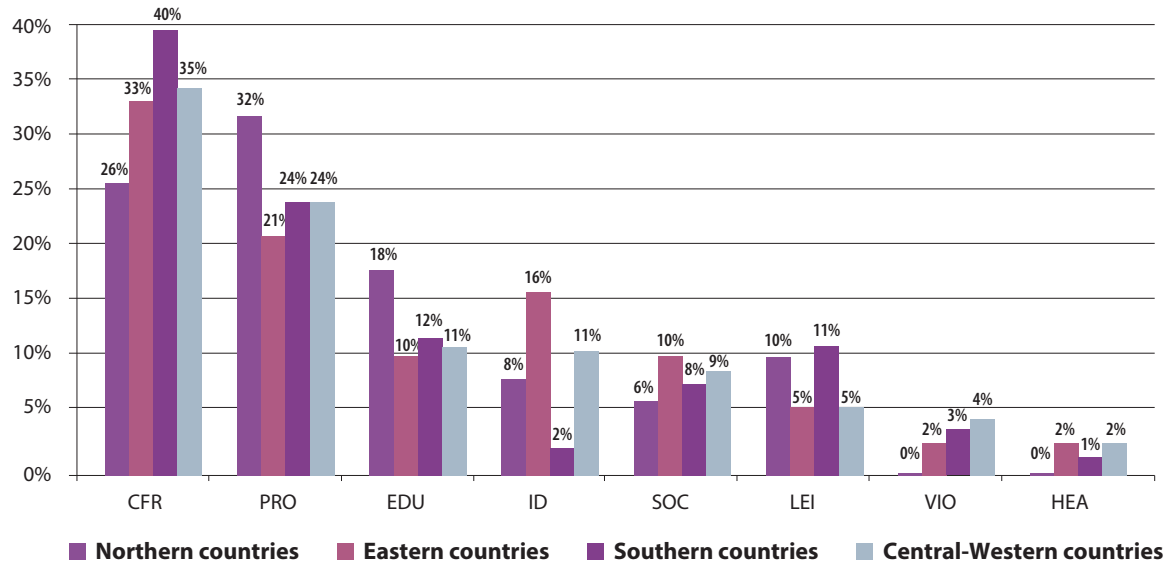


Another way of grouping the countries is by region. The next chart distinguishes four groups of countries in the following manner: Central and Western European countries (AT, BE, CZ, DE, FR, IE, LU, NL, SI, SK, UK), Southern European countries (CY, ES, GR, IT, MT, PT), Eastern European countries (BG, EE, HU, LT, LV, PL, and RO) and Northern countries (DK, FI, SE). The distribution over the themes of the stories offered by each country group is in this chart again shown in percentage, calculated on the total number of stories originating from this group of countries.

This representation allows a somewhat more refined insight into variations across the countries. The highest variability in how often the respective themes were addressed can be noticed in the group of Southern countries. Up to 40% of the stories originating from Southern

countries dealt with the theme 'childhood, family life and relationships', whereas this share was only 26% in the Northern countries. Also noticeable is that the theme 'identity' was far less often addressed in the Southern countries than elsewhere: only 2% of the stories originating from Southern Europe deal with this theme, while it was most frequently addressed in Eastern Europe (16% of the stories from this region). Another observation based on this country grouping is that for each of the regions, the theme 'childhood, family life and relationships' has been the one addressed most often, except in the group of Northern countries where the stories that deal with gender perceptions in relation to 'professional career' represent the largest share. While the themes 'violence' and 'health' were not often central to the stories across the board, none of the stories from the Northern countries has any of these themes as central subject.

Chart: Number of stories per theme by region, in percentage of the total number of stories originating from each country group



4.4. Sample-related considerations

As can be concluded from the above sample description, and as set out in the previous chapter, the sampling rules that were applied resulted in a certain homogenisation of the sample. The researchers did not have a possibility to seek for variety and diversity among the respondents. In the end the interviewed respondents in their majority belonged to the white, highly educated, middle-class and thus their experience might not be representative of Europe's entire population.

The sampling rules did not include sexual orientation as criterion; neither were the respondents asked to provide this information during their interviews, unless they mentioned it spontaneously. Only three respondents talked about their sexual orientation (two stating they are homosexual, one - bisexual). However, in their stories, none of these respondents raised issues in relation to their love or partner relationships, but rather talked about their sexual orientation in view of identity issues. Therefore, all stories in the database that deal with partner relationships are heterosexual relationships.

As mentioned above, because of the limited representativity of the sample in the study the research is not suited for an analysis of multiple and diverse realities of gender experiences and perceptions of gender stereotypes taking into account ethnic background, class, religion, race, sexual orientation or other relevant factors.

5. Dimensions of gender stereotypes, underlying norms and values





This chapter deals with the content of gender stereotypes that were identified in the stories offered by the respondents. While gender stereotypes commonly are considered as assumptions about traits (or characteristics) and behaviours of women and men, it is also recognised - in existing literature on the content and structure of gender stereotypes - that more dimensions of stereotypes can be distinguished. Other dimensions are the societal roles of women and men, skills and competences, physical appearance, and emotions. Below, the contents of the gender stereotypes are described as they appeared from the stories, according to these dimensions. It must be recognised that at times this categorisation might be to some extent artificial and even partially overlapping. This is also why emotions have not been dealt with as a separate dimension of stereotypes but have been considered either as part of the personality traits (where assumed emotional predispositions are regarded) or under behaviour (when the expression of emotions is concerned).

This chapter furthermore pays attention to the norms and values that underpin gender stereotypes. It aims at identifying those gender norms for which respondents expressed different or opposing individual normative positions, in order to detect which existing gender norms may be prone to being challenged.

Since gender stereotypes have both a descriptive and a prescriptive nature, the prescriptive character of gender stereotypes refers to the normative power gender (pre-) conceptions have. Indeed, people (women and men) behave and act, knowing they are evaluated based upon (normative) conceptions of what is regarded as appropriate for their sex. While there is ample literature on gender stereotypes that points out the persistence of and the difficulty to change gender norms, the present research aims to focus on detecting opportunities for and barriers to change. For this reason, it is important to pay particular attention to the dynamic nature of gender stereotypes and norms. Keeping in mind that the ultimate goal is to undo gender inequalities or to dismantle gendered constructs, it is necessary to understand the social processes that underlie resistance to conventional gender relations and how dominant gender roles can be challenged.

In the present research, 514 narratives relating to gender have been collected from 216 EU citizens from all 27 Member States. These narratives are individuals' stories that provide insight into people's perceptions of social norms and how these individuals relate to these norms. In the analysis, the research team has paid particular attention to those narratives in which people express individual normative positions that oppose the dominant norms as they perceive them. The underlying idea of this approach is that when such individual normative

positions gain legitimacy and become to be shared by a growing group in society, they can become an alternative norm that can challenge the dominant one. This dynamic perspective should hence allow to trace and to provide further insights into structural change processes.

In what follows, the different dimensions of gender stereotypes are addressed together with the societal norms (as perceived by the respondents) and individual normative positions as far as such positions were expressed. At the same time, the research team has sought to identify the values⁴ underpinning both societal norms and individual normative positions that are put forward as legitimising the norms or respectively, the individual normative positions.

5.1. Personality traits

5.1.1. Gender perceptions relating to personality traits

'Typical' female and male personality traits are commonly known and described in the literature. Examples of personality traits that are typically associated with women are emotional, warm and kind, interest in children, sensitive, friendly, clean, attention to appearances, patient, gentle, understanding, and devoted. Examples of characteristics typically associated with men are assertive, controlling, active, competitive, independent, self-confident, athletic, business-minded, ambitious, decisive, capable of leadership, rational, aggressive, and willing to take risks.

Research has shown that the association between gender and these traits is remarkably consistent over time, geographically and across respondents' age and sex.

The same stereotypes could also be recognised in the collected stories. Women have been described as emotional, social, 'more human', empathetic, communicative, intuitive, gentle, dutiful, neat, orderly, weak, manipulative, and not smart. Men are seen as rational, factual, ambitious, strict, 'having a big ego', tough, strong, disciplined, responsible. The stereotypical traits for girls and boys are very similar, and emphasise the obedience, diligence, calmness, creativity of girls and the naughtiness,

4 The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology defines a value (in attitude research) as 'ideas held by people about ethical behaviour or appropriate behaviour, what is right or wrong, desirable or despicable'.

playfulness, disorderliness, laziness (when it comes to duties or tasks) of boys.

These beliefs, either supported by the respondents or experienced and recognised by the respondents as supported by others, are presented in many different stories. The stories clearly reveal the descriptive and prescriptive components of gender stereotypes: how the qualities that tend to be ascribed to persons of one sex are also those that tend to be required of these individuals. The following quotes may illustrate how pronounced and alive these stereotypical views are, how they may manifest themselves and how they put the sexes not only as complements but also as opponents to each other.

“I believe this sort of a pattern is right, that the one who maintains some emotional atmosphere or well-being is a woman. Mutually, but mostly a woman. That is the idea of keeping the family together, domesticity. And my wife had problems with emotional expressions. She did not express emotions neither towards me nor towards kids. (...) And I saw it and we often quarrelled about it. And that was one of the reasons why I decided that I did not want her anymore.” (SK_M_39)

“If you are reasoning things out with your emotions and I am reasoning things out with my intellect, we’re not going to come to an agreement. So it has to come from both sides, let us say. (...) I feel that, yes, maybe I can empathise with that person. I understand a little bit. I’ll never be like them, I think, but I can understand what a woman goes through; how a woman’s mind works. (...) The dynamic she goes through, the small processes that she goes through... I think that now I can empathise with a woman’s feelings, the dynamics, the way her mind works, what she goes through.” (MT_M_24)

Several respondents do recognise the stereotypes and the ambiguities these create for how people are expected to deal with each other, how their behaviour will be interpreted and how they will be assessed accordingly. The example that follows is a quote from a young, Belgian woman who points out how gender stereotypes influence interpersonal relations.

Stories furthermore reveal how people are confronted to assumptions that communicate they are being assimilated with the stereotype, which may cause confusion and conflicts in their relationships with others but also with one’s own identity.

“I think that a woman and her soul are different; she is gentler, more appropriate for caring.” (SL_M_67)

“Because [as a police woman] I had worked three years earlier in (this neighbourhood), I had asked to return to (this neighbourhood), and then I was told that this would not be possible because they needed ‘men with balls’ there. And I, as a woman, would not be able to do anything there, my approach would be too soft, and it had to be finished talking with the people, it had to be the rough-and-ready way. And for that, I would... I would not fit that picture.” (BE_F_38)

“I think that it’s clear that there is always an ambiguity, often an ambiguity between men and women and so clearly in working life, it is not easy to manage this difference. It’s really stupid but it’s a stereotype, or a hidden stereotype, but a male boss who goes to thank his workers and puts his hand on their shoulder and says “nice work” and so on – that would be seen as natural. If it’s someone charismatic, no one would worry. But if a woman did that, it would be seen totally differently. (...) She has to show that she’s stricter, much more... Because women also have a maternal side, and there a barrier has to be put up. Whereas a man doesn’t have this maternal side, so he can just show what might be called minor gestures.” (BE_F_22)



“I work in the field of human relations, in contact with people through training, coaching and other things. And here for once, being a man brings a range of preconceived ideas about how we will deal with human relationships. (...) That is to say that as a man, I would be more straightforward, I would pay less attention to the emotional, human side. I would obviously be eminently more rational, and so on. So all that heavy stuff though... I would have a special aptitude for mathematical things, planning, organising, something innate, that comes from who knows where. So there... where basically I'm completely useless by the way (...) I am facing this kind of assumption that as a man in human resources, people expect me to tackle things in a technical, organised and structured way, which is not me.” (BE_M_39)

“If I meet a guy, I instinctively become like one of the lads. And I become like his mate. Like play-punching each other and banto, and all those like friendly insults and stuff like that. Because I get so worried, I get very worried that I will make myself vulnerable and then I will get my feelings hurt, because I think, whether I like it or not, you know guys can be very much... hurt those feelings and they don't even know about it.” (UK_F_19)

5.1.1. Norms and normative positions relating to traits

Since girls and women are generally thought of as vulnerable and unable to defend themselves while the stereotypical man, on the other hand, is portrayed as potentially violent and regarding women as sex objects, it is generally believed that girls and women need to be protected (from sexual assaults). The values which are regarded as at stake are the girl's (or woman's) physical integrity, as well as (for some) her own and her family's honour. As a consequence, parents usually display a (very) protective behaviour towards their daughters. This results in girls being brought up significantly less freely and being more strictly controlled than boys. Many respondents pointed out such aspects as girls being allowed to start going out at an older age than boys, they have to be home earlier when they go

out, they cannot go out or be on the streets alone at night, they may not be allowed to spend the night at a friend's place, they cannot travel alone. While many respondents, women and men, point out the seriously constraining effects such protective measures have on the girls, most nevertheless recognise they share the view that girls and women need to be protected more than boys (who are believed to be more able to defend themselves since they are stronger). It seems that the reasoning which is followed in such cases is: 'it is better to be safe than sorry'.

“Women were put in a glass bubble. However I never felt it. I didn't feel, but... but I saw it, I saw people that were treated like a little flower that should be well kept.” (PT_F_70_SOC)

“Last year I stayed for a week here in city A while there was a festival. A friend of mine who lives on the Costa da Morte [rural area] came here to spend some days at my place. She had a lot of trouble at home because she was coming to a guy's place. In fact, she had to tell them that I was a homosexual in order to be allowed to come.” (ES_M_21_LEI)

“In our culture, in the West, this is in a way the image of the man, who is physically strong. But nowadays, somehow this is changing. This is not necessarily a sign of what it means to be a man. Or maybe in a sense, it is falling off. And of course, not to forget, the purely physical strength is not necessarily a part of the, so to say, identity. That is, the power of the body can be a part of having a male body, but does not necessarily mean that this person builds his identity precisely on this quality, that he turns it, in some sense, in the thing that defines his gender.” (BG_M_24_LEI)

Typically, 'masculine' men are thought of as physically strong. It appears, however, that the prescriptive intensity of the societal view that masculinity requires physical strength is more relaxed nowadays than it used to be.

5.2. Behaviour

5.2.1. Gender perceptions relating to behaviour

Behaviour of men and women is generally expected to be in accordance with the traits that are typically attributed to the respective sexes. So women would be expected to behave politely, modestly, caring (especially for children), delicately and in a socially apt way. Respondents indicated that women may demonstrate their fragility and weaknesses and would thus not be expected to carry heavy things, for example, while the expression of emotions would be seen as 'natural' for women.

“In short, such qualities, which are common to a typical woman who pees in her pants, all these tears, emotions, and so on. These are the qualities which I automatically assign to the women's side. To that side which is soft, good, and weak. I can tolerate such qualities in a woman. I do not need to search for another explanation why she pees in her pants. Well, she is a woman. Well, unfortunately, all that is assigned to femininity.” (LT_M_34)

Men, on the other hand, may behave more robustly, directly, at times confrontational. In professional contexts, men are said to be goal-focussed and to speak in curt sentences (as opposed to women notably). They are believed to like going out with friends, drinking beer, bragging, displaying so-called macho behaviour and telling rude jokes. At the same time, they are expected to care for and be attentive to women and their needs, for example by helping them to carry heavy loads, keeping doors open, changing flat tyres.

“My wife is not this type of a woman, who could take over some of these male responsibilities. She has always been a very sensitive person, who is easy to hurt, easy to... If someone said a bad word to her, she would later be sad for three days. So I have never tried to make her do things, drive somewhere, talk to someone in a robust way. So one had to cope with all of this. So it was.” (PL_M_56)

“I was in the subway and my bank card didn't work, and I had no coins and I was a little muddled. And the sir who was behind me volunteered to give me the money. I even didn't need to ask for it, it was an immediate thing. I think that the fact of being a girl makes things easier. And in daily life, things... I don't know. Helping to open doors, if I'm too heavy: 'oh miss, do you need help?' Basic stuffs... to go to the gas station... I remember that, last summer, I was driving a van, I didn't know how to put gasoline in that van and I was freaking out because I didn't want to play that role of: 'hey, sorry, can you help me?' And then a sir volunteered immediately to help me. I think if it is with men, they get more suspicious.” (PT_F_24)

Behaviour by either of the sexes that does not meet the expectations for their gender is likely to be met with misunderstanding (as is the case for respondent SE_M_32, quoted here below) or even worse, societal disapproval. This starts already in childhood and is manifested in the different treatment of boys and girls in their upbringing, whereby boys are taught to hide their emotions, sufferings and weaknesses, while girls can express these freely – except where it comes to those emotions associated with male attitudes: anger, stubbornness, resistance to authority.

“I have some friends who have babies. And if you walk with a female friend who has a pram, then you're automatically interpreted as the father. (...) Because who would want to take a walk with a woman you are not together with? [laughing]” (SE_M_32)

“I feel that a woman who gets angry is not [seen as angry] because she has a reason to be angry, but because she has PMS or is pregnant... Or, as I remember since my own high-school years, people talked about people not having had sex for a long time, and if that was the case, you were [seen as] frustrated. And people didn't talk that way about men, only about women. One hasn't the right or isn't entitled to give a roar... [as a woman] (SE_F_29)



“Yes, and during childhood, when we were playing football, or riding a bike and fell, and one of us hurt himself, they were looked at in disapproval if they started crying, screaming, while for women this was allowed. It wasn't allowed for us, that how it's like. I mean starting from childhood, you were taught to sublimate your feelings, to show contempt towards pain, while in the case of women, they were actually encouraged to express their feelings as openly as possible.” (RO_M_19)

Some respondents relativise or even ridicule certain preconceptions about girls and boys, women and men, and offer alternative images of themselves (or others).

“I have never been a stereotypical boy. I used to play with dolls when I was a child.” (SK_M_23)

“There is also the preconception that men don't gossip. (laughs) To me, it seems that it's worse, or just as bad.” (RO_F_24)

Stories indicate how at teenage age, girls and boys tend to develop sex-segregated lives, activities and peer groups (see for example by UK_F_38, SK_M_71, IT_M_53, HU_M_64). Still, a few younger respondents admit having felt more comfortable with peers from the opposite sex (for example LT_F_23, SK_M_23).

“(In friendships with boys) there is much less emotions, less talking. There is no such a thing as talking about one subject many hours. Indeed, it is very different. There isn't only the superficial stuff. If it is deep, even the deep things can be discussed in a very precise and concrete way. There are open and direct conversations about feelings and an open suggestion for a help and so on. It isn't the same as in the friendship with women when you are trying to disclose your feelings and your condition for hours. Instead of this, you just precisely point out your situation and condition... I love this - to be specific...” (LT_F_23)

People's views on sexuality and seduction are also embedded with stereotypical beliefs. It is a common belief that men like to have sex, need sex, and like to seduce women (see for example FI_M_60, RO_M_65). Their related behaviour tends to be explained by the 'hunter attitude' in men, a result from ancestors' traditions and role patterns (see for example CY_M_46, DK_M_49, RO_M_44). Consequently, when men behave like 'womanisers', such behaviour is generally regarded with more tolerance by society than when women behave like 'men hunters'. Even suspicion of seduction on the part of women tends to be condemned. The societal norm that it is the role of the male and not of the female individual to make advancements to another can be seen in the same light.

“Men are generally considered as heroes when beside their wife they have one or more mistresses, while the woman is considered a whore.” (RO_M_65)

“If I communicate with women, it is normal. If I communicate with men, I seduce them.” (SK_F_23)

“Everybody knows that during parties, it is guys who are more pushy and pick up girls. Sometimes, they grab your butt or start talking or accost you and it is much more difficult for a girl to defend herself than for a man. But this is life, right? You can do nothing about it. Some girls explain to themselves that it is the case since they are attractive, some others consider it loutishness, yes? I think the latter. And this is it.” (PL_F_20)

“Everything you see on TV gives a distorted picture of sexuality. I do think that it changes over time, but surely not as much as TV suggests. You should pay attention next time when you watch a series or a movie and there is something about sex. I think, in 90 to 95% of the cases, it is the woman who takes the initiative. You should pay attention, it is systematically done like that. And this is a big lie. But why do we all keep this lie alive? That has very much to do with gender. It is because men would like the world to be that way. Men want more sex than women, so they fantasise a world in which every woman is eager to have sex with them, so they make movies that show such a world.” (NL_M_67)

Traffic is yet another sphere where the stereotypes of men and women manifest themselves and are recognised by the respondents. Male drivers are fond of their cars, like driving their cars in a sporty way, like speed, like to accelerate (see for example EE_M_73, IE_M_60), and may regard female drivers as less able than men to drive a car (SE_M_63, LT_M_34, AT_F_21), not deserving their place in traffic (BG_M_27).

“When you drive, generally a woman behind a wheel is something that is always considered to be... Often you do not let them go, right? However, I am a gentleman and I like letting women go when they already drive their cars somewhere and want for instance to join in the traffic.” (PL_M_28)

5.2.2. Social patterns, norms and normative positions relating to behaviour

The analysis has shown that it is not always easy to distinguish social patterns from norms. The norms that relate to the behaviour of women and men may sometimes (also) be regarded as social patterns that follow from the norms that relate to the sexes' presumed traits, and related social role. This becomes especially clear when considering the norms in terms of roles and behaviour that follow from the presumed female weakness and male strength traits, as described below.

The man as the protector of the vulnerable and fragile woman

Since women are believed to be fragile, weak and vulnerable while men are strong (traits), the man is expected to protect and support the woman (social role). Prescriptions for men in terms of behaviour that follow from the above normative beliefs are that men should help women to carry heavy weights, offer his coat when she is cold, go first when there is suspicion of a risk, face any threat that might fall upon her, defend women's physical integrity. This goes as far as removing insects from the house (or tent).

“For example, in wildlife, it's natural to come across unwelcome living beings, like bugs or lizards or sometimes mammals, that one isn't expecting... like... rabbits, or even rodents. (...) Usually girls... at least girls that I know and with whom I have been camping, they stand back and try to call a man to solve this problem.” (PT_M_18)

The behavioural norms related to the 'protector' and 'protégée' roles of men and women respectively are not commonly challenged. On the whole, it seems that both women and men enjoy the courtesy and respectfulness that is interpreted as implied in the mutual relations marked by this behaviour. A few respondents even explicitly stated that while this behaviour could be regarded as condescending towards women and as expressions of their inferior position in relation to men, they rejected this interpretation.

“I think it is equality. (...) Because it is my choice: do I allow somebody to let me go first. And, let's say, I do understand that somewhere it might be perceived as weakness or offense. But at the same time, yes, these are every country's behaviour habits and norms. (...) I think this is equality, this is not inequality, if you... It is politeness to let someone go first, to help and so. (...) On the whole, I enjoy being a woman a lot.” (LV_F_25_ID1)

“If a man travelling can hold two suitcases, he should not expect a woman to carry a suitcase of forty kilos! This is not equality. This is a matter of courtesy. Men should be polite.” (CY_M_46_PRO)



“The way I behave demands respect. Especially from men. It requires respect. I will give a look, speak, smile, or not respond sometimes and... There is no possibility that they would not give me a bow, open a door in front of me, help me, or... Apart from this, I learned one thing and I consider it very beautiful: I ask for help. As a matter of fact, I tell everybody about it. I am not one of these who would drag some loads. I say: “Could you help me please?” And it works out in a totally normal way. And as some tell me, it’s not a request. It’s not a request and it is impossible not to do and they do it in such a kind and nice way. And I have never humiliated anyone. Never. And now, it helps a lot. And here, I believe that my femininity is a very, very good thing.” (PL_F_73_ID)

“I am a social worker. My job is about assistance, counselling and emergency assistance for children from low-income families. (...) And I have clients, a couple who have been visiting the club already for a long time, two gypsy teenagers, kind of. And this guy is really aggressive, he gets angry quite often, and he punches his partner. And we talk about this. At least, the good point is that when we talk together, he is eager to change this, and he knows that he has a problem. But at the same time, those gypsy girls often consider that it’s normal that men use to beat women, and that slapping a girl is not such a big thing.” (CZ_F_24_PRO1)

Violent behaviour

A social pattern that is recognised by various respondents is that men are more inclined to display violent behaviour than women. Violent behaviour is usually disapproved of by society and can thus be regarded as a ‘negative norm’. However, it seems that violent behaviour on the part of men tends to be regarded with some tolerance (or understanding) since a tendency to violence and aggression is believed to be in men’s nature.

“(...) it is seen more in boys than in girls, because they are entitled to that: ‘I am a man, I have to exercise power over someone to demonstrate what I think I am.’ I mean that it’s not a bravery situation, but, in that moment, in that little head, they think so and start to use violence. Girls don’t.” (PT_F_33_LEI)

“So, they brought up my generation like that – that you have to listen to your man, he beats you up and does whatever he likes with you, but you just have to listen to him, that’s that. If he beats you up, it’s normal, you are guilty for something and that’s it. And you have to agree with this, that is how they taught us.” (BG_F_47_CFR)

Men’s physical violence towards women appears still to be considered as socially acceptable in some contexts, as noted by one female respondent who is a social worker.

Rules and risks

In general, it can be seen that the ignoring of rules as well as risk taking tend to be behaviour that is easily associated with the male sex. This societal expectation is in line with the fact that naughtiness is regarded as a common trait in boys. While respect for rules and avoidance of risks are generally two norms that in the upbringing of children are conveyed to both girls and boys, the expectation seems to be stronger for girls. The societal tolerance that exists towards boys/men results in patterns that seem to reproduce the stereotype (as illustrated by the quote below) but also in unequal standards being applied for girls and boys, women and men respectively.

“There was a rather school-like attitude [in respondent’s work place] and only the girls were criticised, just like in school, because boys are boys. You just know they don’t do their homework, that they’re more fidgety, that they’re this and that... Well, these boys were riding the tricycle while I was trying to do press monitoring. Once they started to shoot each other with blind pistols (laughs) while we were trying to slave on the event budget, on this and the other. It was very annoying that they were granted some things which normally wouldn’t have been granted to other employees, with the pretext that... you know, that’s how boys are! Except these boys were 30 something year old men. We weren’t in school anymore. (...) It seems to me that when you are in an entourage without an even distribution, boys, because they are boys, can get away with a lot of things which only deepens the stereotype that boys are naughty and girls are behaving themselves, boys are irreverent and girls are compliant and this completely idiotic idea of masculinity was reproduced very accurately in the workplace.” (RO_F_24_PRO)

Somewhat paradoxically, while there seems to be more societal tolerance for boys when they do not respect the rules, when they are punished (by their parents) boys nevertheless tend to be punished harsher than girls (as mentioned and illustrated above).

Female customers may be provided less quality technical work

Some female respondents indicated that, since women are sometimes regarded by men as completely ignorant and unable where technical issues are concerned, it may occur that men deliver lower quality technical work for female customers since it is believed the women will not notice. While such discriminatory behaviour on the part of men towards women is obviously no 'norm', it could be a social pattern (depending on the incidence level of the discriminatory behaviour).

“Because they know that I have no idea, so they do it the way they do. But if there is a man they would do it better, especially this technical work. But it was not in the communication, I have never had a feeling that they act that I am just a woman, no. But the result ... Several times it could have been done better or differently. In the communication, it was not, but the work done. If there is a man and says: 'guys, this can be done differently or it is not done properly'...” (SK_F_62_SOC)

The associations that come with this role for women are that they ought to be foremost a wife (or partner) of and a caring mother, orienting their own life and identity to their partner's (and giving up their own identity in the process), giving up their own aspirations for the well-being of their family, assuming the responsibility for the household and domestic matters, while at the same time acting as guardian of the emotional atmosphere within the family.

It was noted that especially in those countries where legal provisions for maternity leave are quite long (two to three years), the pressure on women to devote these years also exclusively to the care for their young children tends to be (very) high, leaving them sometimes hardly any choice than to take up this maternity leave, turning motherhood into a duty. As discussed in more detail in the chapter that deals with 'change', this is an example of a supporting policy measure that is looked upon by some as an opportunity, but by others as a 'golden cage', as the pressure mounts to actually make use of this option to stay at home, turning the policy measure into a norm instead of an option.

“And it is difficult for me as a woman to say that I don't want children. Even my best female friends, who I regard as very emancipated, react in that way: 'come off it, you may say that now. Just wait, you'll think about that differently later.' I do not have the right to say: 'No, I do not want children'; it just isn't accepted. I notice that among women of my age where I would have never thought... That is enormous pressure.” (DE_F_33)

5.3. Societal roles

5.3.1. Gender perceptions relating to societal roles

The stereotypes about women's and men's respective roles in society are very prominent, and a very large number of stories touch upon this dimension of gender stereotypes, of which the roots are laid already in childhood.

Motherhood and being 'a good wife' are still seen by many as women's main contribution to and role in society, and thus as their main or even only expected goal in life. Based on the stories, it may be that this belief is supported more by the older generations than the younger, but it is definitely still very present.

Men give striking accounts of the role a woman should take on her in order to be a 'good' mother and wife.

“A woman who has a child must dedicate at least some part of her life to the children, at least to the end of the primary school. That is until their 14 years of age.” And: “(...) also men got I think three weeks of paternal leave. I don't know though why they have it, unless his wife is so worn out from the labour that he must help her. Only in this case it makes sense to me.” (SI_M_67)



“What happens is that society’s developments and women’s options, their independence desires (that are more than legitimate); but women’s independence doesn’t mean (...) to deny that in the first years of a child’s life, the role of the mother is much more important than the father’s. Much more important! And if the presence of the mother isn’t there, in the medium-long term, the child, the youngster, the adult will resent it.” (PT_M_60)

“This is a deeply rooted stereotype that a woman should stay with a child up to its three years. A child in a nursery is wrong; people disapprove, that you are not able to take care of your child, that a woman should stay at home and take care of it.” (SK_M_39)

“To be very honest, speaking about fatherhood as such, I have never been planning on sitting at home for one year. Because for me, it’s completely obvious that a child needs a mother. I can appreciate and respect fathers who take paternity leave, but I am furious on mothers who return to work just right after giving birth. A child needs a mother.” (LT_M_34)

But also women, of different generations, refer to the roles they assumed or were (are) expected to take on in order to correspond to societal norms - roles which they either assimilated or are struggling with: to take good care of the household and of their husband and children, to accommodate and serve their husband, to prioritise the well-being of their family over their personal aspirations (as IE_F_46, IT_F_62, IT_F_19, MT_F_64, MT_F_45 or PL_F_29).

“My home with my husband was... it was a very good home. Very good home. I took care of the household. Home existed... home was created by me. But it was created by me for him. He was the head of the house... no, I put it wrongly. Everything was done in order to make him feel fine and happy. (...) I have never done anything – I thought it should be like this – that he could be unhappy with. The door of the house was never closed. Since my husband... they always said he was an institution, not a man. He had a great knowledge and big community conviction. He had lots of friends all around the world. One day, I set the table 17 times; so many times the guests appeared.” (PL_F_73)

“Now I can say that when I got married, the rhythm of life stayed the same. The same way as I was brought up: that the boys – because they go out to work – have no duty in the house. I can say that my husband has never helped me. Nothing. Not at all. The same as when I was at my mother’s house. Even if there is some maintenance in the house, in my house, I have to do it. (...) Always. Because he says... Because he has got his day at work. To tell the truth, he does not even clean and put away the blade and the brush he uses every morning to shave. He leaves them there for me to clean and put away because I am at home.” (MT_F_64)

“I think the most important thing was the choice of my job because I had always, in the beginning I wanted to be a doctor and then I realised that it wouldn’t fit with the idea I had of family life, the fact that I needed, wanted, to have children and that in a job that took too much time, like being a doctor, I wouldn’t have the opportunity to be with my kids. So I decided to be a teacher. (...) It was my old-fashioned idea of being a woman that I picked up from my parents at home, the mother taking care of the children. So the old-fashioned idea of that period which is probably not true anymore today for my daughter, who doesn’t see it like that. This really influenced me a lot, the choice to be a teacher, to have time not for holidays, yes for holidays, but to have time for the kids, to be available when my kids were, to have time to care for them.” (LU_F_47)

The ‘male breadwinner’ model is still alive, although clearly changing over the last couple of decades (see also the chapter on changing masculinities), with dual earning couples and more equal divisions of household tasks within a couple becoming more common. However, many women and men described situations that remain very much rooted in the traditional model of the male breadwinner and the housewife (examples are provided by CZ_F_48, CY_M_46, FI_M_64, LT_M_24, LT_M_34). And it appears that as long as such situation is not called into question by any of the partners, it will tend to persist.

“What I know for a fact is that my father often used to get teased a bit – in a nice way, a nice way – by other men, because it was his wife who earned the money, which frankly he didn’t mind a bit, but given public perceptions at that time (...) It was something which wasn’t looked on very kindly or understood very well. He wasn’t playing the man’s role fully because it wasn’t him that was bringing home a fat salary.” (BE_M_39)

“My father was always working, very often away from home, worked abroad also and my mother was a full time housewife. And that was advantageous for me. I am more or less, well, spoiled. Yes, spoiled. Anyway, okay, I did not have to make my own sandwiches, so in that sense spoiled. I notice now... Because I myself am ... I live together with my girlfriend now. I am convinced that both of us should do our share of the household. So not as my parents did it: my father worked and my mother was busy in the house. We both work, me and my girlfriend, and so I think we should both contribute to the household, that we both are responsible for the running of the house, shopping, cooking. And I notice that I have trouble with this, because I used to be spoiled in those things.” (NL_M_34)

“[Grandpa] sat in front of the television and doing crosswords, grandma cooking and cleaning. I have never seen grandpa cleaning. My grandma did all that. (...) They functioned like that, right. Grandma was not suffering or something; grandpa was not terrorising her or anything. They organised things in this way and they were used to it and found them obvious and then there is no problem. If something is obvious and nobody feels oppressed in any way.” (SI_Q_22)

“Emancipation solves a number of problems. Well, it raises other problems since we must also arrange and adapt to new situations, compared to a situation before where I still feel - until our parents’ generation - the roles were clearly defined and that many conflicts have not come up as each stayed in his role. Once someone changed a bit the roles or someone rebels against the role, he/she should play, then, there is a conflict zone since it is no longer separated. (...) But on the other side, it is about developing an understanding or compromise or arrangement which is an asset because everyone understands what the other does. And ultimately, if we work together, we can still do much more if both have an idea and can contribute and be mutually supportive in our respective jobs.” (LU_M_29)

A clear gender divide is also noticeable in the area of leisure activities, and especially in sports – a realm in which men’s superiority over women remains beyond questioning, according to some respondents (LU_M_24, PL_M_24). As from childhood, children are encouraged (by their parents or peers) to take up certain activities and discouraged to engage in others (FI_F_21, PT_F_24, SK_M_71, RO_M_19). When it comes to children’s toys, girls typically play with dolls, while boys are geared towards more technical toys as building blocks, cars, meccano.

“Oh yes, that is also when I discovered that I was not allowed to read boys’ books. ‘George and his rebel club’ I liked very much because he was always on to something and was sitting on his donkey backwards. Tintin, I liked Tintin, and the little dog as well, he could fix anything. But my mother said: ‘No, those are no books for you!’ Because those were my brother’s books, he got them at a certain point. ‘No, those are no books for girls!’ I say: ‘Yes but, what does that matter? A book is a book, isn’t it? I just like to get them.’” (NL_F_69)

Where sports are concerned, swimming, dance, gym, ballet are activities for girls; whereas football or soccer, basketball and martial arts are mentioned as masculine sports. Especially where sports are concerned, violations of the gender norms in the choice of one’s sport tend to be socially sanctioned by associations with and suggestions of homosexuality (FI_F_24, NL_F_32, PT_F_24).



“What is also interesting is that I joined a sports club, a Swedish sports club, and the members are in the majority women. There are only very few men. And that was difficult for the women there to classify me. They apparently have two ready-made assumptions when a guy joins a sports club, which is mainly frequented by women. For them, you are either a homosexual or after women. It does not occur to them that one is only interested in sports.” (AT_M_47_ID)

Several women in the sample noted that sports exercised by men seem to have a higher social standing than women’s sports (see e.g. IE_F_34_SOC, CY_F_45_CFR, IE_F_46_EDU).

“When I was older I continued to play football and went to a sports-oriented high school. (...) I trained as many times a week as the boys of the same age but already at that time it was clear that female football players are not appreciated as much as the male football players of the same age, not to mention women’s football compared with men’s football.” (FI_F_31_LEI)

The pattern of the gender divide in leisure activities continues at adult age (IE_M_53, LU_M_24, LU_F_25, PL_M_24, PL_M_28, RO_M_44). As other hobbies and interests for women, mostly creative activities have been mentioned: drawing, sculpturing, singing, music, cooking, and also reading. Men are said to prefer gardening, occupying themselves with technical and mechanical things, cars, going out, playing cards, drinking beer with their mates, watching television.

The preconceptions about women and their traits cause ambiguities about their competences and in their relations with others. Various respondents mentioned issues with the masculine stereotype for women in professional, male-dominated environments, notably when they try (or not) to assimilate themselves to the masculine norm: while ‘un-feminine’ appearances and behaviour in masculine settings may be regarded as unnatural and sad attempts to assimilate to the perceived norm, the display of ‘feminine’ attributes and behaviour by women in masculine settings may equally be met with (stereotypical) reactions of devaluation (being reduced to the stereotype) and being treated along

unequal standards. Examples of such accounts are offered by RO_F_24; SK_M_39, BE_F_22, BE_F_38. These stories clearly show how the different dimensions of gender stereotypes are inter-linked, which underlines the complexity of dealing with them.

“When a male boss makes a scandal, people conform and say ‘wow, what an authoritarian and involved boss he is’, whereas when a woman says the same thing in the same context, the subtext is ‘she is PMS-ing’... This preconception that women cannot control their emotions or have more hormones than men... How can I put this? Even guys were crying one day and laughing the other without needing tampax.” (RO_F_24)

Several respondents, mostly women, mentioned that the existence of distinct gender roles in society came to their attention during their childhood, or at relatively young age, in relation to the Catholic Church where girls and women were (are) not allowed to take on certain roles, for example that of altar boy. The experience of being treated as inferior or being denied participation in what can be regarded as societal activities had an awareness-raising effect on these respondents. An example of a quote from such story is given below. Stories bearing the same or a comparable message were provided by BE_F_52, MT_F_22, CY_F_28, CY_M_23.

“I get a little bit angry with the church. For example, we say that Jesus preached about gender equality. He cut Adam’s side and created Eva, so that they would be equal. He had not created her from the head to be superior or from the feet to be inferior. Nevertheless, we see things that show inequality in church. For example, men sit in front and women at the back of the church. Women cannot enter the holy room. I just can’t understand it; and when I asked my religious studies teacher at school to tell me why, she could not provide an answer. Or, for example, a woman is considered dirty and cannot receive the Holy Communion or worship the icons (...) when she has her periods. What does that mean? It is normal to have that! (...) In Cyprus it is important because people believe. They go to church and the church has an important part even in politics, state affairs and has great power. Church is everywhere. The first president of Cyprus was the Archbishop!” (CY_F_23)

5.3.2. Social patterns, norms and normative positions relating to societal roles

In the section below, a closer look is taken at the social patterns, norms and values that relate to the above described gender perceptions in relation to societal roles, while seeking to identify the extent to which respondents express adherence or not to the societal norms.

The good housewife and mother

As set out in the previous section, there is a clear perception among a significant number of the respondents, that the societal norm prescribes that women should stay home from work and take up their full maternity leave in order to take care of their young children. The 'good (house-) wife and mother' seems to be regarded by some as the ideal model for a woman. As illustrated by the quote above (from SK_M_39_CFR), the 'good upbringing' of the children, which need the love and care of their mother, is referred to in several stories as the main 'value' that underpins this norm. According to some stories, however, also the pride of men seems to be at stake when their wife has a paid job.

“I know some traditional families (I lived for 3 years in Azores) and the truth is that I know that some of my friends' fathers prohibited women to work. (...) And some of those men were unemployed. I know a man that (a father of a friend of mine) that was unemployed and, even so, with so many financial difficulties, he didn't let his wife work. He preferred that his son, with my age, in that time he was 16 years old, worked and helped the family instead of, in my opinion, being worried about his future, and studying, and doing what a boy of that age typically does.” (PT_M_18_CFR)

Some respondents attributed this norm of 'the good housewife and mother' to men as owners of this view, but also women appeared to have internalised this norm.

“If I think about the difference between my own generation and my mother's generation, women today are certainly more independent. But the model 'family-children' and staying at home has not been abandoned.” (GR_F_26_CFR)

“(My mother) did that quite naturally (...) by providing me with an example: how she took care of me, how she focused on me. I realise this afterwards and perhaps that when I was younger, I did not see this that way (...). I received a pushchair and a doll very soon and I was playing with dolls all the time... nothing else interested me but my pushchair and my baby doll and I kept playing till I was 12, or something like this.” (CZ_F_24_EDU)

“These different roles of mothers and fathers towards children, is something important. A mother cannot replace a father and a father cannot substitute a mother. For me this is one of the most important differences. Because from the biological point of view, something slightly different is expected from each parent, and both roles are important.” (CZ_F_48_CFR)

More generally, according to this norm of the 'good housewife and mother', women's priority in life should be the well-being of their family, even if that implies sacrifices for themselves.

“My partner and I, we decided to have a child. I was under contract – a short-term one – that was regularly renewed every two months, for two years. (...) We had agreed with my partner, that I would get back to work soon after giving birth to our child. (...) But a problem occurred: the nanny resigned. We had no other solution than to take care of our baby ourselves: who would leave the job? The choice was made very quickly, naturally. I attribute this to the differences between genders, since men usually think that their job is more important. So that's why he – HE – decided that I would not return to my previous job, since for him it was a short term contract anyway, so that was a good reason enough.” (FR_F_32_CFR)

“Traditionally, it is so that even if we are seemingly monogamous in Finland, it is still like that that women... at least women of my age, are called for to be flexible. A woman is supposed to be permissive even if the man makes errors. I suppose women are being judged more easily as a woman is a mother.” (FI_F_70_CFR)



Despite the fact that the norm of the 'good housewife and mother' appears to have a (very) strong prescriptive character, quite a number of respondents (men as well as women) stated they do not subscribe it. The most important argument offered to defend a different position is the inherent inequality at the disadvantage of women, who are left without choice. Also the fact that children are not constrained in their development (but rather the contrary) if they are exposed to more social contacts than just with their mother, was mentioned.

“I am upset that people still think on these levels, that they do not want to move further. They are not aware of the fact that some women do not want it and are placed only in the domestic sphere simply because everyone expects them to do so, that this is the society pressure. (...) I am not saying that now all women need to be single and without children. I am just saying that this is an area of their lives in which they should have a choice. And not these societal attitudes that she will finish university, get a job, find a man (ideally at the time of university studies) and go for a maternity leave for three years. And then it would be good to have another child. That means another three years and the personal and social capital of that woman will completely disappear. But this is the idea. And women are not aware of it, they do not think about it; that they maybe want something different deep inside. (...) They are educated in that way since their childhood. They are not aware of other possibilities.” (SK_F_23_SOC)

Many respondents, notably women, refer to their upbringing as preparing them for a pre-set task, a pre-defined life in which there is not much choice left for them, as individuals. Often, the striking difference between their own upbringing and that of their brothers (with different norms and values being transmitted for the respective genders, and more constrained options for girls than for boys) was pointed out by female respondents - not seldom with some bitterness, resentment, and a distinct feeling of having been treated unequally and not having received fair chances for developing a fulfilling life. Such stories are provided among others by GR_F_20, IT_F_19, SI_F_64, NL_F_69, NL_F_53, MT_F_35. But also men are aware of girls' future prospects being presented as restrained in their upbringing (for example BE_M_25, CY_M_23, HU_M_22, LT_M_34, PL_M_24).

However, also examples of the opposite situation can be found, where the girls were free to do what they wanted and the boys had to take over the family business (or become a priest) whether they liked it or not. So there are instances when the pressure on boys with regard to their future can be very constraining as well. However, it is clear that the common expectations for girls and for boys are different: whereas the constraining expectations for girls are typically about becoming housewives, the constraining expectations for boys are about their professional careers.

“And there was a time... For example, when my mother used to tell me 'I won't feed you if you don't help me'. And I used to retaliate. I used to tell her then: 'my brother won't eat either, because he is not helping you'. For me, that's stupid that the woman has to be a sort of slave of the house. For me, it's important that if the woman is intelligent, let her go. You understand? If she's not intelligent, teach her other things, but give her support. It's not fair you only support the male so that he can achieve what he likes and the woman, no.” (MT_F_45)

“When I was a child, I saw it clearly because my brother was always the favourite. I didn't count. My mother thought that my brother should study and then bring up a family, and that I should do what she did: go to church, pray, do the housework and cook well. When I got married, I'd be in good hands. That's how it was.” (LU_F_62)

The same norms as the ones transmitted by the parents in their children's upbringing may continue to be conveyed in the education system, by teachers and professors. Stories about teachers and professors explicitly steering pupils and students to stereotypical roles and discouraging them to aspire roles that break with stereotypes are provided (for example by FI_F_31, PL_M_56, RO_M_19).

The stories clearly show how the model that people have seen at home, when they were children, has an important influence on their own gender perceptions later in life. The example below shows how children can come to realise that women's realm should not be confined to the domestic sphere.

“When they [respondent’s children] grew up, I think they (because I was at home with them when they were little) got the impression that I was some kind of at-home-person... When [my daughter] accompanied me to work once when I was working as a headmaster, she was so surprised: ‘I didn’t know you had this role, deciding, organising, ruling!’ I had not thought about how important it is that [the children] see their parents working. They had accompanied [my husband] to work, and they didn’t wonder at him being a professional. But I was their mother, they didn’t see me as a professional until they actually saw me doing my work... It was good that they came at last!” (SE_F_74_CFR)

Especially in relation to this norm, the stories show that the model people have witnessed and lived in their family during their upbringing (in primary socialisation) largely determines how the tasks are divided in their own household when they are adults.

“They brought him [my brother] up like that. Because even if you take dinner time, for example, he does not even remove his chair or his plate. He just sits there because they brought him up like that. He doesn’t know otherwise. And now he takes advantage of it. In fact even when he visits my mother he still behaves in the same way. He’s not going to change. Given that my mother is happy to serve him, he’s not going to change, you understand.” (MT_F_45_CFR)

Housework is women’s work

The societal norm that the typical household tasks (like cleaning, washing the dishes, cooking) are to be done by women clearly used to have a stronger prescriptive character in the past than it has nowadays. Still, even while respondents, especially those of the younger generations, tend to say they do not share the view that housework is women’s work (so expressing a different individual normative position); it appears that the reality does not yet fully follow what is preached.

“Sometimes I try to do something and women don’t let me. For instance, if I try to clean the table, or help to clean somehow... There’s no way, even if I try to. No, no. We’d end up arguing, creating a conflict. Even though there shouldn’t be any.” (ES_M_43_LEI)

“I washed the dishes from a very young age because there were two boys in our family and both my mother and my father worked. My brother and I sometimes stayed in school till the evening for school day care, but when we were older, we didn’t. But there were three men for one woman. As a result, I very soon learnt the joy and labour of cleaning or doing the dishes.” (HU_M_57_CFR1)

Another example is offered by a 67 years old man who states that in his family all family members share in the housework, and this is also how he was brought up. Not only was this individual normative position opposing the dominant norm transmitted by his parents (who both worked), he also states that the same rule is transmitted again to his children and grandchildren.

“I didn’t really like doing house work, but I did, I had no choice, but I couldn’t say it was the passion of my life to cook and vacuum, but I did it out of conscience. And I figured I couldn’t live in a mess either, nor to let my husband out looking scruffy when everyone knows you, but for me it wasn’t like it was for my mother, she was passionate about taking care of my father, and of the house and wanted everything to be neat, it was the passion of her life, but not mine.” (RO_F_59_CFR)

“This is connected to my upbringing. Both parents were employed and then it was necessary to help with housework, otherwise it would take too long. (...) My mother would always say: ‘Clean up after yourself!’ And I was soon used to that. And now my wife says the same to my grandchildren. ‘Clean up after yourself!’ And my children also say this to their children.” (SI_M_67_CFR)

The realisation of the inequality and discrimination involved with the division of tasks can lead to opposing individual normative positions.



“Something which really bothered me when I was small, was the way my parents treated the gender differences between us. To give a few examples, one of the things that really made me angry when I was young was that my mother expected from me help at home that she did not ask from my brother. For example, I remember my mother had a very fixed time-table for housework. For example on Monday she washed the clothes, on Tuesday the floor, Wednesday was her day off, on Thursday she washed the clothes, on Friday she again washed the floor, etc. And Tuesday and Friday were the days that I really hated for the reason, apart from the cleaning, that it meant also work for me, when for instance I wished to spend my time doing other things.” (MT_F_35_CFR)

The man as the (stoic) provider

Complementing and opposing the role that society prescribes for women is the one for men. Men are expected to be the ones who provide in their families' material needs and their emotions are not to be expressed.

“He [respondent's brother] had to divorce because his wife wanted to work, and it was nothing like a big career. And his second wife, she didn't ever consider this option.” (CZ_M_35_CFR)

The norm that men are not supposed to display emotions seems to be opposed by several (as also set out in the report chapter that deals with 'masculinity').

“(Girls) are always taught that their turn will come to be a mother, a wife, to take care of everyone important in their life and then they will implicitly learn how to be more empathetic. Exactly because they always have to take care of someone, that women are expected to take care of the ones around them, that's what makes them more empathetic, more open towards the others' needs, while men are taught that they have to provide money for the family, to support the family. Of course, it's no longer the case, but anyway, even nowadays there are differences. (Men) have to always sublimate their feelings, to look impenetrable towards everything around them.” (RO_M_19_EDU1)

The part of the norm that relates to men's role as the (single) provider seems to be less explicitly challenged. Still, a few stories offered examples of situations where the partners in a couple had swapped roles: the woman being the provider and the man taking on the care role (as also described in the chapter that deals with 'change'). Furthermore, the reality shows that increasingly it is believed that both partners in a couple should share the provider and care roles – albeit that the main and ultimate responsibility for bringing in the money seems to remain regarded as the man's, and the care role as the woman's.

“When I discuss with my daughters' friends (she is 20), I realise they are looking for boyfriends who will be able to secure the main household's income, while they will be working [in order] to buy shoes, bags, etc. Thus, even if things have changed tremendously, it remains that women are usually not considered the breadwinner, as far as it is a classic family, with a man.” (CZ_F_38_PRO1)

“The man had to protect the house and the family from enemies, but the woman had to take care of the children and the food. And nowadays, I think that the roles have blended a bit. We hear more and more about men who take care of the children, they take... Actually they have the right of two weeks of paternity leave. (...) So it is not considered strange or something bad if the man stays at home and takes care of the housework and the woman makes the money. Although for many people this could be a problem with their pride and self-confidence. Just because this old model is still so strong.” (BG_M_27_CFR)

“He [one of respondent's best friends] has said that he believes in the traditional role of the genders, that is, a man must do one, two, three things, and the woman must also do one, two, three things. To which I agree to some extent, but not to the extent that he believes. I mean it's nice to have some rules because otherwise we won't know who we are anymore.” (GR_M_30_PRO2)

The value of 'proximity to the children' is mentioned as supporting the view that also the man should share in the caring role and have access to paternity leave.

“My husband has always been working. I think he had time to pick me up at the maternity hospital and to be at home one day or something. (...) At his workplace, he was an accountant, they would have thought it very weird if he had been at home. It’s such a loss for him, he hasn’t had the advantage [of being at home, watching his children grow up]. (...) He thinks it’s so sad... And now, with his grandchildren, he is [very active].” (SE_F_74_CFR)

“My father is the chief at home, the pillar of the house. If he says we are going out for dinner today we will. We all have to follow, both boys and girls and we do not have a choice. My brother reacts often and I react sometimes because we are boys and he may listen to us. He used to listen to my sister too but he never really took it seriously. He always said that she is a woman. He used to tease her but he never listened to her.” (CY_M_23_CFR)

The man assures the authority and the woman should accept his decisions

Men are typically seen as occupying the positions of authority, or are expected to take up the leadership role, both in professional contexts and in the private sphere. Some men also believe it is their role to secure the discipline in the family and the respect for rules.

“What I meant is that a man should lead when the situation so requires; then he should get in the frontline, assume the task, initiate and do it. And push things forward. So he should be ready for this. I think this is the problem. I find this a lack in masculinity today, that many men miss this.” (HU_M_22_ID2)

“The technical university was new, was modern, they had lots of facilities. It was the landmark of the region. So that sounded like fun to me. However, my wife did not like it at all. She did not want to go there. She would have preferred me to go to town C because she liked that more. She did not want to go to B. But the husband was the boss. The profession... It was not that she had concrete reasons for not going there, it was more an emotional resistance. She thought the place was too... yes, provincial, traditional. No, she didn’t want to. Anyway, so we ended up in town B.” (NL_M_67_CFR)

“The father is more right... He gives the bread and the reason.” (PT_M_71_CFR)

“I remember one time she (grandmother) was trying to say something and he (grandfather) said: ‘Silence you, men are talking now.’ My grandfather was traditional.” (CY_F_23_SOC)

Together with the assumed role as ‘head of the family’, goes the decision-making power within the family, whereas women are in this model given much less status and ‘voice’. This translates in the norm that women should obey and listen to their husbands (or let him believe so, as appears from the story of GR_F_26, quoted below). This view appears however to have weakened in the past decades.

“Let him say what he wants, and you ... [will do what you want]’. This, that the man must appear to make the final decisions, still holds. Even though the women of my generation, but also of the older generation, believe they are the ones who actually make the decisions, they think we must use this female characteristic, to make it seem as if he is the one who decides.” (GR_F_26_CFR)



5.4. Skills and aptitudes

Skills are different from aptitudes in the sense that skills are acquired abilities, whereas aptitudes are thought to be innate. Aptitudes can be physical or mental.

5.4.1. Gender perceptions relating to skills and aptitudes

The stereotypes found for men and women regarding their assumed skills and aptitudes seem to be very binary. Men are believed to be 'naturally' more knowledgeable of and interested in technical matters than women, and thus can solve technical problems. Men are physically strong, muscular, and are assumed to be good at sports, to know how to fight and defend, and thus are regarded as better fit for rough and heavy work. In general, men are viewed as competent and failure is not easily tolerated for men. In contrast, women are not knowledgeable of, nor interested in technical issues. They are weak, vulnerable, fragile and have less physical strength and capacities. In general, women tend to be regarded as less competent, and failure can be expected for women. However, they are believed to be more precise and (thus) better fit for fine work. Women would have a 'natural' ability for caring, especially for children, whereas men may be seen and treated as unable when it comes to children's issues.

This dimension of stereotypes plays out significantly in the educational and professional choices of girls and boys, women and men, resulting in (horizontal) gender segregation both in educational institutions and in the workplace, and thus inter-relating with the societal roles⁵.

The assumptions about women's and men's competences also have consequences for the way people deal with each other, and often lead to discrimination: women and men not being treated equally, unequal standards being applied for women and men. What may occur is for example in commercial relations, for technical matters, that less attention is paid to female clients (e.g. by sales people) and technical work done for women might be of lower quality, in the assumption that the female customer will not notice.

“We are [renovating] and have had some carpenters at the house. We are doing this together; we have been very clear about that from the start. My wife is at least as motivated as me. We have done most of the renovation ourselves, but every time we have had a carpenter, there it is: [my wife] who asks most of the questions, and they answer to me. It is incredibly clear, we talk as if we were a triangle.” (SE_M_52)

In the quote above, a woman is ignored because she is believed to be incompetent in technical matters. Reflecting upon this mechanism, the same respondent recalls he experienced a similar situation when he was ignored because he was assumed incompetent where children's issues are concerned.

“Now I realise that it was exactly the same, only the other way around, when we had children. [...] There it is the father who doesn't exist...I had to experience how the nurse answered my wife when I was asking the questions. (...) I realise that this is what women experience all the time... Perhaps it is not so clear for women, who experience it all the time, but it was very clear to me... You notice when you are unfairly treated, but I wonder if you notice when you are favoured. (...) You are always favoured, every day, without noticing, just because you are a man...” (SE_M_52_LEI)

5 More examples of such stories can be found in the online database, including BE_F_38_PRO, BE_F_22_PRO1, LV_F_22_EDU, CZ_F_38.

When women show aspirations, for example when applying for jobs that are regarded as requiring skills that are typically attributed to men, rather than women, they may be denied the position, experience that they have to prove themselves harder, be met with devaluation or non-recognition.)

“And then you graduate [from the police school] and enter the real world and then you were confronted with - especially in the beginning, when you had to drive patrolling tours with an older, male colleague – the resistance of the kind: ‘Ahh, a young woman. It’s young and it’s a woman. There is nothing to be done with that.’ And then it happened often that I felt we had to prove ourselves harder than the male colleagues. But of course, we can do that. We have always been able to stick up for ourselves.” (BE_F_38)

“A girl must prove herself worthy more, yes, so that others don’t think that she cares only about shoes and dresses. Then you have to prove yourself.” (LV_F_22)

“I have briefly been an instructor for driving all terrains vehicles, because I like driving, I enjoy it and I guess I am a pretty good driver (...). It was in summer, it was pretty hot and I was wearing a skirt and a blouse, and those who wanted to learn how to drive on this rugged training ground were mostly men. So it happened that one of my clients, I mean, customer, came and asked for the instructor. And I answered ‘I am the instructor (female tense)’, and for some of them it was difficult to admit, and they eventually refused to drive with me, because they didn’t want to learn to drive from a woman.” (CZ_F_38)

5.4.2. Norms, values and normative positions relating to skills and aptitudes

‘Natural’ abilities of girls and boys, women and men

The idea that girls and women are better at languages and social sciences whereas boys and men are better at technical matters, mathematics and natural sciences can be recognised in an important number of stories.

“He [my father] would never expect my mother to change a bulb. He underestimates her, he is scared that she might get electrocuted because she is a woman and she doesn’t know. (...) Whereas men knew by nature.” (CY_M_23_CFR)

The norms that follow from this belief are that there are certain tasks and occupations, and hence also orientations in education, that are better fit for women and others that are better fit for men. Girls and boys (as from a very young age), as well as women and men, therefore, tend to be steered towards these occupations and roles that are deemed as corresponding more to their aptitudes.

“I rarely visit my nephew and my niece, but when I go to visit them, I take them in some of those big toyshops and there, let’s play to Santa Claus! Very interesting: my nephew running around the shop; for my niece, it was that easy: ‘I want this’. Great. My nephew going around the shop for 20 minutes: Playmobil, Lego, radio-controlled cars, and so on. After 20 minutes, I feel his indecision and I ask him: ‘what do you really want?’ (In a low voice): ‘I would like the same as my sister: a doll’. 8 years old! (...) It must be really deeply anchored, really, if an 8 years old boy needs 20 minutes before he dares to say in a low voice, ‘Uncle, I would like a doll’. Let’s imagine: the school, whatever, all of this which can contribute to the fact that this little boy (is afraid of asking for a doll).” (FR_M_39_CFR)

“[In the primary school] I was really bad at handicraft, I didn’t understand anything about sewing machines and I always sewed on my finger. So I chose differently and chose technical work while all the other girls chose handicraft. Many people wondered why I just didn’t choose handicraft, that don’t I think at all that when I get older and I am in a relationship, the situation will be that both of us will only know how to do the men’s work? [laughs]. That we will not be able to do different things.” (FI_F_24_EDU)



One of the underlying values that appears to support these norms is that of efficiency: the best utilisation of available resources. However, also the best possible quality of performance of the task seems to be considered. When care responsibilities for children are concerned, there may moreover exist concerns about the children's integrity (notably when a man would assume the care role).

“I was looking for a job with children, abroad, as an au pair, in Britain, and I felt advantaged as a girl. I found that... The ads were pretty clear, for girls, nothing special was asked, actually... And it was asked from the boys to hold some degree in relation with children or... (...) People certainly consider that girls have an easier contact with children, something more natural. And maybe also... there is some apprehension, some notion of danger, attached to the relationship of boys – or men, with children, that parents may feel when leaving their children to a man's care.” (FR_F_22_PRO)

The steering towards distinct pre-destined roles for women and men leads to gender segregation in society, not only in education and in professional life, but also in informal settings especially when these become more formally organised (as illustrated by the last two quotes below).

“In my 8th grade I had pretty good grades, so I could choose almost any high school I wanted in my hometown. Therefore, I wanted to make a compromise, the natural sciences compromise, which was part of the science field. It was a compromise between the real science class – Mathematics-Informatics - and Philology or Social Sciences where I wanted to go. I particularly liked History, not so much Romanian Literature. And it was some sort of compromise after long debates with my family, after I realised it might be much easier to find a job if I went to a science class rather than a humanities one, and so on. That was about it, so it was some sort of compromise. Natural Sciences are somewhere in the middle – between science in its pure form and Philology. (...) Hard sciences offered me more opportunities, so I was set to follow that path. As I mentioned before, I believe it has to do with gender.” (RO_M_19_EDU1)

“I graduated from a technical construction college – where there were a few people of the female sex, so to speak, who were by definition treated as persons who actually cannot get adjusted to this profession. And there is practically no chance that they could be competent workers of this sphere of activity. And here, I felt that all our teachers were somehow preparing us, men, for the jobs typically in construction supervision, typically at the construction site, typically performing concrete tasks, whereas our women, our girls were being prepared for work in planning and design companies, as building projects estimators, as persons who will be dealing rather with preparatory works, accounting, but not in direct supervision.” (PL_M_56_EDU)

“The working conditions for a naval officer or sailor, in the merchant marine, hardly let us imagine that it would be a job suited for women. At least for a simple reason: we had to spend months at sea, and very few days ashore, in family. Of course, you have to put this into the context of the 1960s, when women were the core of the family unit and therefore, nobody would have expect... a woman to spend months at sea. (...) They certainly do have the same skills as men, but I think it was mostly a family issue, and I didn't see much evolution in this profession. I spent some time on a liner, and there were some women, but it was just because there was a nursery, things like this, and they were mostly restricted to rather subordinate roles.” (FR_M_71_PRO1)

“For example, if there is a big wedding celebration and there are thirty women who cook the soup, the cabbage, make the pasta and do a myriad of things for the 300 guests, then it is crystal clear that there is the female chorus who do all these and there is the male chorus who cut the wood for the fire, make the fire, build the tents, slaughter the pig, and I could go on. So in certain situations, society operates on cooperation that is set up according to skills, knowledge, physical strength, delicate work or needs.” (HU_M_57_CFR1)

“The truth is that experience tells me that girls have a great organisational skill and... of space and resources management. So, sometimes girls are much more in charge of decisions and boys of executing certain plans. (...) I think that, for a better utilisation [of resources] and for better results, it should be this way. Boys usually have more skills for physical tasks that need body work and girls usually have more skills for tasks more... more... tasks that need more touch and more... more... expertise... more intellectual capacity and not so physical. This is a tendency, it's not a rule, but usually, both girls and boys accept these behaviour patterns.” (PT_M_18_LEI)

Considering the collection of narratives, it seems that the male respondents mostly mentioned the issue rather matter-of-factly, not so much referring to having felt particularly constrained by such norms. Women's stories, however, more often indicate the constraining and even discriminatory effect these norms have had on their lives. These effects are further elaborated in the respective section of this report.

“When you mentioned primary education and secondary education, I suddenly remembered that I had to struggle to be able to do what I wanted to do because I am a girl. My head teacher didn't want me to do sciences. And then when I was actually doing the sciences, there were only two girls in the class and we got side-lined mostly. We didn't get as much attention as the boys. Whereas you would think we would get more, but we didn't.” (UK_F_46_EDU)

“(...) within my function of chief inspector, I had participated in the selection to become a team leader of a neighbourhood team. Because I had worked three years earlier in (name neighbourhood), I had first asked, myself, to return to (name neighbourhood), and then I was told that that would not be possible because they needed 'men with balls' there. And I, as a woman, would not be able to do anything there, and my approach would have been too soft, and it had to be finished talking with the people, it had to be the rough-and-ready way. And for that, I would... I would not fit that picture.” (BE_F_38_PRO)

5.5. Physical appearance

5.5.1. Gender perceptions relating to physical appearance

Although when thinking about gender stereotypes, typical representations of femininity and masculinity in terms of physical appearances may immediately come to mind, this dimension has not been addressed as often as the other dimensions of stereotypes (covered here above) by the respondents. This may suggest that, although media and notably commercials still tap into the traditional stereotypes when representing women and men, the societal expectations about the physical appearances of the genders may have loosened and become more flexible and open.

Attributes relating to physical appearances that were mentioned more frequently referred to gender codes for girls and boys, and to professional contexts. Stereotypes for girls and boys relate to the childhood and teenage period. Very young girls are associated with pink and doll-like images, adolescent girls are expected to (start to) be using make-up, shaving their legs, wearing clothes that underline their femininity. Boys' appearance is (or should, according to perceptions, be) more 'sturdy and cool'.

“Throughout my pregnancy I was convinced that it would be another boy. I did not know beforehand. So she was born and the gynaecologist said 'congratulations with your daughter'. And I (thought): 'a daughter??' A girl! I immediately had images of... something... a pink... doll-like...” (BE_F_38)

“I am doing my psychology training in a nursery school, where I was looking after a kid which had behavioural problems, hyperactivity. And there was the teacher who did theatrical play who had dressed the little boys as flowers. They were four years old. And a mother comes in crying, and saying 'how dare you do this thing, how dare you make my child into a flower, what if his father sees him, are you serious, make him into the sun, right now, not a flower!' This made an incredible impression on me, and we are talking now about a four-year old child.” (GR_M_30)



One of the sanctions for individuals, independent of their age, whose appearances do not match the expected stereotype, and who thus violate the gender norms, seems to be suspicion of homosexuality. Labels are also attributed to individuals whose appearances, including through behaviour, are assimilated with those of the opposite sex: boyish girls are called 'tomboys' (see for example IE_F_22, IT_F_19) and men who pay a lot of attention to their appearances are labelled 'metrosexuals' (UK_M_29, PL_F_20).

“I think when you're a girl at school it is very hard. I found it very hard to fit in, because I was never really very 'girly'. But if you're not 'girly', well at my school anyway, if I wasn't really feminine, they seemed to think I was a lesbian. Because, you know, God forbid there could be just a girl who doesn't want to wear tons of make-up and stuff.” (UK_F_19)

“I have some squared shirts. It's true that I bought them as... I bought some boys' shirts because I liked them [laughs] and a friend of mine has bought some too. And once we put the shirts on (but they look as if they were made for girls, if you wear them with leggings) people told us: 'you look like a truck driver! That is the typical lesbian's shirt!' And I said, are there typical lesbian's shirts? I don't think there are shirts saying 'I'm a lesbian's shirt' or 'I'm a lesbian'. (...) It made me feel bad. In fact, I still wear them. When she was told that... when my friend and I were told that, we even started wearing the shirts more often.” (ES_F_21)

“(...) male models [respondent speaks about modelling as a profession] are often called, so to say, queers, right? That they're gay, for sure some kind of homo or metrosexual, that they want to work so much on their own bodies, that they take so much care about themselves, and are so ooh and aah. There are guys like this who idolise themselves, but they are exceptions.” (PL_F_20)

In professional, white collar contexts, men are described as wearing a white shirt, a tie and dark suit, a short haircut, and a serious facial expression (SK_M_39, IE_M_60). The attributes worn by men in a business context are

said to serve as status symbols and to be important for men to display their masculine identity. As mentioned above, women in such contexts may consciously assimilate themselves with the male standards in order to be treated as equals (as explicitly explained by DK_F_42).

“Because society links masculinity with such outer characteristics – muscles, a wide back and a short haircut, specific accessories – such as a belt, a watch. For men it is very important. When they compare their watches, it is like they measure how big their penis is, for example. It depends on the context, but in the business context, they check each other's ties and watches and they judge on this basis how successful and masculine the other is.” (BG_F_25)

“I do try to act as 'one of the boys'. Well, I care a lot about not dressing up in a way which would attract attention. I am very attentive to being part of the group. There is no use in showing up wearing a short, red dress for a meeting if everyone else is wearing suits. It wouldn't, I wouldn't be, then I would... I believe that there would be some sort of barrier in advance. If I show up and am neutral, then I can easier get my points across.” (DK_F_42)

5.5.2. Social patterns, norms, values and normative positions relating to physical appearances

This section seeks to shed some light on the relation between existing gender stereotypes that deal with people's physical appearances (and notably their normative character) and underlying values, as well as the relation between the stereotypes and social patterns.

The female body and its display

It may be regarded as feminine for women to wear clothes, hair styles, make-up and accessories that bring to the fore their bodies. At the same time, however, younger girls are generally not expected to display their bodies, but rather should have a 'decent and respectable' appearance - albeit that this norm seems to become more relaxed nowadays. Similarly, the norms for married women may also require a more 'honourable' look. These norms in relation to women's appearance can be seen in the light of a social pattern to represent the female body as object of sexual desire for men.

“I don't know if it comes precisely from the patriarchal, but the women wear high heels, they have long hair, which should be loose because if it is in a ponytail, you already lose points. If you are not wearing high heels, but you have more elegant shoes, this is fine, but the more you go to the sport style and you don't emphasise the sexual appeal, which underlines your gender, the less you are evaluated in society in some way. Society requires it and imposes it. Even if you look good, you take care of yourself and so on, without emphasising your breasts with a low neck and all, never mind how big your breasts are, it is not okay because the expectation is just like that.” (BG_F_25_ID)

“I think this is within the DNA of gender. Women like to buy many clothes and be admired because the man is the hunter. The woman still needs to feel that.” (CY_M_46_CFR)

Situations occur in which women seem to be reduced to their appearance and sexual appeal to men. Respondents who told about such instances considered them as devaluing for women.

“Nowadays discos treat women like livestock. Like goods. In fact, here in city A, where I usually go out in town, with women they don't... Frequently women don't get charged and men do. Why? Because they think women are an attraction. The more women go there, the more men will also. Then I feel discriminated against. I say, I'm an attraction too! There is no need to have this sexist policy since in the end, although women profit from it, it is a sexist polic - to treat them as a decoration, as an object. And boys would follow them and therefore would go to those places.” (ES_M_21_LEI)

“Very often you immediately notice that they [respondent is writing a book and talks about publishers] think: 'ok, so you are a young girl and that sells easily.' So it is immediately... I have literally had a talk with someone who said: 'oh, so we can put you here and there in our brochure, between those two, and we can take your picture and cover the whole back of the book with it, and we can do this and that...' So at a certain point (but this was an extreme example) at a certain point the content was not discussed at all. Then I thought: 'hey, hold on, I also have something worthwhile to say!'” (NL_F_23_PRO)

“When my boss told me that I could go (to an appointment) with colleague A, I didn't like it. Colleague A joined the company after me. She wouldn't help me. If it was about going with colleague A, I'd rather go alone. So I said to him, 'colleague A? If it is about going with colleague A, I'd rather go alone'. 'Well, the client likes Latin American women very, very much. And sure, your colleague A would help because she is a Latin-American woman, tanned skin, and so on'. I told him: 'look, the fact that you are telling me that, bothers me. But if I was colleague A, I would feel even worse. I don't care if the client likes Australian women. I don't care!' I'm working as a seller for a company. I'm not selling myself, nor my sympathy, nor flirting with clients. I try to do my work properly and that's it. My boss tried to explain himself: 'No, you don't know that man. He is too much... I sometimes have lunch with him and he starts telling me things. He travels a lot to Brazil and so on, and he tells me some wild things... I'm not going to tell you these things because it's embarrassing.' That situation shocked me, made me angry, and I thought, who does he think he is? (...) I'd rather go to work with a turtleneck on than with a low-cut neck line. I'm not, I'm not selling myself. I'm selling the product. I'm not going to use my female weapons in order to sell, for helping me with my work. I want people to respect me and to value me because of my work. Not because of my appearance, nor for the fact that I'm a woman.” (ES_F_34_PRO2)



Women's breasts are generally regarded as a fundamental constituent to their femininity and may even become the embodiment of femininity: the body part in which femininity is crystallised. One woman who suffered from breast cancer reports to have experienced being treated by others as if her femininity was reduced to her having (or not) two breasts, as if she would stop being a woman if she lost one of her breasts. She strongly opposed this view.

“I wanted to get rid of that breast as soon as possible, because I thought: ‘That is how I will stop the process.’ Then you get the strange thing that people don’t talk about the disease itself, but about the breast, about the loss of the breast: ‘do you still feel you’re a woman?’ They just say that! So, I decided to put a notice above my hospital bed – thinking this would stop it - stating: ‘My breast may have been part of me – but I am not my breast!’” (NL_F_69_HEA)

The female professional

For women in a professional (white collar) environment, societal expectations tend to prescribe that these women's appearances, and more generally their behaviour, should fit the male norm. It seems that since women

entered these settings which used to be very male-dominated, they are expected to assimilate to the existing masculine norms: men set the standard which has become the norm also for women.

“This is interesting how the world is stereotypical! When a woman wants to change it, when she act like a woman in a managerial position she is perceived as weak or untrustworthy or inappropriate. That is what I think. And this is a worldwide situation that if a woman wants to succeed in political or managerial positions, she needs to act according to male stereotypes in expressions, fashion, everything. I cannot imagine that a female manager would wear some chic dress, express her femininity. It would be untrustworthy and inappropriate. So she has no other chance than act like a man.” (SL_M_39_PRO)

“I think I became more masculine in my behaviour, so I could handle some problems. Even if some things bother you, you have to put up a front so you won't get labelled as another unsatisfied woman.” (RO_F_24_PRO)

6. Dealing with gender stereotypes





The previous chapters have already made it abundantly clear that people are often confronted with stereotypes in their lives. Somehow they need to deal with these situations. The way in which people deal with stereotypes can vary greatly from one person to another and from one situation to the next. In popular psychology, three 'typical' reactions are recognised when people deal with unwanted situations, which are labelled respectively 'fight', 'flight' or 'freeze'. Surely also when dealing with stereotypes, these three reactions can be recognised, but there is much more going on. Reactions to stereotypes are much more varied and complex. In this chapter, we try to grasp the dynamics encountered in the research.

First of all, not all reactions to gender stereotypes are conscious. Respondents are not always aware that something is a stereotype and may, for example, neglect the societal influence in their decisions and stress the personal choice they have made. Some women might explain the choice to stop working as being a conscious and personal choice and deny the societal pressure that may be exercised on mothers to stay at home in order to raise their children. While most decisions are probably based on a combination of personal convictions and societal factors, this is not always perceived or experienced as such.

6.1. Awareness of stereotypes

When discussing how people deal with stereotypes, it is necessary to make the distinction between those situations where people are aware about something being a stereotype, or whether they are unaware thereof. This is obviously a personal process fuelled by their paradigms and opinions on male/female stereotypes, their prior knowledge and experiences in life.

It is interesting to note that some respondents only became aware of something being a stereotype while giving the interview. They would say things like: "now, coming to think of it, I suddenly realise that..." Also, some respondents said at first that they did not have anything to contribute to the study because they were unaware of any stereotypes in their lives, but by the time the interview was conducted they pointed out that by thinking about the research in preparation to the interview, they realised there were indeed a number of stereotypes prevailing in events of their lives. This means that the perspective from which people look onto their lives can rather easily change and labels like 'stereotypical' can move in and out of focus and consciousness through reflective processes triggered by such events as an interview for a research project.

Once people become aware of stereotypes in their lives, they have again a number of options for how to deal with them. The verb 'dealing with' refers here to two aspects of reactions: inward and outward reactions. The inward reactions are basically what feelings are evoked in people when they are confronted with stereotypes, feelings like shame, anger, indignation or rather comfort, warmth, security, etc. The outward aspect refers to the behaviour of people in their reaction to stereotypes. So, what do people do, how do they behave when confronted with stereotypes. Both inward and outward reactions can be in tune with each other (for example 'I feel angry and I start shouting') or they can be non-congruent (for example 'I feel ashamed but don't show it and just smile').

Obviously, both processes (inward and outward) are inter-acting, a feeling might fuel an action, but this is not always the case, people can also ignore feelings and rationalise them away in their 'internal dialogues'.

6.2. Internal reactions to stereotypes: dealing with emotions

As stated above, the internal reactions refer to the emotions experienced in confrontation with stereotypes. These emotions can be rather negative or positive and can encompass a great array of feelings like anger, shame, guilt, but also pride, strength, joy.

We will first turn to the negative emotions and then take a look at the positive ones.

6.2.1. Negative emotions (shame, anger, guilt, etc.), blaming oneself or others

There are more quotes from respondents that show negative emotions towards stereotypes than positive ones. Amongst the negative emotions, there are quite a lot of guilt and/or shame-related feelings and anger.

Some of the stereotypes relate to elements of people's personality (like looks), some are more profoundly linked to the overall male or female identity. Below are two quotes, from a man and a woman respectively, who feel very much pressured by having a narrow view on masculinity and femininity imposed upon them. The man in this quote needs to deal with a very negative view on masculinity as imposed by his mother and sister, the woman in the second quote has strong negative feelings about her grandmother pushing her into the 'obedient wife' role.

Q I: And how did that affect your identity as a boy, growing up and having two women around you who were very negative about masculinity?

R: Well, I think... I suppose, I think to some extent... I think I probably **felt quite bad about myself**. But I think the more powerful thing that came from that is: 'I'm just not going to be one of those', so misogynistic, women hating oppressive men. (UK_M_29_ID1)

Q I: Who was encouraging you to be a behaving girl?

R: To be a behaving girl? Well it was mainly my grandmother and it was more than an encouragement, it was **a real pressure** which I only got to realise very late. Already when I was 20 I started to reflect over my personality, over my own wishes and I have realised that there are actually more things about me that I do not know or **that I have been suppressing** in a way because **I am struggling to perform the obedient girl model**. So there was a pressure...

I: How did you realise that you have been pressured?

R: (...) **I was continuously dissatisfied with myself, but without realising exactly what I was dissatisfied with**. (RO_F_30_CFR)

The importance of power in relationships has been dealt with in other chapters, but also here it can be noticed how the typical power struggles which force people in certain roles create a lot of resentment. In the quote below, a respondent describes the feelings of her mother, who is a housewife, in relation to the (financial) power her husband claims to have over her.

Q I: And you also mentioned that you had a feeling your father thinks more of himself, that he thinks he is stronger than your mother because he earns more?

R: Yes this is a fact. When they fought, this feeling that he thinks that without him everything can be destroyed, was often present. And with that he sometimes, not blackmailed, but that he thinks that **he has a power over me** and my brother and mother because of that. Financial power. That my mother couldn't provide for us if they got divorced. In this sense he considers **her a bit helpless**. Or incapable. That too, yes. Here you can notice this **male pride**, that he earns more money. Some sort of conviction that he keeps everything together.

I: And how did your mother react in such situations?

R: Very powerful (laughing). Because she is a very liberal woman. I don't know, sometimes she was also **very hurt**, right, and then she started thinking, that maybe she is really not so capable, or that she contributes less because she earns less. And things like that. But I think that this has changed very much and that **she became much stronger** and she knows this is not the point. (SI_F_23_CFR)

The above quote also shows that feelings are not always clear-cut and unchanging. The quote reflects how the mother is at times very hurt and how this evokes shame ('maybe she is not so capable') but in the end she becomes stronger. There is a process of self-doubt instigated by the man's proclaimed power and her feelings evolve accordingly.



Let us now turn to a number of quotes where female respondents feel treated 'as a sexual object'. In the first situation, this happens during an oral exam. The second quote deals with night clubs where girls do not have to pay entry fees. In the last example, a woman testifies about being chosen as a girlfriend solely because she has good looks.

“ R: And I was bothered by that. Especially on a few oral exams.

I: And what was that?

R: The conversation was about some poem, erotic poem, it was literature exam, and I got a feeling from the professor that he wanted **to embarrass me** with this question. He was discussing this erotica and I think he expected me to be in a somehow awkward position. (...)

I: How did you react? How did you feel?

R: **I felt a bit abused**. Not abused, but that this person **wanted** to put me in an **uncomfortable position**. But I got over it. I said what I learned and read about this poem. And I ignored it. Because to argue with a professor is not really smart (laughing), especially on oral exam. But yes, I was **in shock**. (SI_F_23_EDU)

“ And when I go to night clubs, girls don't have to pay to enter. There is just one disco where girls have to pay. And boys always get charged. And I ask girls how they feel. They say 'it's better this way, I don't have to pay'. But I feel bad about it. It's like I pay with my body. In fact, I usually go to the only disco where women must pay.” (ES_F_21_LE1)

“ Well, in fact that's when I became conscious of the fact that women just by looking good can achieve quite a lot with men, in fact. Or to put it this way, they can get quite a lot from men just because of this. And so that's when it dawned on me that women have quite a variety of means to exercise power over men, so to say, but on the other hand, this is quite...well... annoy...not that it annoyed me, but **made me angry actually**, this idea, **that men largely perceive women as an aesthetic object in their lives**, I mean, I have heard from my female friends several times that... 'I'm sure he is going out with me only because he likes to show off with me in public'... I never perceive myself this way, nor women in general, but many men still do or... yes, they still do. And this is **extremely annoying** and **I am very angry** with such people.” (HU_F_20_VIO2)

Finally, there is also one quote where the reverse situation is found: a man explains how he felt treated by women as an object.

“ I went out drinking with another guy. A good friend. We were in a nightclub in the city center. We were enjoying ourselves and drinking. We had not seen each other for a long time. Then all of a sudden two young girls, about 18 years old, come there. We had not spoken with them during the whole evening. They just came and told me and my friend that 'We have run out of money. Can you offer us drinks?' I am normally quite quick-witted. I was just... I could not respond. We just started to laugh with my friend. It was an absurd situation. We just started to laugh. We didn't say anything. We just laughed, as the situation was absurd. The girls left as we just laughed at them. After that I felt that... I was annoyed that... ”

I and my friend are just drinking there, having fun and someone comes and tries to use us. 'Can you gentlemen give us drinks?' That doesn't... If we are there, that does not mean that we want to offer drinks to strangers. **I felt cheap. Like I was being treated like an object**. I have the picture clearly in my mind. I have never really told this to anyone. I felt stupid, like what do you think I am? How stupid are you? I felt that it was insulting.” (FI_M_25_ID)

We now turn to some negative feelings women got in a professional situation. The first one is a quote from a woman who explains she did not get a job because she is a woman and was expected to cause problems by being absent too often on maternity or sick leave. The second quote is about unequal pay.

Q I: And how did you feel about that?

R: Well, **very bad (laughing, silence). Totally without any rights.** Because you really can't do anything if you are a woman. I do understand the employers, because it is true. If there are so many women in the teachers' room, it is a hennery, in quotes. It is better to have something like fifty-fifty or balanced. But the reason that it is expected to take maternity leave and sick leave, this hurt me the most.

I: Did you have a baby already?

R: No. I didn't even consider having one. (SI_F_34_PRO)

Q "One thing **that upset me very much** happened about ten years ago. It suddenly came to my knowledge that a male colleague had over 2000 more a month in salary than I had, even though we had the same role, the same tasks. **This made me furious, really, really angry.** But... The thing was that the way I had found this out. There was a girl doing our salaries, who was really not allowed to tell me this... But she hinted to me, and then I realised that it was true... But I couldn't do anything about it, because then she would have been exposed." (SE_F_60_PRO1)

Surely not only women have negative feelings when being confronted with female stereotypes. Also many male respondents testified how bad they felt about being confronted with a male stereotype. In the quotes below, we find a testimony of a man who feel pressured about having to earn a lot of money, of another man who is not able to see his children anymore after a divorce, of a boy who experienced pressure exercised on him by his father for him to play a 'protective role' (= controlling authority) over his older sister who had a boyfriend and finally of a man being confronted with prejudices towards his professional activities (theatre not being considered a 'male' sector).

Q "My sister has been saying for years now that I will make a lot of money later in life (the respondent is still studying now). Then I get the feeling **that I really should live up to that expectation** and it gives me the idea that I really should make a lot of money. Because later on, I will have to be the man who can support his family and that's the idea I get. I don't fully agree with this, **but it is a constant pressure on me.**" (BE_M_25_PRO)

Q I: So the two of you divorced and afterwards she refused to send the children?

R: Yes, that is what happened. That is when you realise that your legal right to see the children is relative indeed! It looks fine, but in reality, when I went to pick them up, they always had activities to do: a pony-camp, a youth movement camp, etc. Anything was better than being with their father. I still remember at a certain point, yes, **this is very hard on you.** (BE_M_72_CRF3)

Q R: When she was ... she was flirting, she didn't have an affair, when she was 14, with a young boy her age in [name place] and I remember my father came and I didn't understand what he was trying to tell me. He grabbed me very angrily and said you have to protect your sister because if you don't they will call you a cuckold and they will call me a cuckold as well. I did not know what cuckold meant. I asked my mother. Of course my mother did not believe all this but what could she do, she had to excuse him. (...)

I: And what did you do when he addressed this role to you?

R: I don't remember. **I was taken aback and scared** by what he was saying. (GR_M_51_CFR)



“The other thing that has happened to me was with a group. I had organised an activity of theatrical play for children in [name of neighborhood], and there we had open meetings so new people could learn about and come to the group. The parents could watch the meetings, could watch me interact with the children, it was an open session so they could enroll their child. During the conversation afterwards I saw a mother who was very excited, she liked it, and I could see this, she was different before and after the session. I asked her, will you enroll your child in the theatrical play workshop? Oh, no, she said, I don't believe this is right for little boys, I will take my son to karate. I told her, the one doesn't exclude the other.... Little girls can do karate and theatre, and little boys can do karate and theatre... (...) **Angry, I was very angry,** and I expressed it. I told her ‘what you are saying is not correct. It seems to me it takes us back a long way. The identity of your child is not at risk to become a homosexual and all that, from the theatre.’ That is, this is the worry.” (GR_M_30_PRO3)

An important aspect of the quotes above, which voice the negative emotions the respondents feel about being pushed into stereotypical roles, is that despite the negative feelings, not many respondents react accordingly. As in the example of the mother who lingers between guilt, hurt and slowly gaining strength, or the employee who could not react to the situation because a colleague might lose her job, or the student who silently smiles while feeling abused during her oral exam: situations of power can provoke very negative feelings that are not expressed. So, a lot of the negative emotions go unnoticed. This means that probably many more people feel negative about stereotypes than those who feel negative *and* give a negative reaction to it. The latter only seem to show the tip of the iceberg.

6.2.2. Perceptions of inequality and unfairness.

Now, before turning to the positive feelings connected to stereotypes, it is worth to explore a bit further these negative feelings. As could be seen in some of the quotes above, some respondents not only feel negative about a stereotype, they also label it as being unfair, or unequal. Generally speaking, ‘unfair’ or ‘unequal’ in the quotes mean that the respondents feel they are treated differently for reasons related to their sex, in situations where their sex is not relevant at all.

As a first example we turn to a female student who was forced to cook food at school, but had to take the food to the boys to be eaten.

R: And there was another thing that we perceived as **unfair**. We had those cooking classes and we cooked something and then we were forced to bring it to boys so they could eat it.

I: Did they make something for you in return?

R: Not at all. That is why we considered it as ... You know, they did not do anything for us and we were supposed to give them something. It was not our idea; a teacher said that we needed to give meals to boys. (SK_F_47_EDU)

This quote reveals that the feeling of ‘inequality’ is connected to the fact that they had to do something for the boys, but that the boys did nothing in return. The situation is one in which an ‘imbalance’ is perceived between what is given and what is taken. This feeling of imbalance is central to understanding other situations of unfairness, as it is always about something being denied or forced to do, while the other sex is not constrained or pressured in the same way.

I: Does your standpoint that you don't accept you being a housewife and a man not doing anything comes from your family, growing up?

R: No. I don't know from where. I find it very unfair, that I should contribute the same amount to family fund plus do a lot more work and because of that have lesser free time. It is because of that. ... At home I found it quite off, when my father said, ‘where is the salt?’ And instead of getting up and getting the salt from the kitchen that was closer to him, my mother got up and got him the salt. And I was like: ‘Come on! [laughing]. He has two feet as well, why couldn't he get up himself?’ (SI_F_34_CFR)

The above quote points out the imbalanced situation in the household. In this example, both partners contribute to the household income, but the wife is also expected to do the household work. Especially in the second part of the quote (mentioning the salt), the respondent explicitly opposes the imbalanced power situation in which a woman is expected to serve the man and not vice versa.

The quotes reveal that when respondents recognise an imbalanced situation, this easily provokes feelings of anger, or at least irritation. In the example below, this situation causes a break-up between a brother and a sister who are unequally treated in a family business.

“In fact there was great trouble because two of my sisters worked for my father. When I came along I became their boss, and they complained and quarreled because obviously they were more experienced in the business. But he said that I was the male and I must take over, I mean in this case it was to my advantage. But again to be fair, it's because his mentality was that the man is responsible to provide, the man is the head of the family. That's why I took over (...). I mean this was to my advantage. In fact I had a big argument with my sister who had been working there for twenty years, no joke, and I told my father it's either me or her, and he decided it was me because I carry the name of the family. She was married. I mean, at the end of the day, I will keep the family name going, not her. (...) But that's the irony of life over which I have no control.” (MT_M_40_CFR2)

Some respondents do agree that there is an imbalance, but legitimise this imbalance with a variety of arguments. In the two quotes below, the male respondents attribute the differences to biological differences (women are physically not as strong as men) or to women's behaviour (they would be too talkative and troublesome).

“Inequality between men and women also relies on **the physical aspect, in the physical ability and since pre-history there was always this difference:** women taking care of children and home, and men working, being the support, the breadwinner. This is a reality very present in many places.” (PT_M_18_EDU)

R: There isn't equal salary for equal work. I don't know where it exists. Not here. Here, women and men are distinguished. Specially in the wool products/fabric business.

I: (...) Do you mean there is a difference in the salary?

R: Yes, of course, it is obvious. ...

I: But, why do you think that happened? Why did they opt more for men?

R: Because men work a little more, I mean, men don't talk much, women are troublemakers (...)

I: Do you consider that the fact of you earning more than women was fair?

R: Of course. (PT_M_71_PRO)

Another male respondent explains that the difference in income will translate in an unequal power position and will lower the right for women to participate in financial decisions. So the lower income of women is used as a means to legitimise their lesser power. The respondent says that he does not agree with this, but still claims it is a big issue for other people.

“Both contribute, but with different salaries, of course. And that, sometimes, is a big issue: who earns more has much more decision power. But, for me, I don't think that is important; it's important to understand that since the two of them are contributing to the family's money, I think that both must have an equal opinion, an equal weight in the most important decisions in what financial family issues are concerned.” (PT_M_18_CFR)



There are also other types of situations that respondents describe as being 'unequal', but which are not so obviously linked to an imbalance in giving and taking. These 'inequalities' relate to an unequal treatment of women and men that implies assumptions of inferiority in certain contexts. The two quotes below are from the same respondent (already quoted in the previous chapter). In the first quote, he describes how he felt unequally treated at the maternity ward (because men were not considered 'experts' on childcare), in the other quote he talks about his wife being treated unfairly by their common employer.

“Now I realise that it was exactly the same, only the other way around, when we had children. [...] There it is the father who doesn't exist...I had to experience how the nurse answered my wife when I was asking the questions. (...) I realise that this is what women experience all the time... Perhaps it is not so clear for women, who experience it all the time, but it was very clear to me... You notice when you are **unfairly treated**, but I wonder if you notice when you are favoured. (...) You are always favoured, every day, without noticing, just because you are a man...” (SE_M_52_LEI)

“This is an example I had probably not thought about if it hadn't been for my wife... [...] Because we have the same profession, we are both pastors, and we have worked at the same place, and have had the same boss. She had huge problems with him, or he had with her... Anyway, it didn't work out. And we have talked so much about this at home... This is so classically patriarchal, a textbook example... And this is unconscious, because [the boss] thinks he is a great feminist and very aware... And he is so patriarchal, in every way you can imagine, every master **suppression technique**: diminishing, double bind, and all the unmotivated and unpredictable tellings-off...” (SE_M_52_LEI)

6.2.3. Positive emotions (being happy to be a 'typical' man/woman)

Not only negative emotions towards gender stereotypes are noticeable. Some respondents react in the opposite way and feel good about them. These are generally women and men who seem to feel good about their femininity or masculinity and certain stereotypes attached to them.

In the first two quotes female respondents are talking who enjoy being helped by men. Interestingly, the first

woman is 73 years old, while the second is only 25. So, both in the older and younger generations, there seem to be women who enjoy this aspect of their femininity.

“The way I behave demands **respect**. Especially from men. It requires respect. I will give a look, speak, smile, or not respond sometimes and... There is no possibility that they would not give me a bow, open a door in front of me, help me, or... Apart from this, I learned one thing and I consider it very beautiful - I ask for help. As a matter of fact, I tell everybody about it. I am not one of these who would drag some loads. I say: 'Could you help me please?'. And it works out in a totally normal way. And as some tell me, it's not a request. It's not a request and it is impossible not to do and they do it in such a kind and nice way. And I have never humiliated anyone. Never. And now, it helps a lot. And here, I believe that **my femininity is a very, very good thing**.” (PL_F_73_ID)

R.: I feel that I'm a woman every day. I walk every day, very often – and I, it seems to me that I'm a woman who exploits the fact of being a woman very well. I feel that, well I don't know, – men open doors for you; if you smile – they let you go first. (...)

I.: And how do you feel in such situations?

R.: I feel very good in such situations. (...) I think it's great, when, let's say speaking of gender equality – it is great when there are men and there are women and that is the business of every woman herself to choose if she wants to be equal or not. I think that there is nothing bad about being a woman and that someone opens doors for you or, I don't know, helps to carry a sack or something... I take advantage of that with pleasure. I like when somebody hands me over my coat. I often give my coat to a man myself so that he would help me to put it on. I honestly don't have problems with it. (LV_F_25_ID1)

The above quotes show women who appear to believe that asking for help and accepting it is a prerogative of women (only). They seem to think that if they would be men, they would not have the right to be treated that way.

In the next two quotes, the same theme appears that triggered negative emotions for some respondents in the previous section, i.e. the female student – male professor relationship. Here we find two female students who are happy about (ab)using their femininity in order to get better grades.

“So I have experienced only **positive situations**. Namely, it has been easier for me. At my university, I study at ASP [the Academy of Fine Arts], it is girls, who have it much easier. And if they are pretty, then I can do nothing at all, I can have my work done at the last moment or not come to the corrections at all, or attend classes just once per month. . . and it's easy since professors are men. Women do not teach at our faculty at all, . . . so there are men only. For instance, for one course, I need to have a couple of print-outs done. I do not have anything and I get 5 [‘very good’ grade], whereas my male friends have their print-outs and get 3 [‘satisfactory’ grade]. And everybody knows that I will dress more nicely for classes [laugh] and **it’s cool.**” (PL_F_20_EDU)

“Because I was, because I am a woman, I handed my work in a day later, but the professor didn’t reduce my grade although he had promised to do so. He gave me a remission. (...) **I used it. I am not ashamed, or ... I feel good in this model.** I think everyone should use the benefits of [his/her] sex.” (LV_F_25_EDU)

Below is a quote from a male respondent who feels very good about being male because he believes this makes his emotional life much less complicated.

“It is a bit of a statement that I sometimes think about and then I think: **‘yes, in fact I am happy to be a man!’** It sounds stupid, but well. . . No, there is also a disadvantage attached to it (but men are much less complicated) especially emotionally, because. . . I notice with my partner that she can really rack her brains about something. I do have this as well at times, but most of the time I can **much more easily put things into perspective.** And I notice that my girlfriend gets much more involved and gets carried away by things and can lose confidence and feel unsure. And actually I – sometimes even in an irritating manner – react to this as follows: ‘Just let go of it! It’s no use to get wound up about it, it is a waste of energy, just let go!’ So, that is a clear difference that I notice and because of which I think: ‘yes!’ And I also think it is women-specific, typically for women. That it is a tendency. Men don’t do that as much and have much more a tendency to just let go. Those are little things and women get much more wound up about it.” (NL_M_34_ID)

The above quotes illustrate how some respondents feel good about certain stereotypical aspects of their sex. It is furthermore clear that they not only feel positive emotions about the gender-stereotypical elements, but also how their perceptions shape their actions. These external reactions are considered in the next section.

6.3. External reactions to stereotypes: dealing with stereotypes through actions

Stereotypes evoke emotions in women and men and in turn these emotions are sometimes – but not always – turned into concrete actions. We have divided these external reactions in three broad categories: actions that oppose the stereotypes (reacting against), actions that (ab)use stereotypes to one’s advantage and finally actions that just consist of ‘going with the flow’ and in doing so confirm and possibly reiterate the stereotypes.

6.3.1. Reacting against (e.g. rebellion, sabotage, questioning)

The first type of reaction that we will be looking at is a ‘rebellious’ reaction, i.e. the person does not agree with the stereotype and wants to change it. Different ‘stages’ of opposition can be recognised in the respondents’ accounts about how they reacted. The first reaction consists of a questioning of the situation, which will typically be done in a discussion. A lot of talking appears to be done when people decide to go against a stereotype. Talking about it, reasoning and looking for a logical conclusion, questioning the current situation, is the first effort undertaken by many respondents. So a verbal reaction will often be the first step. Next, we find certain respondents who turn their opinions into decisions to change something in their lives and who will take action as a result. We will now look at quotes that illustrate each of these stages (verbal reaction, action).

Questioning / discussing / reasoning about

In the quotes below, (female) respondents describe how they tried to engage in a discussion with the person who imposed the stereotype upon them. Their reasoning seems to have been that by logically deconstructing the stereotype in a discussion, the behaviour of the other person can be changed. The female respondents explain how they try to use the talking strategy in their relationships with husband, mothers or others, hoping this will change the situation.



☞ R: Yes. And then **I have to explain him over and over again** that maybe it has been a woman's work when men took care of the family and women stayed at home and do house work. But now in the 21st century it is not like that anymore. That is the way it is. (laughing)

I: And what does he say then?

R: He just cleans up. So I am pleased.

I: And he is serious when he says it's women's work or is it a joke?

R: It is not a joke. He really thinks in this way. He still tries in some way too. But well, now we are together for so long that he knows I won't give in. But he still does. (SI_F_34_CFR)

☞ "For example, when my mother used to tell me 'I won't feed you if you don't help me'. **And I used to retaliate. I used to tell her** 'then my brother won't eat either because he is not helping you'. For me, that's stupid that the woman has to be a sort of slave of the house." (MT_F_45_CFR)

☞ R: Well, I also think that in such situations... once in such a professional situation, I've experienced something that was not violence, but a kind of... One did not talk about harassment at that time but it was a form of harassment. For instance, a guy who addresses a woman by 'sweetheart' is simply a loser for me from the start. I mean, **I did not allow to be called like this, but...**

I: **So you did react...cR: But of course! Instantly, yes.** I mean this was a man, who... An older man, older than me and at that time already quite... an older man before retirement. And he addressed people, women like this. However, after this first time, he has never addressed me like this anymore. (PL_F_55_ID)

Whereas talking about stereotypes is obviously an important step in the change process, further actions might be needed to actually implement the change.

Strategic decisions in the field of education, motherhood, relationships, etc.

Some respondents talk about taking strategic decisions at a certain point, resulting in actions. So, rather than trying to change the views of the other person, they would change their own behaviour – either in a more or less emancipatory direction, as can be seen in the examples below. The first respondent recounts how she started to neglect her schoolwork after finding out that she was not allowed to become a veterinary because she was a girl. The second quote reflects the opposite situation: a woman who, after being treated condescendingly by her boyfriend about not having a university diploma, decided to get one.

☞ R: I was in my early teens and I was doing quite well in school and I was learning Latin, which was unusual for girls and my aim was to be vet (veterinary). I remember talking to my father about it and he explained that there was no way that I could possibly be a vet because women vets were not taken seriously in Ireland and therefore that was a very foolish career choice for me.

I: You were living in the countryside?

R: Yes, in the far edge of a town. And to this day I'm still very good with animals and can have enormous empathy with animals, maybe even better than with humans. [laughs] So, **I was so upset, I gave up studying Latin, my schoolwork really deteriorated**, so instead of forging ahead with good academic studies, I did a very mediocre final exam in school which meant that I couldn't go to university at all. And, so that was the first gender negativity that I experienced in my life. (IE_F_68_PRO)

☺ R: I went to university. What influenced that decision? One of the motivating factors was the fact that I had a boyfriend at the time. He was horrible. He always said: 'if you can't explain something, you don't really understand it! So he was really into knowledge! So in fact this stimulated me very much. So he was really condescending towards me, because he thought that I was... that I couldn't analyze things properly and couldn't lecture properly. So because of this, mine, yes **actually by making me look smaller, I started thinking: 'What? I will show you what I can!'. [laughs] I can remember that that was one of the motivating factors for me to go to university.** And I really enjoyed it very much. Yes, I am very happy that I went to university because this put me in touch with completely different worlds. Yes, with people whom I... Yes, that is where I found recognition, yes friends for life, it was really great! I: So actually because somebody looked down upon you, you were positively stimulated to show what you were worth? So it had the adverse effect?

R: Yes, so that pressure was never put on me at home. My parents were very accepting. (NL_F_53_EDU)

The two quotes above show that a negative influence will not automatically result in a negative outcome. Some persons regard a negative situation as a stimulus to take a positive decision, whereas others will be disillusioned and therefore contribute - with their (re-)actions - to making the stereotype a self-fulfilling prophecy.

To end this section on rebellious strategies towards stereotypes, here are two stories of a man and a woman, who both recount in great detail the intricate steps and actions that helped them in their change.

☺ "The change was really about: 'ok, what kind of a man do I want to be?' and: 'what do I want to do and how do I want to be in the world?' and 'how do I learn how to be the man that I want to be?' and **I became involved in men's groups and men's development and just awareness,** the way things were for me and ... it took me about five years to... **I stopped working insanely** in 2000, to **slow down** I work an awful less, and as you know I turned 60 this week. I looked around in 2000, I looked around at my colleagues where I was working and I realised that most of them are ten years younger than me and suddenly I realised: 'I don't want to do this work this way anymore. I don't want to work this hard, **actually I don't need to earn as much money** as I was then. I was earning about close to a quarter million Euro a year at that stage, right at the top of that business. To earn that you have to work really, really hard. And I couldn't do it, I lost interest, I couldn't care anymore. And I want to be as involved with other men in men's groups and in working with men and I was much more interested in that. That work certainly doesn't pay a quarter of a million Euros a year [laughs]!!'" (IE_M_60_ID)



☺ R: Foolishly, I got married. And my husband worked, owned (or at least his family owned) a pub. So, I worked, I had my two children there and I also worked in the pub and I set up a bar-food business, which was very famous at the time, because I specialised in seafood. So, anyway, it was a seaside resort area and the pub was very lucrative, but I wasn't paid. And as well as that - well, we had a good lifestyle, but I only got my housekeeping - and as well as that, I found out later - in Ireland it is called 'stamping a card' - but it was paying social insurance. Nobody paid social insurance for me, so when I came to retirement age, I didn't get a good payment although I worked every day of my life! So, that was another gender issue, because my husband always had social security and as well as that, he put money away in a private bank.(...)

R: But anyway, we divorced after 10 years of marriage. In the meantime, after about 7 years, I started in college.

I: I was wondering, what made you had that major change in your life of divorcing your first husband and deciding to go to school? After having worked in a pub for many years and, you know, not really earned a lot. I mean you had your living, but they didn't pay much.

R: Well, that was part of it. Because I found that **I wasn't valued**. And **we were having a row** one day and I asked him where I came in, in his life and I came about 7th, after the dog and everything else and so I realised that there was no place for me and as well as that, the local doctor had seen how distressed I was. And in those days they didn't realise the implications of prescribing Valium and things like that, so **I was on heavy doses of Valium and sleeping pills** and all sorts of things. Then my father died and so it made me begin to think about life and the meaning of life and so I gave up cigarettes, Valium and sleeping pills all on one day! And **I had a big long think** about what I was going to do with the rest of my life. **And if I wanted to do anything meaningful, I had to go back and study**. And that's what I did and from my very first day in college, it was a Philosophy Lecture and it was like somebody turned on all the lights. It was wonderful. And so, I would still be student if I could! (IE_F_68_PRO)

6.4. (Ab)using stereotypes (tapping into the stereotype for one's own advantage)

Some stories show how in certain situations people try to use (aspects of) gender stereotypes to their own advantage. These situations can be recognised as conscious strategies, not to oppose the stereotype, but to tap into it for one's own profit.

Let us first turn again to the female student–male professor relationship discussed above in the section about the emotional reactions. As was stated there, some respondents felt bad about the situation, others appeared to feel comfortable that they can use their femininity to raise their grades. The first quote below is from a student who consciously uses the stereotype as a strategy for raising her grades.

☺ I: And you mentioned earlier that you noticed it at other times too that this professor paid more attention to girls, or that he privileged those girls who were more dressed up, and you said you also had a similar experience. Was that at an exam? And also could you tell me how you felt then, I mean, was this a strategy for you at the time, or...?

R: (laughs) Yes, **I think there was this strategic aspect too**, related to this subject. This was a final exam and only a one-semester subject, so... And during that term, this was the first semester at university, we did not take this subject too seriously, and also the professor's style implied that... he basically implied that the most important was to be present at the lectures, and at the exam too it seemed it was enough just to show up and I thought, well, if that was the case, let's make the most of it... and let me receive not just a C but a B or B+. **If I can get that just like this, why not make use of it. So yes, there was a strategic reason behind this, very much so.** (HU_F_20_EDU)

The two quotes below show that both women and men may be believed to use gender stereotypes to their advantage: in the first quote, the men gladly accept the opportunity to act naughtier, in the second quote, the professional women act in a more masculine way in order to claim more power. However, the stereotype as such does not appear to be really contested by those who decide to tap into the stereotype.

“You know, **boys are supposed to be naughtier** and girls are supposed to be more quiet! **And they got away with a lot**, including the fact that they didn't respect the deadline, that they could fight with the boss, to tell her 'I don't feel like doing this, I will say no and you can't do anything about it!', I mean they were pretty unreserved and demanding, and could just ignore it if they didn't feel like doing it.” (RO_F_24_PRO)

“Because I think, my impression is that women act this way because they feel that if they act like women, the audience would consider it as a weakness, as something inappropriate. That is what I think. They **have a tendency to act according to male stereotypes, the way of dress code**, they wear a dark suit and a white shirt for a press conference. They imitate men, only a tie is missing.” (SK_M_39_PRO)

Some respondents take actions without really fighting the stereotype itself, but rather changing it to their advantage. Still, this can have an emancipatory effect on them as in the quote below where a girl's father could not pay for her dowry. Instead of opposing the dowry system itself (she does not really question this stereotype), she decides to find a job herself so she can pay her own dowry.


R: Don't forget that in those days the girl needed to have a dowry. The dowry by force you had to buy it. We decided, myself and my older sister that we start working from the home. I forgot to tell you that my father used to sell animal fodder, with a van, around the streets.

I: So (...) we were saying that the dowry was a must for the girls, but there were no...

R: ... finances in the family **because there was not enough money for a dowry for five girls. We could not find a job outside the home, therefore we had to invent something.** In the meantime, my father used to sell animal fodder, right. Now **myself and my older sister we decided that we start reading recipes and we cook them and we try them out.** And my father started experiencing a loss in his business because people stopped keeping animals in their homes, and he changed to selling confectionary what we cooked myself and my sister. Our work was in request and we even organised wedding and baptism receptions. (MT_F_64_CFR1)

The last quote in this section deals with motherhood. It concerns a Dutch mother who wanted to be a (single) parent and strategically chose to have a child with a man with a different cultural background. She explains that she was motivated by her knowing that men in her own country take fatherhood seriously and want to take part in the upbringing of their children, a role which she was not prepared to grant the future father of her child. The interesting perspective is that the social norm in her country would stigmatise men who do not assume all responsibilities that come with their fatherhood, while the 'model father' represented exactly the type of man she did not want as a father for her child, since she believed he would restrain her freedom and claim rights to the child.



 R: I had a very gloomy scenario in my head when I thought about children. I thought that the responsibility was too big. But anyway, then I was living in the Dominican Republic and I met someone who had a very nice son and then I started thinking: 'I would like, with him...' Well, it was a love relationship, but also very clearly: 'with him I would like to have a child!' And I know that partly this was because **I knew he would not play a big role in raising the child.** That is a very rational logical calculation, I think. So obviously it is love and you don't just randomly pick a man. It was a man of whom I thought: 'I would want him to be the father of my child, he is a loving man.' But as a 'parent' I didn't think he was up to the task and that is very normal in the Caribbean culture. People always have children from several fathers and fathers sometimes play a role in raising the children but more often don't or hardly do. So, that was okay in that context. **It worked a lot better than if I would have chosen to do this in the Netherlands because in the Netherlands, the men demand their fatherhood or their role in raising the children. Men in the Netherlands say: 'I don't want a child unless I can participate in raising it!'** So...

I: I also think that there is more pressure from society to take up that role? I think a father here who does not take up his responsibility as a father would get a lot of negative criticism?

R: Yes, because here, taking up responsibility for your child is very important. That is very important. The men that I know, those whom I appreciate, in fact most men, take this very seriously. Just as seriously as the women I know. They have ideas about educational models and styles and you should combine that with your work and what you want to offer your child and choice of partners with whom you want to have that child. So, in a Caribbean culture these things don't count. So having a child is considered a positive thing for a man, but having to take care of it is optional. You can if you want to, but are not obliged or expected. And if women demand anything, it will be financial support. **So, that freedom that I experienced in this matter, a lot of the Caribbean women have and the African as well.** (NL_F_53_CFR)

6.5. Acting according to stereotypes

In this last section of this chapter, we look at respondents who are confronted with stereotypes, but decide to just 'go with the flow'. The respondents notice the stereotypes and all of them have negative feelings about them. Nevertheless, they do not think that any specific action is needed or believe they are in a position that does not allow action, and so refrain from action or just accept the situation as it is.

The first quote is about a 'minor' event, but which nevertheless seems to have conveyed an important message to the young girl, since sixty years later she still remembers the experience.

 "I think of my grandmother. This was one Christmas and we were quite a large family and I was eighteen or nineteen and I was wearing trousers and my grandmother said to my mother: 'She's not sitting at the table in those'. And I said: 'oh, for goodness sake'. And my mother who was an eternal diplomat said: 'please, go and put a skirt on and **don't make a fuss**'. So I had to go and put a skirt on before I was allowed to sit at the table, because I was wearing trousers." (UK_F_79_SOC)

The trousers in this quote probably also had a symbolic meaning, suggesting emancipation. The interaction of the three generations of women in this short quote is interesting: the oldest generation setting a conservative norm, the middle generation not agreeing with it, but not wanting to explicitly oppose, and the youngest generation showing more revolt but eventually giving in. It can be assumed that this type of intergenerational interaction is quite common.

Loyalty can also be quite important in certain age groups when it comes to peer pressure. In the next quote, a student feels obliged to laugh about stupid jokes, to gain acceptance.

“I realised that after I started [my university program], I have learnt to laugh at other kinds of jokes, that it is a much more manly jargon. And if you're not into that, then you are regarded as very cross and boring... If you don't think it is great fun that someone paints a cock in your pad while sitting at a lecture... I can see that there has been a change, that I suddenly have learnt to laugh at other things. **I think that you, or at least I do, quickly feel that if you want to be a part of the group you have to join in on the talk as well, even if I don't think that this type of jokes which are much about sex and quite harsh you know... [are very funny].**” (SE_F_23_EDU)

In love relationships, some respondents seem to be more likely to accept stereotypes, or at least not to be confrontational about them, even when they do not agree with the stereotypical roles and feel bad about them. In the first quote below, a male respondent complains about not seeing his children often after his divorce, but says that there is nothing that can be done about it. The second quote is from a woman who followed her husband against her will when he decided to move to a different town.

The third quote sheds a different light on the same matter. Here a male respondent talks and he warns that it is not because women take up their stereotypical role 'dutifully', that they do not build up resentment inside and might one day demand a reward for their altruistic behaviour. So, this respondent believes that it is not because the situation is accepted at one point that problems cannot arise later on.

I: Sometimes there can be disagreement about children, did you both agree that the children will stay with the mother?

R: Well, I will put it like that, **what can I do? This is some kind of societal consensus**, right. So, this is it.

I: Would you want...?

R: Yes, it would be nicer if they were with me, of course. **But it is like that, this is momentary praxis. What can you do?** (SI_M_53_CFR2)

R: Yes, in those days it was still the technical college, but later on became the technical university. The technical university was new, was modern. They had lots of facilities. It was the landmark of the region. So that sounded like fun to me. However, my wife did not like it at all. She did not want to go there. In those days it was normal – we got married in 1966 – you got married, you started a family, your husband had a good job, so you quit your job. That was true.

I: So, do I understand you correctly that when choices about your relationship were concerned – like where to live, who continues to work – **your wife found it evident to follow you and put her own ambitions aside, so stopped working and moved with you to town B?**

R: Yes, in those days that was it. Especially moving to that village was a very sensitive point. That is what she says now: 'I really did not want to, but I just did it'. That was normal, she could not influence that choice. (NL_M_67_CRF)



Q R: It wasn't a long relationship, also because she was more eager to be more in this situation, classification, that I really don't like. Because of that we haven't had a chance for development since the very beginning. So, it was like that. These classical colours of femaleness are very obnoxious.

I: What are these classical colours of femaleness that you didn't like about her?

R: That I didn't like about her? This unconditional, total attachment, when you have a feeling that the other person is living just for you. That you are the center of her world and that only what you do matters, nothing else. So, the other always adjusts to you. I think this resembles going out with a zombie. So... **These are some women who orient their whole identity to their partner and at the same time they lose any personality they have.** And all that is left is willingness. So sad.

I: And also in the classic sense, did she cook to you and you...?

R: Yes, that too, yes. I mean, I don't mind that she cooks for me. This is great (laughing). But it is really, really unpleasant that she totally devotes herself to you. A zombie. And the problem with the zombie is this **complex of a good suffering mother. This devotion is not for free.**

I: And what is the price?

R: **I didn't get to know the price. Well the price is always this inner resentment. If this willingness is not returned with great gratefulness.** These are two functions of a certain relationship and in any case you can only go crazy.

I: So behind all that is a motive?

R: I think that actually it is not. It is still given out of love, affection. But you can never, ever pay for it, it is not possible, while it is a total devotion which can only be paid with total devotion. But it is never paid because the absolute cannot be given all at once. She is giving all the time but she only gets little pieces in return. Unrealistic expectations. And I think this is quite a common syndrome of a number of women who still cling to this old, old division of roles of men and women. (SI_M_26_CFR)

Below are two more quotes in which women describe how bad they felt about a stereotype but nevertheless decided not to express their discontent because they believe it can be unwise to speak up in certain situations.

Q "I felt I should just be quiet, just act [calm], I don't have to become annoyed, because I feel that seniority in years is more important... And as for 'honey'... [...] I could have said 'don't call me honey'... **But what's in it for me, I have to think [strategically] here...** What kind of future communication do I want to have with this man? Do I want to be the bitch, this feminist pain in the ass? [...] Shall I make a row? One has to think [strategically]... Perhaps it's better to smile a bit, to 'know your enemy' instead of having a confrontation..." (SE_F_29_PRO2)

Q "But I resented my male friends even more because all they could say was: 'That's why we don't like going out with girls – it always leads to problems.' So we got the picture that the problem was us. (...) **This is how quite a lot of boys and girls react to violence or harassment in general: we shut up, we don't dare make a fuss, for a number of reasons.** One reason is precisely that we are afraid that if we were obliged to confront those blokes physically we would have no chance, and so you say 'better a wandering hand than a punch in the eye.'" (LU_F_25_VIO)

7. Effects of gender stereotypes





This chapter aims at identifying the effects (results and impacts) of gender stereotypes on people's lives. The analysis of all collected stories shows that gender stereotypes play out in different ways and have effects at different levels. In what follows, the effects of gender stereotypes are grouped in categories that are broadly organised from the societal level to the individual level. Such categories are made for analytical purposes and since they are partly overlapping, it is not possible to make a strict delineation between them. Moreover, in each category, different areas can be recognised in which gender stereotypes are present and affect people's lives. Overall, the effects of stereotypes that were identified are overwhelming, mainly for women, and this was recognised by women as well as by men in the study.

The researchers have attempted to describe all the effects that were revealed in the interviews. Of course, this does not mean that all happened in the same situation, at the same time and/or to the same person. Rather, an overview is given of the different types of effects that may be caused by gender stereotypes. These descriptions are enriched with some fragments of quotes that illustrate and confirm what is being described. Furthermore, references are provided to other stories in the database which contain similar arguments.

A partial overlap can be recognised with Chapter 5 where norms, values and social patterns are addressed because these may be the instigators of the social sanctions that are described in this section.

The sections below address subsequently: social effects; effects on relations; effects on studies; effects at work; effects in the private sphere; effects on leisure activities; physical effects; and emotional and psychological effects.

7.1. Social effects

Social effects play out on people due to common societal perceptions that are stereotypical.

Women's marital status

According to the respondents, (adult) women's marital status (especially when single, separated or divorced) may influence the way they are perceived and treated. According to what respondents told in some of their stories, women are generally expected to have a male partner to support them. Violations of this expectation can be socially sanctioned: women may experience being looked down upon, being gossiped about, may suffer marginalisation, may be pressured to find a male

partner, or they may be perceived as having a different sexual orientation. In addition, divorced (or separated) women may be perceived as a negative role model for girls or other women, and their capacity to bring up or to take care of their children without the presence of a man may be questioned. Evidences that support these findings are provided below.⁶

“I often encounter that if a woman is single, without a partner... For example my grandparents, I am 23 and they have never met my boyfriend so my grandmother asked me whether I am of a different sexual orientation... that is really funny. They push me to introduce them to some boy because it is not normal if a woman of my age has no man. So once she asked me directly whether everything was OK and whether I were a lesbian.” (SK_F_23_SOC)

“That's true that I did some work in the flat, I moved in so it allegedly disturbed him [a neighbour] and he turned to be horrible: I received registered letters from the property board all the time (...). I think that if I had been in a couple, he would have had a completely different behaviour. I think that he felt strong enough: because of his age, his anteriority in the building and the fact of being a man, well, he might think that being a woman, I would be afraid of him, I would be scared and I would not fight back.” (FR_F_55_CFR2)

“You should bear in mind that in a small city in region A at that moment there might be [just] two or three girls that got separated. Two things were done to them. First, [they experienced] social segregation since they could be a bad example for other girls. Furthermore, there was a sense of misfortune, of someone who is incapable of solving her problems with docility.” (ES_F_61_CFR)

⁶ Other examples can be found in the online database (see FI_F_70_CFR and PL_F_55_CFR).

“I divorced and became a single parent with three teenaged daughters... (...) What was a surprise to me and what is related to being a woman was that many male acquaintances or family members – more or less directly – called into question me coping with the kids alone. They clearly presumed that I will get a new man to deal with everything. (...) They were so clear, the arguments that you cannot handle everything, that... The point was that the life of my daughters, who were 10-13 then, was ruined now. They could not become decent people who do well in the society. That the divorce was my choice and, that I have chosen to ruin the life of my children. That was the message and that was the most difficult thing to bear at that point. That was really surprising, especially when I heard it from different directions - from my family, from the environment, from friends.” (FI_F_55_CFR1)

Different categorisations and perceptions for women and men

According to what the respondents mentioned in the interviews, for the same actions or in similar situations, women and men may be categorised/perceived differently and this can have severe consequences in people’s lives (at different levels) if the community in which they are integrated (neighbourhood, school, university, village, among other contexts) is aware of the action.

A perception that was commonly reported was that an individual who has sexual relations with several people may be categorised or perceived differently depending on whether s/he is a woman or a man.⁷ In the first situation, some people might consider a woman to be a prostitute and she may be excluded by other women as well as by men. In the second case, a man would rather be considered a womaniser and it may even be appreciated and encouraged among other men.

“The woman is for the house. To do the housework, look after the children, to be nice and not to be criticised, to have a good reputation (...). Whereas boys, if they go around with one girl and then with another, my mother didn't like that, but my father, my uncle etc. they thought that it was an achievement, I was their favourite son. (...) In my family, for my town she would be considered a prostitute. [laughter] Whereas the boy is a womaniser. They do the same thing but it is not the same for the society. And I believe that this is not only in my town. (CY_M_23_CFR)

Another example that was recognised in the interviews is how people think that women and men are perceived differently when they are victims of domestic violence, and that such different perceptions may influence victims’ behaviour. As the quote below illustrates, the belief exists that it is socially more accepted when a woman admits that she was a victim of domestic violence rather than a man. When domestic violence happens to a woman, people tend to be totally supportive, whereas when a man is the victim, people may question their masculinity and their (physical and psychological) strength, judge the male victim or even make jokes about him.⁸

“Maybe it’s the habit, let’s say that, and the mentality that people still have. And it has also to do with the media, because it is always visible, when it talks about it, that the situations of domestic violence are always done by men against women, women appear hurt and women appear dead, and, in fact, it doesn’t talk too much about men and it actually happens [to them]. (...) Because there are many men that, due to the discomfort that society, friends, neighbours will instil them, close themselves more and, maybe, they live their whole life suffering from domestic violence and don’t tell it because of the burden that comes next. And for women it’s a more common situation, they don’t mind revealing it and try to change the situation.” (PT_F_33_VIO).

7 Examples are available in the database, e.g. CY_M_29_SOC, DE_M_30_ID, ES_M_21_CFR, ES_M_62_CFR and IE_M_21_ID.

8 Further evidence supporting this observation can be found in UK_F_19_VIO.



Different credibility depending on the area of “expertise”

Women and men seem to be perceived as being “experts” in different kinds of subjects. (This point has been made and illustrated also in Chapter 5.) In certain situations of life, some respondents described men being seen as more credible than women and vice-versa in certain aspects, which may affect the way people react to them.

Different situations in daily life were highlighted by the respondents in which women and men experience a different treatment by other people because they are not recognised as “experts” of certain domains⁹.

“When I was with a male friend in the bus, discussing politics, something, I don’t know, some piece of news, we were commenting on it. And an older guy on the bus told him in awe that ‘you will become a great man!’. And it was as if the hope in the new generation and politics needs to be supported by guys, maybe also in this context that ‘the youth is emigrating and we need someone to stay here and take care of things’. And I believe this is rather oriented towards the male population, that you need a man with a good image, who is still a bit paternalistic, with an iron hand.” (RO_F_24_SOC)

Women and politics

There seems to be a stereotypical perception about men’s skills on leadership and politics. Some respondents pointed out some of the consequences that women may experience if they hold a position in politics. The common perception that came out in the interviews was that women’s ability may be questioned by other people, as the examples given below show.

“So there was this research, in (name of agricultural district around the capital city), we were two girls and a boy. (...) What I noticed was that in the moment when we went and tried to explain to them, and state our status, that I was a student and we were doing a research on this, this and this, when we would get to the political questions we would inevitably arrive to things such as (...) ‘what do girls have to do with politics’, (...) ‘why do you want to know’ and we would end up with nothing, after hours and hours of trying, inquiring, talking to women who were telling me to wait for their husbands to come home, so they could answer the questions about politics claiming they didn’t know these things, ‘my husband knows, but he is away now’. (...) There was also this thing (...) this idea of women in politics didn’t penetrate the rural areas, wasn’t known. Even if the implicit assumption about women in politics is that, ‘who knows who they slept with to get there’. (RO_F_24_SOC)

9 Further examples include SE_M_52_LEI and SK_F_62_SOC.

“In autumn I ran for a position in the local self-government. There were 18 candidates out of which three were women. (...) I was the only woman with university education and I was the youngest one. (...) I probably had the best qualification because I even have a degree in public affairs. But there were only men elected to the self-government and one woman. (...) When I came to the self-government with some suggestions how to do things differently, how to be more proactive and publicise information I had a feeling that they thought that I did not understand anything and why I cared and that I was too young to be taken seriously. I still have that feeling. (...) there has never been a woman in a position. According to my knowledge there is only that one lady who is serving her second term. But before, I do not know about any other woman who is interested in this sort of things. In fact, people expect that it should be a man in the position, with secondary or even better university education. This is the idea of that person. (During the campaign) the reactions were positive. I was surprised how people, even older people, told me that it was great that I tried. One lady who had moved to our neighbourhood told me that in her previous place there were no young people willing to become members of self-government. So I was quite positive about a possibility to be elected, that it was not that difficult. And then I got surprised. (...) Formally, I was able to run for the position. Informally, I was a young woman. If I were a young man the society would have taken it differently as if he would represent some hope of civic participation. But if it is a woman ... as if I would necessarily fail.” (SK_F_23_ID)

process (a power position) or ‘at risk of rejection’ (since they may experience being rejected).

“Women like to buy many clothes and be admired because the man is the hunter.” (CY_M_46_CFR)

“I thought generally the process of relationships: starting relationships, going on dates. It is always, well not always, but generally the man is meant to instigate that. So, approach a woman and ask her on a date, pay the meal, all of that. All that sort of things which I see as pretty unfair. (...) You’re expected to make all the moves and show all the interest of... So it is you who is going to be rejected, rather than the other way around. But then, of course, there are negative sides for women as well where they have to wait to be approached. There are some, I don’t know... I don’t know how to put this... I guess the... There are some ideas of women approaching men, where it is – I don’t know – I don’t express myself very well... Yes, it is not expected I suppose. (...) I don’t see why that should be the case, I mean, that is pretty archaic.” (UK_M_21_CFR)

“When I was sixteen years old I was attracted to a young man, and after many months feeling desperate I decided to speak to him about it and tell him how I was feeling in his regard. And I did. He was very polite even though he did not share my feelings. He was polite, he did not humiliate me. He told me it would be better if we remained friends. And anyway, when I told my friends about it everyone looked shocked, as if I had done a very grave error, like I had lost my dignity, very serious, like I had put myself to ridicule. You know what it’s like to lose your dignity. I had shown that I was desperate. My friends told me that in these matters it is the male who has to take the first step.” (MT_F_22_CFR)

7.2. Effects on relations

Seduction

According to the findings, there seems to be a common perception that categorises men as ‘hunters’ and women as ‘hunted’, and according to which men may be expected to have a more active role in the ‘seduction process’. Evidences can be found in the stories that some men may find it a privilege to be the first to approach women (e.g. CY_M_46_CFR) while other men may perceive it as unfair (e.g. UK_M_21_CFR). On the other hand, it may not be accepted when a woman ‘takes the first step’. This evidence was found in PL_M_56_SOC and MT_F_22_CFR. The belief that it should be the man who takes the initiative to approach a woman may have effects for both sexes: women may feel constrained in their freedom to act, while men may either feel in control of the seduction

Social interaction

Social interactions between people are very complex and may vary according to one’s sex, as recognised in the interviews performed.

On the one hand, social interactions between people of different sexes may be recognised as an opportunity for seduction by other people (even if it is not the intention of the person). These perceptions may restrain people’s



spontaneity and also the way they interact with a person of the other sex¹⁰.

“For example, I walk the streets or so, I meet people, I am a communicative person, so I start conversations. But if it is with men I am trying to seduce them. Women often tell me that I am trying to seduce every man. But this is not what I do. I communicate with men in the same way I do with women and it does not mean that I am seducing anyone. They never say that I seduce women! If I communicate with women, it is normal. If I communicate with men, I seduce them.” (SK_F_23_SOC)

“And I am surprised to find too that in these types of relations as a man I’m probably more careful about what I say to women... With my ‘trainer’s hat’ on, yes, I think I most certainly restrain myself... Where I perhaps find it easier to go... to have physical contact with a male participant... I’ll put my hand on his shoulder... Perhaps with a woman I’m more reluctant to allow myself that type of contact, and if I were a woman, I think I would face less of a barrier to do it with both (men and women)... And then as a man I’m probably more careful about what kind of... attitude, nonverbal communication... Than a woman would be... Because I’m not saying I’m afraid of being prosecuted or anything... But I think somewhere you say to yourself: be careful, that could be misconstrued.” (BE_M_39_PRO3)

On the other hand, social interactions between people of the same sex may be perceived differently as there might be a connection between one’s sexual orientation and social interactions. This was especially recognised in the interviews in ‘man-to-man’ interactions. There may be a fear of being considered homosexual by other boys/men when there is a close relationship/friendship. Consequently, boys/men may prevent themselves to engage in this kind of relationships with other men. Nevertheless, this may not happen in ‘woman-to-woman’ relations (as it was recognised in an example above). Some evidence is provided in the quotes below.

“When I was a child, in primary school, I had a friend who used to spend the summers in my home town. We had quite a deep friendship. (...) So once, I was leaving school with my friends and this guy was waiting for me because he was on vacation. (...) I said hello and automatically the other boys began saying that he was my boyfriend. Yes, it was very disgusting for me. I completely rejected that... I didn’t know how to react. And even if I went to play with my friend at that moment, from then on I never wanted to see him again. The fear... Sure, at that point I wasn’t aware at all. But I was afraid of being called a queer, pussy, homosexual, which were very common insults.” (ES_M_30_LEI)

“I had a very close male-friend, when I was between 16-17 years old, who was something of a model, including the cultural sense of it and really intimate to me. (...) At that age he had a great impact over me. The way he dressed... We sat and talked a whole lot and even until today he remained the absolutely only guy in my life with whom I could talk for ten hours non-stop, we had moments like this. Afterwards, I realised that it was something almost like a homosexual relationship, only without a consummation. (...) I don’t think he ever considered it. But as a typology, it was like being in a relationship, because we would meet at high school, we would call one another when we got home, we would spend so much time together. I remember that when he met other guys I was jealous. I mean... and at one point, he was a suffocating person and I couldn’t stay under his influence anymore, I tried to rebel... I stopped seeing him as often. He was really irritated and he stopped speaking to me for good. Somehow, even this reaction of his was the same type of feeling, a sort of affectivity.” (RO_M_36_ID)

Expectation for women to get married, to become mothers and to have a family

According to the findings of this study there seems to be a common perception that women are expected (and sometimes pressured) by their families and also by society to get married (with a man), to become mothers and to have children. This expectation (verbally and nonverbally transferred over generations) might be constraining for women’s freedom of choice. The findings show that some girls/women may be made to believe that they may face a problem in getting married if they carry on with their studies, because they would not

¹⁰ Examples were provided in the interviews, available in the online database, including PT_F_24_LEI, SK_F_23_SOC, BE_M_39_PRO3.

find a man who had an equivalent educational level. In addition, there seems to be a belief that if a woman is successful in her professional career and earns a 'good salary' (meaning more than a man) she may face some problems in finding a partner/husband¹¹.

“It is just that some things didn't come naturally to me. But when I told my parents that I am bisexual, it turned out that I am their biggest disappointment and that they actually did have expectations, which you don't need to voice out – to get married, to have kids and so on, the kind of expectations that society has for you, that is, there is not even the need to voice them as expectations because they are more or less clear, and if you don't meet these expectations, they are extremely disappointed.” (BG_F_25_CFR)

“Both girls and boys were encouraged to study. There was however a problem as far as it concerned girls because it was difficult to get educated. They could become teachers. But then, they would stay single because they could not find a man in an equivalent education level.” (CY_M_66_EDU)

“Yes, go on, but until where, and then who will have you, who will want you if you are always going further. It is difficult for a woman to find a man at her own level to be able to keep her.” (GR_F_26_EDU)

“I do have friends (...) women – some of them lawyers, whatever –, who are often extremely skilful in their respective areas and who earn quite a lot of money. They can easily fulfil their needs, they have a high living standard, they can travel. But when they are alone, they have a number of problems to find a partner.” (CZ_M_44_CFR2)

Several respondents also identified some of the consequences that women may face when they accept to stay at home in order to raise their children (such as the evidences below and, for example, in NL_F_69_ID). It was described that women may feel so absorbed by their children's needs that if they do not get proper social stimulus and opportunities to get some self-realisation they may lose social skills and even become aggressive. Female respondents who made this choice also admitted they lack other social contacts different from other housewives, such as colleagues, with whom they would be able to share other points of view.

“Families do not naturally live a community life so a wife can have enough social contacts. Let's admit it, any animal gets crazy while being alone and the same thing happens to a woman who is at home with children for a long time. Children have needs and demand things and she automatically becomes isolated by those needs and if her surrounding does not understand it and does not create social stimuli and opportunities for some self-realisation she will lose her social capacities. And she becomes aggressive and so.” (SK_F_38_CFR2)

“She was at home because of her children for five years and thus lost her professional competence, in everything. Qualification disappeared in this time. [She] lost human contacts. Practically, she was chained to the home for years.” (EE_M_36_CFR)

Punishments

According to what some respondents shared in the interviews, the stereotypes of 'good girls' and 'unruly boys' (as well as other characteristics that are attributed stereotypically to boys and girls) may influence the type of punishment they get (within the family or at school), even if they did the exact same thing. The respondents reported that the punishment is usually harsher for boys (physically and psychologically). Also, boys may feel that the fault was almost automatically attributed to them because of their gender. Evidence is given with the examples below¹².

11 Other examples include DE_F_33_CFR, SK_F_23_SOC and SK_F_47_EDU (available in the database).

12 Further examples include CY_M_23_CFR and PT_M_26_EDU



“If you ask any kid in school, if you have a story about the differences between girls and boys, there is... a difference. (...) A characteristic story which I remember, and I remember it intensely because my teacher had even told my mother about it, I remember a girl who, you know we have the custom if you get a haircut that the other kids come and give you a slap on the neck, I remember a girl who came and didn't only give me a slap but also kicked me. And the teacher saw that she kicked me and did not give her any penalty. Whereas if she had caught us boys fighting between us, she would have punished us. There is a rule that 'OK, let her be, she is a girl'. (...) Yes, the boy not the girl. (...) Once, a boy was expelled from school only for cursing. But a girl who wrote that same curse on the wall didn't get any punishment. (...) This says a lot. This is how inequalities come about. The unruly boys and the good girls. Maybe it's also true, I don't know, but we shouldn't put everything in the same mould.” (GR_M_22_EDU)

“My sister is a tiny bit older but whatever bad would happen at home, whatever would get broken then, of course, it was (name respondent)'s fault, because my sister would never do such a thing, right? (...) I've got this very impression: that the boy was always guilty.” (PL_M_24_CFR)

7.3. Effects on studies/in the educational sphere

Gender stereotypes influence people's educational choices, both in terms of orientation and in terms of length of studies. Gender stereotypes also affect teachers' and professors' assessment of students.

Limitation of people's choice regarding studies and professions

Bearing in mind the descriptive and prescriptive nature of stereotypes, there is a common perception among the interviewees that certain studies and professions are more appropriate for women and others for men, and that when people do not make a choice according to what is expected for their gender, they may suffer consequences at different levels (e.g. UK_F_46_EDU). Gender

stereotypes may influence people's choice (sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously) according to their sex/gender¹³. Evidence has also been found that sometimes the choice regarding studies or future professions is influenced or even decided by one's family.¹⁴

“During gymnasium, I was somewhat good at Romanian Language and humanities, meaning the ones more appropriate to women. However, the closer I was to getting to high school, I was – not necessarily convinced, but more and more aware that my place would rather be in a natural science class. This is because I became aware and I bore my role within society. As I said before, social sciences were, by default, for women and it was a typically feminine field. I don't know if it was necessarily a conscious choice, but it mattered a lot to my specialisation choice in school. (...) Hard sciences offered me more opportunities, so I was set to follow that path. As I mentioned before, I believe it has to do with gender. (...) [The fact that there were too many girls in humanities] I think it would have been an awkward situation. I think I would have felt assimilated, deprived from what defined me as a man. Because being a man is an important part of my identity and being assimilated would have been a pretty shameful matter. (...) I've seen some examples where they were really different from the people in our class. The ones in Philology were much closer to girls than we were, for instance. For example, in our Natural Sciences class, there is a pretty clear cut barrier between men and women, while for Philology students, being much fewer [boys], they had been more easily assimilated. (...) [The boys that were closer to girls] regarding their behaviour, they were much less tough, more emasculated” (RO_M_19_EDU1)

“In that time, it was our parents who decided (...). My father and my mother thought it was a good academic course for a girl, to be a teacher. (...) [because] the girl would continue to work with children.” (PT_F_70_PRO)

Certain jobs (like civil servant, policewoman, and teacher) were listed by some respondents as allowing more flexibility to be combined with motherhood.¹⁵

13 E.g. CZ_F_38_PRO1, FR_F_32_LEI, IE_F_34_PRO, PT_F_24_PRO

14 Further examples include AT_F_47_CFR, FI_F_24_EDU, IE_F_68_PRO, NL_F_32_ID (available in the database).

15 Further examples include BE_F_38_PRO, LU_F_47_EDU.

“Before choosing the field of my studies I always thought that being a civil servant is a perfect choice if someone wants to combine motherhood and career.” (LT_F_26_PRO)

In the interviews, examples were mentioned of what is expected from women and men to study and to choose for their professions. For women it is generally expected that they chose a study in the social sphere; to become secretary, nurse, teacher (primary level), social worker (because women have a need of protection and of taking care of others, they are socially aware, they understand children better), administrative assistant, hostess, model; to be active in human resources (because there is a belief that women are more communicative, empathetic, reliable, intuitive, social and capable to smooth away aggressiveness), the civil service; to be interested in literature, arts, social sciences. For men it is expected that they study engineering, natural resource management, geography, mathematics and scientific subjects in general; that they become electrician, politician, architect, outdoor activity coach, woodworker, veterinarian, or that they enter the military.

Gender and proceeding with studies

According to the findings, the expectations for girls/women and boys/men in their studies can be quite different. Some stories were told about women being restrained in their studies or not recognised in their achievements due to the association to female stereotypical roles, especially by the group of the older respondents. Conversely, boys/men seem to be stimulated to carry on and be proficient in their studies so that they can meet the expectations of their male gender role¹⁶.

“I wanted to become a sports’ teacher, but my parents felt that they did not have the financial means in the first place, but secondly they also felt that a girl will marry sooner than later and that therefore paying for an education would be a waste of money.” (AT_F_63_PRO)

“I still suffer from being prepared to something: ‘Yes, go ahead and do it, you can go to the gymnasium!’ And you take extra lessons with a small group of friends, extra French lessons (two weeks, two days, I forgot about that), and then they tell you: ‘You’re not allowed to do this because you will get married anyway, so why would you...?’ (...) My brother has... He HAD to, because also for him it was not a choice whether or not to study. He had to study. Really this very traditional pattern: yes, you have to be able to earn money.” (NL_F_69_EDU)

“I married during my university years... And that’s interesting, because marrying as a female student wasn’t very popular... We had gotten an apartment and had been together for a while, and wanted to get married. We saw no reason for me to quit my studies only because of that... And that went well, but I had a class mate who got pregnant and was getting married – she ‘had to get married’, that’s what it was called. And then there was a big row... She wasn’t allowed to finish her education... (...) Because of being pregnant... She was not considered to be able to take care of the child I think... She finished her education afterwards.” (SE_F_74_EDU2)

“At that time it wasn’t thought necessary for girls to study as much as boys (...) Because it was men who brought home the bacon – average standard of living, etc. In general, women, as they did work that was a bit less demanding, inferior, they didn’t need to be highly educated. (...) It was Mum – it was more Mum than Dad because Dad worked a lot. Mum took most of the decisions and it was she who said: ‘well, now you have to go and get a job’.” (BE_F_65_EDU)

“It’s also about grades. If a girl has low grades and a boy has low grades as well... Well, the boy is considered a bum. Whereas the girl is just considered weak in school, that she can’t manage, that she doesn’t have the brains.” (GR_M_22_EDU)

16 Further examples include CY_M_66_EDU, CY_F_72_EDU, GR_F_26_EDU and RO_M_19_EDU1.



“I think that in the family life the fact I am a girl often had an influence. Parents looked at me differently than on my brother. (...) For instance, when I talked to my grandfather the other day, he was very surprised that I am considering going to postgraduate studies. Why go, shouldn't I find a job, [name brother] will be the one with PhD in the family. Something like that. But these are maybe really old fashioned variants.” (SI_F_23_CFR)

Favouring and discriminating

As we have seen already in the previous chapter, several respondents identified a trend in the way male professors treat their female students in educational contexts (high school and university): in some cases, they may tend to favour them, but in other cases, they may discriminate them.¹⁷ These two distinct positions may also have consequences for male students, because when female students are being favoured, they are discriminated themselves, and vice-versa. In the majority of the stories that were told, the favouring/discriminating system was based on giving better or worse marks on the grounds of one's sex.

“Actually this has happened to be in both a positive way and a negative way. In high school I had a teacher in [subject] who was such, he was such an extreme male chauvinist. Well, if you were a woman, (...), you couldn't get more than just a pass mark. That was just how it was, you couldn't! (...) And then at university, one of my professors was the total opposite (laughs) – if you were a woman you would just get (raises her hand and points up to illustrate the high marks) then you didn't have to do shit – you would just get really high marks. And if you were a guy, then you would get really low marks.” (DK_F_28_EDU)

“Girls who have it much easier. And if they are pretty, then I can do nothing at all, I can have my work done at the last moment or not come to the corrections at all, or attend classes just once per month... and it's easy since professors are men. Women do not teach at our faculty at all, so... we have it considerably easier than guys. (...) for one course, I need to have a couple of printouts done. I do not have anything and I get 5 [“very good” grade], whereas my male friends have their printouts and get 3 [“satisfactory” grade]. And everybody knows that I will dress more nicely for classes [laugh] and it's cool. (...) Boys from our year notice it too. They say: “name respondent, you've got it easier because you don't have to do anything”. And here, girls also do not have to do anything and it's cool with this professor, everybody knows it. (...) They are not going to rebel against a professor, right? Since it seems to be some kind of a taboo...” (PL_F_20_EDU)

“In a class, a male professor has a manner (...) of appreciating some female students during the class (...) In fact, in the time of delivering the exam marks, that professor turned out to beneficiate some girls because of being so available or simply for preferring them instead of boys. That didn't happen to none of the boys, which only reveals that the professor had a well-defined taste for girls (...) there were other girls to whom the professor sometimes smiled in classes, he used some gestures like someone who adverts and warns to stop, if not they will be punished with a little slap [laughs]... I don't know how to say it, but... these were situations that bothered me and there was too much familiarity between the professor and these female students, something that didn't happen with the boys (...). I think that it's the natural order of things that maybe male professors like to interact more with female students, it's true that with less 40 years than them, and we also know those examples and that the expression of “getting the degree in the horizontal” is very common [this expression means that students get better marks or pass the exams if they have sexual relations with the professors] (...). I don't know many other university professors from other universities, but I wouldn't be surprised if this happens.” (PT_M_18_EDU)

¹⁷ Examples are available in the database, e.g. LV_F_25_EDU, PL_F_29_LEI, PL_M_28_SOC, PT_M_26_EDU, CY_M_23_EDU.

7.4. Effects at work

This section describes the effects of gender stereotypes in the professional sphere that could be distilled from the stories.

Gender and labour market

As already mentioned above, people tends to associate certain professions with women and, others with men. These associations tend to be connected to the prescriptive character of gender stereotypes that relate to women's and men's personality, aptitudes and physical features. These situations may have a negative impact and may be discriminating for both sexes: whether someone is chosen while it is a profession that is believed as being better performed by the other gender; when one (usually man) gets better opportunities and is better remunerated than the other; when a person is rejected because one does not attribute the skills to his/her gender that are regarded as necessary to perform that profession; or when a person's skills are questioned because people do not perceive a certain profession as being performed by that gender. In order to clarify some of these situations, we quote below fragments of text of the interviews that were undertaken¹⁸.

“I heard, after more than five years, what a colleague of mine earned. At that time I earned 1600 Deutsche Mark, and I always assumed that my colleagues earn the same what I earn, perhaps a bit more if they had worked more years than me. Yes, and then at some point one of my colleagues told me that he earned 3500 Deutsche Mark. I nearly fainted and said to him to repeat what he had just said. And he said: ‘Yes, I am earning 3500 DM and what do you earn?’ And then I said: ‘do you know what I earn? I earn 1600.’ ‘That is impossible!’ ‘Yes’, I said, ‘that’s what I earn.’” (DE_F_61_PRO)

“When I came to the reception job I had here, I had a couple of... we did parent interviews before children start, just to try to go through some of those questions that parents ask before starting. And there are a couple of parents who said to me: ‘have you got children of your own?’ I said: ‘well, no because I haven’t got to that stage’ and, you know, it was quite... the implication was almost like ‘why you are doing this?’, ‘Are you up to doing this?’ Almost, because you are a man. I think since I’ve had a child of my own, it actually makes things much easier. Because of course, people don’t ask you those questions. It is something about having a child of your own suddenly makes you... [an expert] (...) The number of parents that I’ve come across who were not experts at all imply quite the opposite. Just having children of your own does not make you an expert a looking after children. (...) But I think having children of your own and being married of course - again in people’s minds - this gives you a credence to do this job. (UK_M_48_PRO)

18 Further examples include BE_F_38_PRO, BE_F_22_PRO1, BE_M_39_PRO1, CY_F_28_PRO, CZ_F_38_PRO2, DE_F_33_PRO, MT_F_35_PRO, NL_M_54_PRO, PL_F_29_PRO, PL_M_56_EDU, PL_M_65_EDU, SE_F_23_CFR, SE_F_29_PRO3, SE_F_60_PRO2, SE_M_32_PRO, UK_M_21_PRO.



“It was very annoying that they [male co-workers] were granted some things which normally wouldn't have been granted to other employees, with the pretext that... you know, that's how boys are! (...) They afforded to mock you, to not grant you the respect which should have derived not from the fact that you were a woman and they were men, but from the fact that we were colleagues and we had to interact, to work on stuff together. (...) boys are supposed to be naughtier and girls are supposed to be quieter! And they got away with a lot, including the fact that they didn't respect the deadline, that they could fight with the boss, to tell her 'I don't feel like doing this, I will say no and you can't do anything about it!' I mean they were pretty unreserved and demanding, and could just ignore it if they didn't feel like doing it. (...) It seems to me that when you are in an entourage without an even distribution, boys, because they are boys, can get away with a lot of things which only deepen the stereotype that boys are naughty and girls are behaving themselves, boys are irreverent and girls are compliant and this completely idiotic idea of masculinity was reproduced very accurately in the workplace. (...) They were autonomous, they were partners, they could curse each other, fight, swear, you could hear 'fuck off' and things like that from their office. Never from ours, girls may not curse (...) They were separated, they were playing computer games, no one was going in, it was the only place where you could smoke. We were two smokers in the group and we were going out on the terrace to smoke. The boys were smoking in their office, in a much smaller room. And when the big boss would enter, she would say 'haha, you boys, what cheap tobacco you're smoking... haha... did you finish?'; 'Yes, ma'am!' I mean, they were all about 'Yes ma'am!' with the boss (RO_F_24_PRO)

Some respondents were able to recognise the stereotypes and the discrimination, but at the same time they might perceive the stereotype as a benefit for them and may even take advantage of it. Examples are provided below.

“I really said events hostess, because there aren't male hosts many times. The boys who are contracted usually are for taking care of more masculine things, normally more heavy works where it is needed to carry things, parking cars, and it is much easier, there is much more offer for work just for girls. Well, it is a great advantage for me, isn't it? (...) I'm a girl and I'm lucky that it's easier for me to have jobs (...) There should be more market for boys too; it should be a more egalitarian thing. (...) If I weren't a woman, I wouldn't get so many jobs.” (PT_F_24_PRO)

“It was the same when I worked in (name club). I have been a barmaid and right away I get bigger tips and it's easier for me and the manager does not carp at me as much as he does at boys. And I don't have to do any physical works, carry barrels, carry boxes, and load refrigerators. And I get much higher tips than guys do.” (PL_F_20_PRO)

Some respondents point out that 'men's clubs' or 'the old boys network' within working contexts are still very important and prevail through informal meetings outside office hours and also through leisure activities, often promoted by companies. Examples of such leisure activities that were mentioned are going to a sauna with colleagues or business partners (said to be very common in Finland) or playing golf. Men tend to spend more time on networking outside office hours than women (probably because of women's duties in the private sphere). Both can be constraining as some business decisions are operated in these contexts and they cannot be accompanied by the absent person (usually women), as it is illustrated below. It may also compromise one's professional career.

“It makes it difficult to create contacts, I would say. Especially in Finland where many agreements are concluded in the sauna. That is an example that there are barriers as a consequence of culture and other factors. One cannot do much about them but of course they have an effect on experiences in working life and on the career progress.” (FI_F_31_PRO)

Some respondents emphasised that women may have to work harder than men in order to prove themselves and to be recognised at work.¹⁹

“Because the men have their men’s clubs to go to and then they have contacts, and it is very difficult. But one of my colleagues, she became one of the first female directors at the company A and she worked, she had to work really hard, she felt she had to work twice as hard as the men. (...) Even now she’s finding it tough still and I think most women do. It is. Especially once they start a family, you have to work doubly hard to prove that you are not making allowances for having a family and that you don’t keep asking for time off. It is hard.” (UK_F_46_PRO)

“As a lawyer who specialises in employment law, that is something that employers are advised really not to do, because if a woman is not given a job, and she thinks it is because she said that she wants to have children, then that’s sex discrimination, that would form the basis of a legal claim against that employer. So, most employers know now that that is not something that they should ask about. But I still think it influences employers in making decisions about who to recruit and if they’ve got a man or an older woman. I think if they are faced with a choice between someone who they would think is about to go on and have children or a man who obviously won’t, I think that would influence the decision not to recruit that woman, definitely. Not outwardly, you know, they would come up with other reasons. But that would definitely be a factor.” (UK_F_38_SOC)

Motherhood and women’s job opportunities

According to the findings, some job opportunities (when a woman is looking for a job or even inside the company where she works) seem to be out of reach to female respondents. They seem to be restrained or even discriminated by employers due to their gender role of ‘main caregivers’ and ‘mothers’. There is a perception among the respondents that women’s role as mothers may be regarded as a disadvantage by employers, because they hold the ‘risk’ of getting pregnant, taking maternity leave, and being absent to take care of their children when these are ill²⁰.

“They don’t write it down but many of them say it. And some new employees experience this, too. They ask you if you think about getting pregnant or having a family... And there are instances where the answer was positive, they got rejected, maybe not by default but it was taken into consideration.” (CY_F_28_PRO)

“I know this from girl friends or schoolmates, many of them are already married and have children and they have problems simply finding a job. Really, who wants to hire a 20-year-old with a child which is still small and it is predictable that she will miss work from time to time because of care responsibilities or because the child has a problem. I believe employers should support people like that and not just not hire them. Something is quite wrong here.” (AT_F_21_CFR)

Women’s appearance and behaviour in working contexts

Some of the findings show that there seems to be a connection between women’s performance at work or their skills to perform a certain job and their physical appearance or the way they dress. Some respondents seem to perceive women who hold leading positions as individuals who tend to imitate and/or possess men’s physical appearance/features. Women were described as wearing a short haircut, a dark suit with a white shirt, using serious face expressions, taking decisions straight away and not being easily intimidated. The fact that women may possess features that are usually associated to men may not be perceived as appropriate for them. On the other hand, there also seems to be a belief that if a woman who holds such position does not conform to male standards (for example by expressing her femininity by wearing a dress) she may be perceived as weak, untrustworthy and inappropriate for the position. In addition, there seems to be a belief that women cannot be at the same time attractive and competent.

19 Other evidence can be found in the database, (e.g. BE_F_22_PRO1 and LU_M_35_PRO).

20 Several stories available in the database (e.g. AT_F_47_PRO2, BE_M_25_PRO, BE_M_39_PRO2, DK_F_23_EDU, LT_F_26_PRO, PT_F_41_PRO1, PT_F_41_PRO2, SI_F_34_PRO) were told by the respondents with respect to this issue.



“What’s more, male qualities are not seen as appropriate for a woman. When a man wants to get ahead (...) people say there’s someone enterprising, someone who wants to succeed, make a career... While a woman would straightaway be seen as (...) at work, she’s a bitch. If she fights her corner people take it badly. Whereas with a man they say okay, he wants to succeed – that is clear to me.” (BE_F_22_PRO1)

“If you happen to have some leadership aspirations, you are a manager, you’re automatically treated as some ruthless harpy that for sure has not a whit of warmth in herself and due to that she has some complexes that made her reach the place where she is now and not any other. And she surely has no family, certainly no husband and for sure she is not going to have it as it is her main... This career is her main determinant, her main sense of life. And I think that this is a very negative picture of a woman, who achieves success.” (PL_F_29_PRO)

“One needs to hide the soft side of oneself and deny the womanhood in a sense. You are not allowed to be attractive and competent at the same time.” (FI_F_70_PRO)

“What I really miss is, why women who are leading some meetings, when they are in the highest position there, why they lack some female charm or something. Why they present themselves so rationally, expressing so curtly, as if they want to behave like men. (...) the head of marketing department, I think that she wants to act like a man. Or she thinks that impressions of her will be better if she has certain male behaviour. (...) My impression is that women act this way because they feel that if they act like women, the audience would consider it as a weakness, as something inappropriate. (...) They have a tendency to act according to male stereotypes. (...) They imitate men, only a tie is missing. (...) Short hair, jacket, serious face expressions, curt sentences, these are rather male features. (...) She thinks that it will help her to win recognition. Or it is sort of a helping tool. When she is not sure how to proceed, has no ideas, she still has the stereotypical mask and she puts it on. It helps her to feel ensured and the audience believes her. (...) We are used to the fact that generally there are men in these positions. (...) When a woman wants to change it, when she acts like a woman in a managerial position, it is perceived as weak or untrustworthy or inappropriate. (...) This is a worldwide situation that if a woman wants to succeed in political or managerial positions, she needs to act according to male stereotypes in expressions, fashion, everything. I cannot imagine that a female manager would wear some chic dress, express her femininity. It would be untrustworthy and inappropriate. So she has no other chance than act like a man.” (SK_M_39_PRO)

Family businesses

Some respondents alluded to the fact that sons may be/feel obliged to help/work in the family business and to maintain its existence after their fathers' retirement or death. This may have been particularly so among older generations. According to the findings, male children in the family are/were traditionally chosen instead of daughters to keep the family business. This is perceived as a limitation by the respondents, because, on the one hand, men seem to be prevented to choose a different path (like continuing their studies or have another profession), and, on the other hand, women's skills are not recognised to carry on the family business.

“My father wanted to study but was not allowed to. His father wanted him to take over the company, unless he wanted to enter the seminary, in order to become a priest. So he had the choice. The choice was very simple: either work (...) as fruit grower and continue the company, or learn. But then: priest. There was nothing to do about it. And so he chose – because of course he did not want to become a priest and he knew my mother already at that time – he chose to enter into the business. He has never liked that. He studied Latin-Greek until the last year and then had to stop; and these frustrations are still alive.” (BE_F_52_CFR2)

“When I had finished my schooling and I was sixteen years old, my father wanted me to work with him in his shop by force. The reason was, he said, that he needed me and he told me ‘either you come and work with me or you go to university’. Now in those days I wished to go to university, but I did not wish to take law because he wanted me by force to do law.(...) And anyway, I told him that I was not prepared to do law and so he told me ‘so you have to go and study photography abroad to learn it as one should’, and he sent me to (place) (...) When I returned back to Malta and I joined my father in his photography shop, he obliged me to do as he liked - not my ideas, what I had learned - so we ended up not agreeing at all. (...) In fact there was great trouble because two of my sisters worked for my father. When I came along I became their boss, and they complained and quarreled because obviously they were more experienced in the business. But he said that I was the male and I must take over, I mean in this case it was to my advantage.” (MT_M_40_CFR2)

Several respondents (mainly women) provided accounts of having experienced unfair situations, due to working in the family business. Such situations related to income and social security rights: not having access to the same (legal) rights as a ‘normal’ (non-family) co-worker, which may deprive the person in question from a pension or allowances, from being financially independent. Evidences are provided below.

“Foolishly, I got married. And my then husband worked, owned, or at least his family owned, a pub. So, I worked, I had my two children there and I also worked in the pub and I set up a bar-food business, which was very famous at the time, because I specialised in seafood. (...) It was a seaside resort area and the pub was very lucrative, but I wasn't paid. And as well as that - well, we had a good lifestyle, but I only got my housekeeping - and as well as that, I found out later - in Ireland it is called ‘stamping a card’ - but it was paying social insurance. Nobody paid social insurance for me, so when I came to retirement age, I didn't get a good payment although I worked every day of my life! So, that was another gender issue, because my husband always had social security and as well as that, he put money away in a private bank.” (IE_F_68_PRO)

“At any other work-place if I wouldn't, if it wasn't a family business, if I would be working at any other place, I would have had a vacation pay and the other person would have been paid too, for working instead of me. And all of a sudden I have to pay by myself for my vacation to the person replacing me.” (LV_F_45_PRO2)



7.5. Effects in the private sphere

Perform tasks and/or behave in accordance with gender expectations

The stories confirm that, within families, girls/women and boys/men are assigned or simply assume certain tasks at home according to their gender: girls/women usually do household tasks and boys/men do not, or they are assigned tasks that, allegedly, need physical strength or are considered 'technical'. These tasks are usually congruent with what is established socially, depending on whether a person is a girl/woman or a boy/man. These gender role divisions appear to lead to a different treatment (which might be perceived as an inequality) among family members in daily life, and also in certain situations when the extended family gathers, as can be seen in the following texts fragments²¹.

“I think about when I meet my relatives. We are six cousins, two boys and four girls. When I started thinking about this I realised that it is expected of us girls to help to clear the table and do things and the boys just sit down. (...) It's not something we talk about, it just happens. (...) In my family I feel that there is another kind of awareness, and my parents have the same level of education, while among the other parents', the man earns much more money and has a fancy job. That could also affect which role you take, I guess.” (SE_F_23_CFR)

“With respect to other issues, I think that there also can be a question of some housework. Following the rule: you are a man (at that time still a man in inverted commas) so of course some beating dust out of a carpet and such stuff fall to you. In case of my sister: do the dishes and it will be OK, right? (PL_M_24_CFR)

“I mean, for example when we wake up in the morning, why do I have to make the beds and my brother does not have to do them because that's not his job? (...) Something which really bothered me when I was small was the way my parents treated the gender differences between us. To give a few examples, one of the things that really made me angry when I was young was that my mother expected from me help at home that she did not ask from my brother. For example, I remember my mother had a very fixed time-table for housework. For example on Monday she washed the clothes, on Tuesday the floor, Wednesday was her day off, on Thursday she washed the clothes, on Friday she again washed the floor, etc. And Tuesday and Friday were the days that I really hated for the reason, apart from the cleaning, that it meant also work for me, when for instance I wished to spend my time doing other things. But I used to understand and I wanted to help her. And then, for example, for some time my brother and I we slept in the same bedroom, and she used to ask me to do the beds. I used to do both mine and his and he did nothing. And also when I grew up and they gave me a new bedroom, she used to expect me to do my bed as well as his. And the same thing when it came to dusting, for example, I had to dust my room as well as his. So now I had even more work, not less. And she expected that I do the dishes and dry them and put them away. And I remember my brother in front of the television doing nothing. (...) We grew up differently. (...) But I still say that it was all the result of how my parents viewed the role of a girl vis-a-vis that of a boy.” (MT_F_35_CFR)

As discussed more in-depth in the chapter hereafter, change can be noticed in what gender roles are concerned, as many couples are sharing household responsibilities at home. However, this sharing is still subject of societal controversy, as the following fragment shows.

“Many people help at home but the percentage of help depends on each person. (...) It is difficult to see a man out on the balcony to put the clothes to dry. Not because he is scared but because there is still this status quo where if the neighbour sees him she will criticise.” (CY_M_46_CFR).

There is a perception that the fact that women take up most of the household work can make their husbands very dependent. Especially among the older generations, it is believed that quite some men cannot cook, or clean, etc. and therefore are unable to take care of themselves in case their wife dies before them, which might jeopardise their

21 Other evidence can be found in the database (e.g. CY_F_72_CFR, ES_F_53_CFR1, ES_M_43_LEI, ES_M_62_CFR, IT_F_19_CFR, LU_M_29_CFR1, MT_F_45_CFR, NL_F_53_PRO).

ability to live independently. From a different perspective, learning to perform household tasks and assuming responsibility in the household may be perceived useful.

“She died suddenly and he was left unable to cook, unable to do any sort of housework. He had no idea how to change sheets on a bed or how to put a duvet cover on. (...) I would go home and make him little meals and put them in the freezer. We bought the freezer especially for this, but he was doing things like making gravy and pouring them on apple pie and things. (...) Somewhere in this little book he’s written... (...) [respondent points to the booklet] This is his writing: ‘Thaw the chicken... clean the inside, with paper, make stuffing and add an onion, cover with dripping, you don’t have to be nervous, boil the potatoes partly to roast and put the oven on at 11 o’clock, mark 5.’ (...) Some of the things he’s crossed out and said: ‘This doesn’t work and put his own timing in, which I think is good’. (UK_F_79_ID)

“Today I think that maybe this thing was useful to me in the sense that I grew up to be more independent, to have more initiative - something which my brother does not have in his character. I mean in that sense it was positive. But in those days, it used to store up a lot of anger inside me. (...) Nowadays maybe that’s been useful. Today if I had to compare my character to my brother’s, I find that I am a person with a greater sense of initiative, maybe more capable in practical things.” (MT_F_35_CFR)

Gender stereotypes and relations within the family

Gender stereotypes have a strong influence on the way people act and react to certain situations. Some stories describe that women seem to accept things like alcoholism, violent behaviour or adultery from their husbands. Such acceptance can be explained by an unbalanced power relation. Examples of such situations are provided below.

“Actually with my husband, we used to live well in the beginning and so on. Later on, I got to know that he had a lover, one of my friends, and I said I didn’t want this woman around. And before that he had already tried beating me up, once, in the very beginning. But then I had told him that if he would hit me even once, even if we have not one, but 101 children, I would divorce him. And I said this already in the beginning of our marriage. Then we had split for a bit, after that we got together again, and so on.” (BG_F_47_CFR)

“Traditionally, it is so that even if we are seemingly monogamous in Finland, it is still like that ... that women... at least women of my age, are called for to be flexible. A woman is supposed to be permissive even if the man makes errors. I suppose women are being judged more easily as a woman is a mother.” (FI_F_70_CFR)

“In my extended family my aunt and my uncle have a very violent relationship and... And I think there have been times when she’s ended up in hospital and things, but... She won’t leave him. (...) I think it is acceptable for men to dominate woman.” (UK_F_19_VIO)

Another example of an unequal power balance within a couple that appeared from the interviews (especially of the older respondents) is that sometimes women may not be able to make decisions about the family’s life because their husbands usually are the main breadwinners (their income is perceived to be a source of power). One example is provided below and another can be found in NL_M_67_CFR.



“To tell you the truth as well, something which hurt me when we were getting married (...) My husband started looking for a place where to live anyway (...) We had a choice between an apartment and a maisonette. (...) I chose the maisonette, so that I could have my own front door and my own house. But my husband, because an apartment was rented for five pounds less per year, he decided himself that we would live in this apartment for twenty-two whole years. That still hurts me to this very day: the fact that I could not even choose where to start my married life, where to start my own new family. I didn't have a choice and this because the woman always had to say 'Yes, Sir.'” (MT_F_64_CFR2)

There is evidence that the idea of women being the main breadwinners may affect their husbands' mental well-being: they might feel weak and humiliated, and such feeling can be reinforced when family, friends or others tease them or make jokes about it. When women earn more than their partner, this can also lead to conflicts within the couple. Examples of such experiences can be found below.

“When I was working at the time, I earned more than he did. This put him on the ground. Indeed, so perhaps he talked about it only once but this really, really disturbed him, the fact that I was earning more than him, though he earned well too, and it wasn't like I supported him, or what not, but simply because of this he felt weaker than me.” (HU_F_31_CFR)

“It's still popular to ask 'How much do you earn?' and everyone who knows that the husband earns less than his wife... I think that he wouldn't receive a severe bullying. However, everybody would always try to make a joke out of this situation. And he would probably feel humiliated... Not humiliation... But then his relatives, friends, well, maybe not friends, maybe relatives, would always tease him by saying: 'How can you earn less than your wife?'” (LT_M_24_SOC)

Another issue to take into account in family relations is the way parents and children interact. There are evidences that children are believed to respect and obey more to their fathers, because, on the one hand, fathers

are considered the ones who determine the rules and, on the other hand, mothers are regarded as more tolerant and more inclined to spoiling her children.

“For me it is essential to have the father's arm [at home], people can say to me that I'm a 'macho', it's not that, it's because, in a home where there is not the chief, it is a problem. Children grow up a little bit unstoppable. So, it is fundamental the father's arm. (...) Mothers are always ineffective. (...) Women's strength in children is always puny. (...) Men are important in families. (...) The father is essential in life, in the children's relationship, because children are more afraid of the father. The father is more right... he gives the bread and the reason. (...) I also obeyed more to my father instead of my mother. (...) The mother gives more benefits, she facilitates. And when you are raising a child, the benefits spoil them.” (PT_M_71_CFR)

Girls (daughters) seem to be more protected by their parents than boys. This (over)protection may prevent girls from doing and experiencing certain things (like travelling alone, going out, using public transport), because there is a belief that boys are stronger and will manage everything whereas girls are more vulnerable. In addition, the stereotype that girls/women are weak, helpless, and that they cannot protect/defend themselves might influence this (over)protection. This protective behaviour may be explained by the belief that girls are more exposed to violence and rape than boys²².

“Maybe that I am not able to take care of myself, in a sense that I am helpless physically, so somebody could do something to me. To - I don't know - always have somebody with me. If I go travelling alone, which I already did, they are awfully worried. Not so much about my brother, because he is a boy, he will manage all right. For me it is always 'Not to do this, not to do that, be careful.' And I must call home very often. Which I don't mind, but I can see the difference.” (SI_F_23_CFR)

Being the (male) breadwinner

The evidence supports that men are usually encouraged/pressured, from their childhood, to study, to

22 Further evidence can be found in the database (e.g. ES_F_21_CFR, LU_F_47_LEI, PT_F_33_LEI, PT_F_70_EDU and PT_M_26_LEI).

have a decent working position and to earn money to provide for their families. These societal expectations might have an impact on how men perceive their role as a man and on their freedom of choice. Some effects of this societal expectation may be found further down.

Being the (main) breadwinner may have effects on men's fatherhood: men are expected to attach a lot of importance to their career and to spend more time at work and, consequently, they may be deprived of sharing in the upbringing of their children. Therefore, their role as a father may be on a second plan²³.

“I suppose the thing that hits me most as a man, that is, coming to the end of his working life is the impact of how I saw my need to work and be successful very much driven by my understanding of what a man was. I had a very, very successful career in advertising up to ten years ago. (...) As a young man, I married early (...). And set about that whole utterly middle class thing of making a home and building a career. And my task was to provide. That was kind of the beginning and end of it. I have three children that are now grown (...). And two of my daughters between them, have, have five children - my experience of how I experience my grandchildren now is very different from how I experienced my children, because I was working and I was working furiously, sixty to seventy hours a week to create a career. (...) Being a father was second hand. You know, second class and being a husband, whatever that meant then, being a husband and being a father was actually about working then and providing. (...) [My wife] worked at home, she raised the children and took care of the house. (...) She didn't have a paid job.” (IE_M_60_ID)

Children may perceive their parents differently bearing in mind this gender perception. For instance, as mentioned in a (Swedish) female respondent's story, even if the mother also works, children still perceive her as a housewife and not as a professional (even when she performs a leading position at her work, as in the example provided).

“When they grew up, I think they (because I was at home with them when they were little) got the impression that I was some kind of at-home-person... When [my daughter] accompanied me to work once when I was working as a headmaster, she was so surprised... 'I didn't know you had this role, deciding, organising, ruling!' I had not thought about how important it is that [the children] see their parents working... They had accompanied [my husband] to work, and they didn't wonder at him being a professional... But I was their mother, they didn't see me as a professional until they actually saw me doing my work... It was good that they came at last!” (SE_F_74_CFR)

Some examples of (in)direct pressure for conforming with the male breadwinner model were reported by the respondents, such as wives being dependent on the husbands' income or women making deliberate decisions to count on their partners to be the sole breadwinner.

“One of women's advantages [over men] is that they can decide how long they want to stay at home with their children. Although I always tried to be emancipated, I deliberately wanted to live this period with my children. I have stayed at home 7 years with them. For long, I have thus adapted my workload [to that situation] and in general, I think it was fine, I like to remember this period, and I am conscious that for men, this option is rather complicated (...). And of course, this choice can't be made by every woman, because they need to have a man who is able to make it possible financially, being the main breadwinner. We had that chance, and I think it was good, because nowadays, when [women] return to their occupation when their babies are only a few months old, I think it somewhat impoverishes the parents.” (CZ_F_48_CFR)

23 Further evidence can be found in the database (e.g. CZ_F_24_EDU, CZ_F_48_CFR, FR_M_51_CFR1 and SE_F_74_CFR).



“One day my mother confessed to my sister and me that she was afraid that something might happen to my father. And I said: ‘Why?’ ‘Because if your father dies, what will we do for a living?’ Sure, the family income belonged to my father. So my mother was scared about my father dying. Then, what would we do for a living? Even if it doesn’t seem so, these sorts of things are seeds that stay inside you.” (ES_M_62_CFR)

“If I had been a boy or a man I would not have done it... I would probably have seen my duty elsewhere because it is also a question of pay. Currently I’m a teacher, part-time what’s more, so I’m dependent on someone. I couldn’t live alone on what I am earning so I’m not sure that as a man I would have dared to be in that position; perhaps I accept it as a woman.” (LU_F_47_EDU)

“When I discuss with my daughters’ friends (she is 20), I realise they are looking for boyfriends who will be able to secure the main household’s income, while they will be working to buy shoes, bags, etc. Thus, even if things have changed tremendously, it remains that a woman is usually not considered the breadwinner, as far as it is a classic family, with a man.” (CZ_F_38_PRO1)

From a different perspective, for men not to comply with the societal expectation of being the breadwinner may lead to feelings of uncertainty, non-acceptance and lack of self-confidence about their role as a man in a patriarchal society. Also, conflicts between the couple may arise. Several examples can be found below.

“Also, my father, at least at first sight, was the person who was sustaining the family, but this has changed at times, there were periods when my mother’s job was the one bringing the money in the family, so that it exists normally. And there is this concept that my father is the person at home who is earning the money for us, and in a sense, my parents have even argued on this topic because there is the feeling that my father did not always want to admit, not in front of somebody, but in front of himself, that my mother’s efforts have been crucial at times for the smooth functioning of our home. (...) But in a sense, I have been able to see that my mother does what she says and I have wondered why my father is so stubborn to admit it and to admit it to her, her merit, her efforts, that she really put into the family, at least in my eyes.” (BG_M_24_CFR)

“I married when I was 23 years old and [wife’s name] started her family life as a housewife, then one day she revolted and told me: ‘[Interviewee’s name], I cannot accept these conditions anymore, I need to find out my identity’ and I suffered and was refusing this as I saw myself as the one who had to earn money for the family [the word ‘breadwinner’ does not exist in Italian]. I identified myself with my father and the fact that she had this kind of need was embittering to me, but she legitimately found a job and a good one; as I said I was not happy about that but we had agreed on it that she would have continued and when she came home with her first salary she was enthusiastic about it and I said: ‘I don’t need that money’. And she reasonably answered ‘Look, I have lived on your own money for many years’. From that moment on, I started to reflect and to understand that men are not superior to women and that relations have to be based on mutual understanding; and I adapted to it.” (IT_M_71_CFR2)

“I feel a bit unusual because, as I've said here, I work part time at the moment. I've been doing working part time, I guess, for about 18 months. My wife works full time; we came to that decision basically for child care. (...) I got to the position where I worked full time but I was actually earning less than my wife who was working part time. Which I found a bit demoralising, because my job - I am a teacher - so, because my job involves being quite a lot of stuff at home. And I say it was a bit demoralising to feel that I was kind of, you know, working 5 days a week, coming home, doing work and still not actually getting paid as much as my wife was, who was working kind of three and a half days. (...) I still, in the back of my mind, well not in the back of my mind, in the front of my mind, there is still that feeling that I ought to be actually providing for the family myself and I must admit that that is something, you know, I still feel a lot really. And certainly with older members of the family, say my mum or my wife's parents, I do wonder if they've that kind of thought in their heads sometimes.” (UK_M_48_CFR)

“Another friend was with his wife abroad where she had a job and he took care of their daughter. It did not work out very well I must say. He told me that she had stopped to take him seriously after a while.” (SK_F_38_CFR2)

“But for example if you ask me if I would stay at home with the kids and she would go to work, I find this unimaginable and I wouldn't like this. Not only because this is a matter of self-esteem, or things like... but in fact, yes, this would be humiliating for me to know that my wife is the breadwinner... yes, I think this is part of it too. But also because I think that children need their mother more in the early years than their fathers.” (HU_M_22_CFR)

In addition, according to the findings (some examples are given below), other people tend to be critical about men who are not the main breadwinners.

“My mother was the family's main breadwinner, which was still quite rare in those days, more than 30 years ago. (...) My father often used to get teased a bit – in a nice way, a nice way – by other men because it was his wife who earned the money, which frankly he didn't mind a bit, but given public perceptions at that time (...) it was something which wasn't looked on very kindly or understood very well. He wasn't playing the man's role fully because it wasn't him that was bringing home a fat salary.” (BE_M_39_CFR)

“I have a friend who decided to support his wife when she got pregnant, that it was him who stayed with a child, he is a psychologist. And she continued to have her job with lots of responsibility and a good salary. And they love each other so they manage it. But it is now three years that he is at home with their daughter and I can see the mental damage he suffers from, it is like his personality is diminishing, his self-confidence, orientation, social capacities. He has become that sort of demanding wife that wants to have expensive things from her partner's money and never knows when to stop. This is strange, the wife syndrome that they sort of lost the idea of a value of money because they are out of the labour market for so long. And they buy their status through material things.” (SK_F_38_CFR2)

As a consequence of performing the role of breadwinner during their whole lives, after retirement, men were described as losing their social/professional contacts, and to experience some difficulties in finding how to occupy themselves.



“He was a very keen bowler and that was his salvation because he went bowling practically every day and the company, the male company which he needed - once when he had retired and my mother, of course, wasn't used to having him around the house during the day - and I'm not saying they argued, because I never heard them argue once or be cross or anything - but I said something to her about: 'How are you coping?' and she said: 'Well, the awful thing is, when I have visitors, you know, some of her friends came, and she'd say: 'Have a cup of coffee or have a cup of tea', she said: 'He feels he has to join us, we don't want him there.' But she said: 'I can't say to him: 'You! Go away! We are quite happy by us.' (...) I once said to him something about: 'Is it better now you've retired?' and he said the thing he missed most was people asking him for advice or wanting his views on things. Nobody wanted it anymore and he missed male company, he said. (...) When people are widowed and widowed, I think it is easier for widows than for widowers. Because women are used to - I'm not saying doing the housework - but they have lots of hobbies whereas men don't seem to have them. (...) A friend of mine who died just before Christmas (...). Her husband, I'm really quite worried about him because he has no hobbies and I don't know what he does all day long. It is very difficult. I mean, he has two daughters who keep their eye on him and they live locally and they come in and see him. But, he goes into the city on the bus, but what does he do in the city? It's sad! Very sad!' (UK_F_79_ID)

Responsibility in case of illness or after death

Death and illness of one of the parents can be an important turning point in their children's life, as reported by some respondents. A social pattern was depicted in the interviews: the sons tend to become responsible for their fathers' duties, and the daughters for their mothers'. A perpetuation of gender roles could be identified in the findings, as sons are expected to become the 'head of the family' and/or assume the financial responsibility of the family (because their fathers were the breadwinners), and daughters may assume the responsibility of the household tasks (because their mothers

did it). Assuming the role of the absent mother/father has consequences at different levels (personal, family, among others). At the family level, a conflict between family members may arise, as their roles and boundaries might not be well-defined. At the personal level, a pressure to follow in the footsteps of the absent parent may happen, which may restrain an individual's wishes, preferences and interests (causing an internal conflict between what s/he wants and what others expect her/him to want). On the other hand, some respondents do not perceive this to be negative as it stimulated them to take up responsibilities²⁴.

“In 2002, after two years in a wheel chair, he died. And suddenly, I am the eldest of a family with three children and a very professionally active mother. (...) Of course, I have plenty of responsibilities over this period (...). Moreover, there is a strange phenomenon occurring among the family of my father: there is a striking resemblance between me and my father. And of course, I bear his responsibilities upon my shoulders and each time we have some family dinner, that's again 'you look so much like him!'. During these moments, I can really feel that I am bearing the psychological legacy and the moral weight dad had in this family. (...) If I had a sister a bit older than me, I am not quite sure she would have had to bear the same weight and there is this resemblance that is so striking according to the whole family and that encourages everybody to see me as the new head of the household, whereas my mother endorsed a rather ambiguous role, if compared to the father's role and the mother she used to be before this happened.” (FR_M_21_CFR)

“As a woman, at school, since my mother had a lot of children and illnesses in her life, I had to act as an older daughter and an older son. (...) Then my father took me out of school because my mother was at hospital, to help at home, to help in the fields, whatever I could, to look after the other children (...) because my mother gave birth to the fourth child.” (CY_F_72_EDU)

24 Other examples can be found in the database (e.g. MT_M_61_CFR and PL_F_73_CFR).

7.6. Effects on leisure activities

Choosing leisure activities or sports

People's choices on leisure activities seem to be influenced by what is perceived as a typically female leisure activity/sport or a male one. On the one hand, some respondents reported they were stimulated to practice a kind of sport or to have a certain leisure activity, because it was perceived as being gender appropriate for them or in order to protect themselves (e.g. FI_F_24_LEI, MT_F_35_CFR). This stimulation was perceived differently by respondents: some did not like the stimulus/choice and soon gave up (e.g. FI_M_23_ID2, PT_F_24_LEI); and others were grateful for it (in spite of the fact of not recognising it at the time), because they had the chance to have a career within a certain sport (e.g. LU_F_25_LEI). On the other hand, some respondents mentioned they were discouraged, discriminated or even prevented to practice a certain sport or a leisure activity because it allegedly did not correspond to their gender. Likewise, there were other situations in which parents allowed their children to experience leisure activities/sports that are not generally perceived as acceptable for their gender. Several examples are provided below.

“One of my daughters is a sports lover and football especially. At school the girls wanted to do a female football team. But the female gym teacher did not accept it and said that only boys can play football. This is why she entered the volley ball team.” (CY_F_45_CFR)

“I think that the majority of girls lived the experience of having ballet classes, that very feminine thing. I didn't like it much. I've been there for almost two months. (...) Nowadays it is a lot related with that and there is also that stigma of dancers boys being homosexual. (...) [If I had a brother], probably he would have played football, because my uncle is a football coach in the club (name club) and, probably, surely, he would have played football.” (PT_F_24_LEI)

“My father oriented me towards male sports, to protect me – well, what I do consider like men's sports. (...) I think that for my father, it was certainly a way to protect me. He wanted me to do especially some men's sports.” (FR_F_32_LEI)

“My son wanted to attend a Hip-Hop course in primary school, but the school was of the opinion that hip-hop is only something for girls. But I insisted and argued that kids should have equal rights and that it is against the law that boys are being excluded from Hip-Hop just like girls cannot be excluded from football. Finally the school gave in and it was the first year that boys were allowed to participate in a Hip-Hop class. (...) We did not understand why it should be a purely girly activity. I probably wouldn't have intervened if it had been a sewing course (laughs), but not allowing boys to participate in a Hip-Hop course, that I didn't quite understand. And one of my sons participates in such a course, but he is being criticised. It was not only difficult to get the school to accept, but also his classmates. Schoolmates have difficulties in understanding why a boy would want to participate in a class with 10 girls.” (AT_M_47_LEI)

When a person practices a leisure activity/sport that is not perceived as suitable for her/his gender, this can cause different effects. On the one hand, some respondents described that if a boy/man practices a 'female sport' (like ballet) he may be mocked or considered homosexual (e.g. PT_F_24_LEI). On the other hand, if a girl/woman practices 'male sports' (like field hockey, basketball, rugby, football, shooting), boys/men may have positive and negative reactions to it, such as accepting a girl/woman as a 'buddy', or considering her a lesbian. (e.g. NL_F_32_ID, PL_F_29_LEI).



“If you are good at some sport, boys are surprised. (...) Since I was little I played field hockey. So, they seemed pretty surprised when I told them that I was playing field hockey. Or when my friends said that they played basketball, boys seemed quite surprised too. Because they tend to think that we do artistic roller skating, which where I live is pretty common. Or ballet, or swimming, a sport which they classify both for women and men. (...) Also, there are thousands of male football teams, but for girls, where I live there is just one. And it is uncommon, because in other towns there isn't any team. (...) I know girls who play rugby and boys... Or even rowing, which here, despite being a place where... In region A, rowing is very common. Still, boys always have a stereotype about girls [who are on a crew team] saying that they have huge backs. (...) I felt badly because they were surprised. But afterwards they see that as, 'oh, a girl who plays...!' They were interested and the fact that I played hockey seemed interesting to them. As if I was a strange person. Weird things tend to attract people. Or things that are not common. But I have girl friends that because of playing football or things like that were classified as if they were boys. If you dress in a normal way, like everybody else, and you don't wear tracksuits, you are never marked like that. But if you wear tracksuits or dress in a certain way they tend to say that you are masculinised.” (ES_F_21_LEI2)

Going out

In what going out is concerned, there is a perception among some respondents that boys tend to be allowed to start going out at a younger age than girls. Even if it is not the case (that boys start to go out sooner than girls), parents are described to be more permissive with boys in this matter, not opposing too much or not imposing too many strict rules/constraints. The same does not apply to girls, who must comply with all the rules imposed (about hours to be back home, where to go, how and with whom to go, etc.). This pattern can be explained by common perceptions that (young) women are more vulnerable and need to be protected, and that (young) men are stronger and can defend themselves. As a consequence of this social pattern, some respondents seem to believe that boys may experience certain situations before girls do, like drinking alcohol, using drugs, and engaging in sexual relations²⁵.

“The question of me being a boy... so I was allowed more. When I think about the time when my sister had this period of going out for eighteenth-birthday parties, it was always this 1 am time when the questions “where are you”, what and this and that, popped up. I already did not have this problem, meaning I did not have to come back at 1 am. Of course, the phone call was always recommended to inform that I will be back later or something but I could afford going out later and I have the impression that the fact that I was a boy and nothing bad should happen to me, could have actually had an influence on this.” (PL_M_24_CFR)

Both female and male respondents shared their personal opinion regarding night clubs and going out. There is a tendency to recognise women as an “added value” in discos and night clubs, because they may attract more men due to the typical perception that women pay attention to their looks (they use make-up, they do their hair, they dress up). According to the findings, women may be seen as sexual objects and baits (e.g. ES_M_21_LEI, ES_F_21_LEI1). Also, men appear to be perceived as consuming more alcohol than women. Evidences are provided below.

“So, girls will be more noticed... It's the same thing when you go to a disco, girls are less barred than boys. (...) Because girls attract more boys, isn't it? (...) They attract more boys, then boys buy drinks to girls, boys consume more... (...) [Discos let more girls get in than boys], because they also dress-up more, they are more eye-catching...” (PT_F_24_PRO)

25 Further evidence can be found in the database (e.g. CY_M_23_CFR, IT_F_19_CFR, PT_F_33_LEI and PT_M_26_LEI).

“I went out drinking with another guy. A good friend. We were in a nightclub in the city centre. (...) Then all of a sudden two young girls, about 18 years old, come there. We had not spoken with them during the whole evening. They just came and told me and my friend that “We have run out of money. Can you offer us drinks?” (...) We didn't say anything. We just laughed, as the situation was absurd. The girls left as we just laughed at them. After that I felt that... I was annoyed that... I and my friend are just drinking there, having fun and someone comes and tries to use us. “Can you gentlemen give us drinks?” That doesn't ... If we are there, that does not mean that we want to offer drinks to strangers. I felt cheap. Like I was being treated like an object. I have the picture clearly in my mind. I have never really told this to anyone. I felt stupid, like what do you think I am? How stupid are you? I felt that it was insulting.” (FI_M_25_ID)

“Boys usually stay in charge of collecting wood for the fire, of cutting wood to make constructions, we make wood constructions and build them, too. These are three tasks. To arrange everything... a portico, a table, an orator, as we attend to catholic scouts. On the other hand, girls usually get tasks like cooking, cleaning the tent and also, for example, dealing with logistics issues, like demarcating spaces. (...) Girls are more into intellectual tasks and boys are more into physical tasks.” (PT_M_18_LEI)

Physical punishments were said to be harsher on boys due to the belief that they are (and must be) strong; but also to intimidate girls.

7.7. Physical effects

Physical strength

According to the findings, physical strength is considered as a typically male characteristic. This dimension of stereotyping seems to have direct effects in what women and men are expected to do and/or to be able to stand.

Some respondents agreed that men are usually assigned the hard work or tasks due to their physical strength, such as carrying heavy things, performing household tasks that require more strength, working in the fields, build things, gardening, working as civil constructors, working in a warehouse. Women are generally expected to have a weaker performance in those jobs and tasks that require physical strength²⁶.

“But at the end of the day I was the one who got physically punished because I was the boy, the strongest one. They thought that I would not get hurt, that I am stronger because I am a boy. (...) My parents believe that boys are stronger by nature. Both physically and psychologically and I think that they beat me up in order to intimidate my sister.” (CY_M_23_CFR)

According to some male respondents, the person who possesses physical strength (usually men) may be able to use violence (against women) (see BE_M_47_VIO and also the example below).

“Usually a man has much more physical strength than a woman. And the violence begins to be verbal and then turns to be physical. And it only is physical because someone is capable of hitting in other one, if not it wouldn't exist.” (PT_M_60_VIO)

²⁶ Examples can be found in the database (e.g. CY_M_23_CFR, CY_M_46_CFR, PT_M_18_CFR, PT_M_18_LEI, PT_M_60_CFR and UK_M_21_PRO).



Violation of physical integrity

Examples of violation of women's physical integrity were provided by some respondents. There is a perception that women may feel some difficulties in defending themselves and, consequently, they may conform to certain situations that were described in the interviews (such as grabbing their "bottom" or accosting them) by 'excusing' men's actions because their feminine physical appearance may attract men. The phenomenon wherein the victim is described as being the provoker of unwanted acts, and should therefore be blamed instead of the violator, is widely described in literature and often still used by men to legitimise their unwanted behaviour.

“But this is life, right? You can do nothing about it. Some girls explain to themselves that it is the case since they are attractive, some others consider it loutishness, yes?” (PL_F_20_PRO)

“But I resented my male friends even more because all they could say was: ‘That’s why we don’t like going out with girls – it always leads to problems.’ So we got the picture that the problem was us. (...) This is how quite a lot of boys and girls react to violence or harassment in general: we shut up, we don’t dare make a fuss’, for a number of reasons. (...) Then there is the reaction of boys who don’t understand the problem at all: on the one hand they play it down, and say it isn’t as bad as all that: ‘OK, it’s good he didn’t do anything to you’, or ‘OK you shouldn’t have worn a skirt’, or, exactly the point: ‘You always make this into a problem’, ‘Going out with girls is a pain in the ass’, etc. And on the other hand they don’t encourage us at all to say ‘You have to hit them back!’” (LU_F_25_VIO)

In the stories, also accounts of cases of domestic violence can be found²⁷.

“This evening he had already drunk, and when he was drinking, it affected him in a very bad way. And then he started beating me up, I passed out and I don’t remember anything. For the beating, I cannot say anything, I was all bruised afterwards. I got a medical certificate for that, but I don’t remember the beating.” (BG_F_47_CFR)

“In the older times I think men would treat their wives violently and their children. I know a case where the husband would beat his wife up constantly and his children as well. Usually the first person who receives violence is the woman.” (CY_F_23_CFR)

7.8. Emotional and psychological effects

Physical appearances influence the sense of femininity/masculinity and psychological well-being

A few stories about breast cancer came up during the interviews, provided by women who suffered the disease. The respondents, who both had their breast amputated, made it clear that this event in a woman's life may have an impact on their own sense of femininity, psychological well-being, self-esteem and self-image, as well as on how other people perceive them. The female respondents also told about the pressure to correspond to society's femininity view. Some reactions of other people towards cancer and losing a breast were reported, such as people showing feelings of sorrow (for the loss of femininity), staring, enquiring about a breast re-construction, etc. Evidences can be found below and in NL_F_69_HEA.

27 Other examples include NL_M_67_VIO and UK_F_19_VIO.

“While a breast is still a symbol of femininity and sexuality, and besides that a cancer is an additional stigma. Also the association of death. (...) Back then, when I was sick, you didn't hear a lot about it, not at all. Very rarely you could hear something about it. (...) At that time I also considered breast reconstruction, a new breast from my own tissue. And the thought of that was like a psychological crutch. I see that now. For a few months. And it was also helpful for my kids. I know they kept asking me: 'When will you get a new breast?' But then the thought of that kept drifting away. We were nudists and we are still nudists. At that time I was covering myself up. Well, you can't be covered up all the time. (...) When you are young [she was 33], everybody was telling me 'Yes, you should have a reconstruction, you are so young.' (...) People pity you a lot, because what happened to you. Everybody, I think. (...) And I recall I used to go swimming in September because I needed to recreate my arm, while they removed my lymphatic glands And I went to [name town], to [name coast], I walked very proud, wearing these high heels (laughing), full of myself. And there were these three lads, I imagined them being body guards at a disco doors. [laughing] Good lookers, right. [laughing] And one of them followed me. And I thought to myself "just wait, you will see alright!" [laughing] And I went to these rocks and he went to these other rocks. And I positioned myself in a way [laughing] that he couldn't see anything. And I undressed myself. He sat five meters away and he looked at me constantly. And I was. flirting with him a bit [laughing], but kept myself covered up just enough. And I had a plan: 'If you are a real man, you won't be scared by this.' But he was. This was the only such experience. I also had longer hair so everything was covered up. And I slowly started to walk into the sea. And he sees me and starts doing the same. And at the very end I lifted my arms, I don't even know, what I did, and he sees it. [laughing] And it was not ugly at all. I already had a nice scar. But I was flat. And he jumped into the water and swam away. I thought to myself 'Jerk!' This was the only such message. But I must say I wasn't hurt, I had fun. I still have fun remembering it. But otherwise I think people accept you." (SI_F_47_HEA)

As regards health problems, eating disorders were also discussed in the interviews. Some respondents explained that the pressure to conform to society's expectation about a certain physical appearance may cause individuals (mostly girls / women) to develop eating disorders. According to the respondents, the family is believed to play an important triggering role in the emergence of this mental health problem (by expressing

criticism or by not offering support and stability). Also the images transmitted by media were pointed out²⁸.

“My dad is quite conservative and hard-and-fast. He is very critical on how a woman should be like. (...) On my dad's side, the people do not get fat even if they eat extra. (...) On my mum's side, everyone is short and rotund. I think my dad did not like it when I was not very thin first. In the beginning I was, like around the age of five, but after that I was too fat according to my dad. I got an eating disorder. (...) A while ago he had an opinion that I am anorectic and too thin. Nothing is good enough for him. I don't know how this is related to womanhood but he has this picture in his head that you cannot have muscles or extra kilos. You cannot be too thin but anyhow you are supposed to be. Nothing is good enough. (...) My mom never prohibited me to eat something but my dad had comments like '[name of the respondent], this Christmas you will not eat any chocolate. You have eaten enough of it.' My mum has always been very supportive when I have been on a low carb diet. It helps me to recover from bulimia. (...) I think I would not have got the eating disorder if I had been a boy. I don't know. I don't think my father would have pressured a boy child or been watching what I can eat and what I cannot eat and how I am supposed to look like." (FI_F_24_LEI)

Some male respondents who feel (or felt) that they do (did) not match society's views of 'masculinity' shared how this affects (affected) their own sense of masculinity and how this perception causes (caused) them inner troubles. Some revealed their ways of coping with their perception and what they have undertaken in order to avoid (hetero and self) criticism and bullying and in order to strengthen their self-esteem and self-image. The following fragments exemplify some of the situations found. The first is from a young man; the second from an older, married man who also has two mistresses.

“I could not prove anything to myself if I had not proved it to all others. This is how I... I was not studying because I wanted to learn but because I wanted the scholarship of the best student, just to get it official that I am a man. That was the starting point. I wanted to prove to people. With the gym, it was the same. I trained so much that I finally was stronger than everyone of the same age whom I knew." (FI_M_23_ID2)

28 Other examples include BG_F_24_ID and NL_F_69_HEA.



“I have been thinking: how will my life as a man continue when I turn 65 and retire? I am not so mobile anymore. I start to... Do I just sit at home on a rocking chair and watch TV from the sofa? (...) I don't have so much urges to sleep with women, I just think that they are great creatures. It is more like I could stop having a sexual relationship with these two women and keep them as friends but their motive is that I keep them partly alive, as it is not easy for them to find other men. (...) Even though I am an old man, in my sixties, I am expected to behave in a traditional masculine way. (...) Showing sexual desire. (...) I have become cautious as a man. As I am already this old, my desires and sexual potency will go down. (...) I can conclude that when someone is over sixty, to be a man... I guess there are less positive definitions. Condition goes down. If a man is being assessed based on his condition, potency, ability to act and do things... I have wondered whether I will just accept the role of a grandpa. A role of a slightly silly grandpa. (...) I don't see myself in that role. I just see grandpas who are a bit silly and who like to spend time with their grandchildren. I guess some of them like that and I guess I will too. I cannot think that far. I cannot think further. Will it be silent walking with slippers on, picking up the newspaper in the morning and drinking coffee? Then the grandchildren will come for a visit and so on. Is that how life will be like in a while? I have worked in tasks that are related to the military and there people are prepared to die quite... Men are. People around me have committed suicide and avoided being grandpas. I have heard that it is a sign of depression if one starts to think how to do it and how much it hurts people around you. I have realised that it would hurt them so much that I cannot do it. (...) I have thought that I could die elegantly when I am under seventy. I don't find my inner grandpa. (FL_M_60_CFR2)

“I rarely visit my nephew and my niece, but when I go to visit them, I take them in some of those big toyshops and there, let's play Santa Claus! Very interesting: my nephew, running around the shop – for my niece, it was that easy: 'I want this'. Great. My nephew going around the shop for 20 minutes: Playmobil, Lego, radio-controlled cars, and so on. After 20 minutes, I feel his indecision and I ask him: 'what do you really want?' [In a low voice]: 'I would like the same as my sister: a doll'. 8 years old! (...) It must be really deeply anchored, really, if an 8 years old boy needs 20 minutes before he dares to say in a low voice, 'uncle, I would like a doll'. Let's imagine: the school, whatever, all of this which can contribute to the fact that this little boy [is afraid of asking for a doll]. (...) He has no father, he lives with two girls. So it's pretty normal if he likes cooking, since he is surrounded by girls. He has nobody to play cars with, but his sister, eventually.” (FR_M_39_CFR)

“I have never been a stereotypical boy. I used to play with dolls when I was a child. My parents bought them to me without any problem. Looking back, it is a bit strange. I had two Barbie dolls. I liked cars and meccano as well but dolls, they had human features and I did small performances with them. But my folks gave them to me without any problem. I know that my god mother – this is one of my early memories – that my god mother said that they should have been more careful in order not to be surprised one day. (...) It just somehow got stuck in my memory. I did not understand what she had in mind: be careful because of the dolls. But I knew that it was related to the dolls, as other boys did not have them. (...) And children thought I was different because I spent more time with girls.” (SK_M_23_ID)

Playing with toys and children's plays

According to what was said by the respondents, there are gendered toys and gendered children's plays.

Stories show that not only do children make the distinction between girls' and boys' toys, but adults seem to encourage this differentiation too. This can lead to an internal conflict or to people's criticism when a child chooses to play with a toy that is not socially proper for his/her gender. The children's sexual orientation may also be at stake.

Depictions were presented by some respondents about children playing in groups composed only of girls or boys, in which children tend to play with gendered toys and plays. In addition, the respondents report that children may tend to assume gendered roles when they play together (reproducing gender stereotypes they socially learn) or they may play in a gender neutral way (like playing football together). When playing together in mixed groups, children's plays were described as reproducing the role models they have at home, which may not conform to what is traditionally expected. One respondent said such situation (of gender role deviating play) may lead to segregation by other children, because the child(ren) do(es) not act according to social expectations.

“My daughter plays football. Because there is a boy in the family and they have team spirit, they both participate in all games. Of course if she is with girls she would play girly games. But my son does not play with dolls.” (CY_M_46_CFR)

“But the story which I am about to tell here took place in the crèche and they played, that is, they wanted to play in the crèche, among the kids, ‘father, mother, child’. But that didn’t work with J. There was this problem that J was supposed to play Dad... Dad leaves for work and that was, as became evident, the expectation, but Dad could not play that since the father did not leave for work in the morning. I was the principle carer at the time, educating my son, and when I worked, I worked on my dissertation. (...) that was apparently the way it should be for a number of families there, some of them weren’t even married, etc. and that wasn’t really important for the kids [being married or not], but it was important that the father leaves for work in the morning. And that was what J. told us and he found it funny and said: ‘but a dad does not do that, you do not do that!’ And that was evidently not the right basis to be invited to play.” (DE_M_58_CFR)

Pregnancies

Stories about pregnancies were touched upon in some interviews, as well as the psychological and emotional effects that occur when people do not succeed in getting pregnant. Different situations will be discussed below.

There is a perception that when women experience complications during their pregnancies they may receive psychological support and a full follow-up; on the other hand, according to a male respondent, the health system may be overlooking men and their psychological

well-being. This can be analysed as a result of the stereotype that women are supposed to be mothers and take care of their children, and that fathers are pushed away from active fatherhood. The emotions of men are perceived to be unnoticed and devalued, because unconsciously people may act according to another stereotype: men cannot (and are not expected to) express their emotions.

“For 18 months, we are in a process of In Vitro Fertilisation (IVF), with my wife. (...) Last February, I realised something after the last IVF: things went really bad; a slaughter, my wife had an ectopic pregnancy, and had an operation... the really nasty thing. Psychological support for the woman in such a situation: 100%. Great follow up. Psychological support for the [man]: 0% (...). And I realised this also in February, for the sampling. We all arrive early in the morning for a sperm sampling, five guys in a row, we all know why we are here (...). We know it: we are here to jerk off, at 7.30 in the morning, and there is nobody around. And because I am kind of a chatterbox, I can’t help and I go for a chat with a nurse. (...) And she sees me arriving with a smile. ‘You look quite in a good mood’. ‘Well, I am not about to do the worse thing in life’. And she tells me: ‘you can’t imagine how many men are traumatised by this’. Who gonna talk with them? Who gonna take care of them? IVF is a female-dominant medical act. Motherhood, that’s still a women’s stuff. (...) There is no doctor or paramedic who comes and asks you: ‘are you OK, Sir? How do YOU feel? (...) Don’t you bear it upon your shoulders too? (...) We don’t have all the injections (that women have), that’s true, all the physical dimension. But still, when you are fully engaged emotionally” (FR_M_39_HEA)

One story of an older woman deals with the burden that women used to carry when not being able to get pregnant. Also, in the past, men’s biological capacity would not be questioned when a woman did not get pregnant. However, it was also reported that even when it has become common for both women and men to be tested in infertility situations, women may choose not to expose their husbands/partners to it.



“At a certain point we wanted to have a child. But I didn’t get pregnant, so I said: ‘Listen, we can talk about this endlessly, let’s just have it checked’ and then, well, then... What do they investigate? The woman! While my husband was not at all negative about it. So I asked: ‘I don’t mind being checked because I want to know what I am up to, but what about my husband?’ No, no, no, we don’t do that! So, you felt unsure: ‘Is this right?’ If both of us can’t have children, well, ok, then we need to accept that. Then you re-arrange your life accordingly. But if you have to continue to doubt?’ (...) I don’t think it is still that way, but in those days, really, I can still even remember the name of that doctor: ‘No, not your husband, but you!’ (...) my sister – who is from a much later generation – they told her: ‘you and your husband’. And after she found out that with her everything was ok, she didn’t want to put him through the ordeal and so they never had any children.” (NL_F_69_HEA)

After a separation/divorce

According to the findings, whereas women may feel liberated after a divorce (e.g. FI_F_55_CFR1), men may feel they lost their dignity after it, bringing out an identity crisis in which they may feel their role as breadwinners is put aside and they are not needed anymore.

“I see around lots of divorced women who just started to flourish, they realise their dreams. Of course they are emotionally frustrated or they sleep alone that is not pleasant all the time and maybe they want to have someone on their side, but the feeling that they need to catch up with something or experience something different; it keeps them in a distance. Of course they have lovers and so, but I can see how they wake up their individuality, how they figure out what they really want, they are just different.” (SK_F_38_CFR)

Gendered traits and characteristics

As a consequence of the descriptive and prescriptive nature of gender stereotypes, it may be socially regarded as more or less acceptable if a person displays certain traits/characteristics that are usually attributed to the opposite gender. This may have emotional and psychological consequences that can affect one’s self-perception.

“I think that there is a certain feeling of: ‘ok, I’m a boy, I have to be strong and these things of crying in public are ridiculous, it’s not a masculine thing of me.’” (PT_M_26_EDU)

“I work in the field of human relations. [I am in] contact with people through training, coaching and other things, and here for once being a man brings a range of preconceived ideas about how we will deal with human relationships. (...) It will occur when I’m doing little exercises and small simulations where I’m going to play somebody. And I’ll... fall into extreme emotion to destabilise the person, typically... beyond the exercise as such, typically in the debriefing after that there is someone to tell me... I did not think a man could react like that. It’s quite strange as... I saw men crying at their workplace. (BE_M_39_PRO3)

“It’s caused increasing tension and I think I probably would have witnessed in a couple of scenarios where women had become over-confident while the emancipation has been a very, very welcome thing. From a male perspective, there are quite a number of males who quite enjoy the equality issue. But I think there is slight leaning now towards an over confidence in women and leading to a more demanding set of, I suppose, procedures or standards from the man. You know, there are many, many guys in the last three to five years in Ireland who have lost their jobs and have lost their dignity and have lost their home through separation. Many, many stories will arise in social conversation about: ‘God, I was okay - and this would be a typical statement - I was okay when I was earning the money, and I was working till 8 o’clock at night during the Celtic Tiger (Irish economic boom period) and the boom and I was bringing in all this money, and as soon as I lost my job or I went back to normal time and I could only bring X amount of Euro in whereas before I had been bringing in double that. And that’s where the problem started. When the money went scarce, the love went out the window’, that kind of attitude. And I think that is a key issue, particularly in Ireland now and in England it would be pretty much the same because we would have very, very similar mind sets. And I think that is an issue that has to be dealt with societally because the guy, from a men’s perspective, the men have to get back to some semblance of: ‘Hang on, I’m the power base here, I have strength, I have my male strength and I need to preserve that.’” (IE_M_53_CFR)

From a different perspective, some respondents (men as well as women) shared their personal experiences about their parents' break-up and their mothers' (new/different) perceptions about men. This fact was reported to have an impact on the way they began to perceive and relate with men in general; on their self-concept; and/or on their relation with their mother. Their view about men in general seems to be compromised and this may have played an important role in the way they perceive themselves and other men.

“I think to some extent I think I probably felt quite bad about myself. But I think the more powerful thing that came from that is: 'I'm just not gonna be one of those', so misogynistic, women hating oppressive men. (...) I carry with me far too much guilt about my gender.”
(UK_M_29_ID1)

“So maybe I tried to balance a little bit the fear she had about men, and this tendency to restrict men to 'something' which is present only from time to time. (...) It's important for me to build a family and a man and a woman are equally important, and their relations should be quite equal (...). It's not that great to be separated, I guess. It's not natural.” (FR_F_22_CFR).

8. Inter-generational differences in gender perceptions





The following topics are mainly talked about by the respondents with regard to inter-generational differences: general observations about gender changes, household tasks, relationships, education, work and sexuality.

The inter-generational differences are mainly experienced in the private lives of people, where household tasks and the roles and power relations of women and men are concerned. The differences in the extended family structures are the most obvious to notice.

8.1. General observations

Generally speaking, there is a huge consensus among the respondents (with a few exceptions) that things have changed over the last generations. So, when talking about inter-generational differences, almost all respondents point towards change. Some do this in a more general sense, others are more specific about which areas of their lives have changed. Here is an example of the more general type of statements, in which the respondent thinks that the inter-generational change is an improvement. This view is shared by most respondents.

“No extreme is good, however... which means that the patriarchal model that survived here in Europe till the end of the 20th century, including in this country, (...) started to change in the past decades, to convert itself in something – I couldn't say what – which makes at least possible a greater respect for women. And I would be glad if [my children] could understand this.” (CZ_M_44_CFR2)

However, exceptionally respondents see no change.

“Now I can say that when I got married, the rhythm of life stayed the same, the same way as I was brought up: that the boys - because they go out to work - have no duty in the house. I can say that my husband has never helped me. Nothing. Not at all. The same as when I was at my mother's house. Even if there is some maintenance in the house, in my house, I have to do it. (...) Always. because he says... because he has got his day at work.” (MT_F_64_CFR2)

Some respondents go as far as to say that there seems to be a return to traditional models. Below are two examples to illustrate such opinions. In the first quote, the respondent delineates this return to traditional patterns as a local phenomenon. The second quote is a bit more nuanced in what the return to traditional values could mean.

“When Poland horribly regressed. In my opinion, it horribly regressed. And I have noticed that many young women, who generally are not religious and nothing of this kind, they have church weddings and so on. There is such a strong pressure. And I think it goes in two directions since on the one hand, there is this traditionalism, and on the other hand, still a lot of women live without being married, get divorced and have children without getting married. So, in these big cities, which I know from my own experience, it is practically no sensation. But women themselves seem to regress, not the circumstances. It looks like the society or, let's say, families or some people who know about it, accept it in some way or nobody really cares about it anymore. Whereas the women, these young girls, are in my view very backward nowadays. (...)” I: “And do you notice any difference over the time? So, now we have talked about, let's say, the 90's and this still... lasts?” R: “No, it lasts. In my opinion, it lasts.” I: “And there is no change? One cannot see...” R: “No, no, no.” (PL_F_55_CFR)

“[...] on the surface, this is changing. However, in reality these patterns, some kind of “calques” or models that the majority of us brings, no matter what, from our own environments, are very strong. And I would say that still this model, among some of my female and male friends that I met studying or even, let's say, working, is that a woman should be this weaker party. Even if she has some professional aspirations, they should not surpass what her partner does. And this is very strong, which is worrying. And despite everything, young people still have this kind of approach. (...) ‘On the surface’ means that while having a general look or within some kind of a shallow conversation, many people admit that of course it is important that women... that it is normal that there is equality, that women have the same aspirations. However, if we take a closer look to see what patterns do in fact govern their life and what expectations they have, we see that it is not true. That they sort of transfer some social expectations from their environments and even do not realise that they behave this way.” (PL_F_29_PRO)

It is interesting to see that the respondent makes a clear distinction between – what we will call now – surface changes and profound changes. This is an important observation that might not be noticed by other respondents but still it can often be found indirectly in their statements about change. A closer look will be taken at how this surface and profound changes materialise in people's daily lives when the household is discussed in the next section.

One respondent perceives a 'regression' in gender relations in her environment and supports this observation by arguing that in the past some sort of control was exercised by the party or union with a view to restraining domestic violence and divorce cases. In the absence of such interventions, the respondent sees domestic violence cases happening unsanctioned.

” R: (...) Romanian women just put up with too much and I have always opposed these things. I've never...
I: Do you think things changed in any way?

R: It made a turn for the worse. Yeah, it regressed, I think. Because when I filed for divorce, in '89, on grounds of infidelity – although he hadn't cursed me, nor was he beating me... Speaking of violence, I had colleagues of various...even cleaning women...if they heard a woman was beaten up by her husband, you'd be summoned by the party, by the union and reprimanded. (...) Here in the museum we have a couple, a cleaning woman and a handyman and he's beating her up so badly that he leaves her bruised and no one can stop him. I find it dramatic not to be able to defend oneself, but it is also linked to the fact that the Romanian woman still doesn't... I am referring here to the average, because the intellectuals seem to have evolved a little, which might have resulted in an increase in the number of divorces. (RO_F_66_SOC)

8.2. Household

Besides the general remarks about change, most respondents go into details and describe how they encountered the inter-generational differences in their everyday lives. As said, most talk about their private lives in this regard, as if inter-generational differences are most noticeable in this domain.

” “Because actually you can still feel this among them, in a relation grandpa – grandma, because grandma cooks and grandpa can't even make his own tea. Well, maybe he can, I am not sure. But the relationship is divided precisely. While with my parents it is not like that, they do everything, one this, one that, everybody everything. The roles are not divided, woman – man. That somebody would cook more or clean more. Everything is mixed.” (SI_F_23_CFR)

” “Really, I believe that when I was young, gender roles were more differentiated than nowadays.” (SK_M_71_EDU)

The above text fragments introduce the division of household tasks. This is a big issue for many respondents when they talk about change. However, not all change is in the same direction or to the same degree.

To understand the differences, it seems appropriate to make a distinction between the following aspects:

- Household task: a precise job in the household, like washing the dishes, laying the table, etc.
- Household responsibilities: a domain in the household that you are responsible for, like cooking. Cooking involves choosing what to eat, doing the shopping for the ingredients, preparing the food, storage of leftovers, etc.

When talking about inter-generational change, it is clear that most respondents agree (as illustrated in the above text fragments) that tasks and responsibilities used to be divided very strictly among women and men. Typical responsibilities for women seem to be: cooking, childcare (especially for babies), washing, cleaning. Typical responsibilities for men would be: deciding on the important purchases (those purchases other than for the daily life), gardening, fixing broken things. There are also responsibilities which are sometimes listed as typically female and sometimes as typically male, like finances and household administration.



“I think a lot of talk has been about those things of classic male or female things related [with that] women are emotional, men are rational and the like. (...) Because I grew up in a family where we were three brothers, [and still] are, and both parents, both parents are working. And I think in our family we had a fairly classic setting in every way and especially in the men’s, women’s roles - the same like I think in both of my grandparents’ families. Well, that is, of course, that there is a mother - more responsible for home affairs, for cooking, for the clothes and dressing up children, feeding them, and sending them to school. And while the man is more responsible for the... I do not know, the technical things - to screw in a light bulb, mend a chair, and for the money matters, or for the decision making, the decisions about money - to buy this or to buy that. Presumably that always was [things] I was supposed to do. And I think the same was also for my grandparents. There also the roles are very clearly separated. And I do not think it is somehow a bad thing, it’s just the way people are brought up and raised. I think that it does not change the way, if they are happier or unhappy.” (LV_M_26_CFR1)

Despite the fact that there might be important differences as to which responsibility is taken up by whom in a specific family, there is general agreement among the respondents that the very strict division of tasks between men and women has become more diffuse among the younger generations. However, it is noteworthy that the only concrete examples of responsibilities that are listed as taken over, are most of the time men taking up responsibilities in the household that were formerly held by women. There are fewer examples of women nowadays taking over household responsibilities that were formerly typically male. Probably this is built upon the assumption that women took up more household responsibilities in the older generations, and growing towards a more balanced world means that men have to take over more women’s responsibilities and less vice versa. So, moving towards equality means that men have to take up more female responsibilities. Obviously, the reverse logic holds when it comes to professional life, where women have been taking up responsibilities that were formerly held by men.

The respondents generally think that it is good that men and women share responsibilities in both domains (private and professional). This norm is hardly ever directly stated, but underscores their concrete examples.

Let us now return to the distinction that was made earlier between surface change and profound change, as well as household tasks and household responsibilities.

Despite the fact that some respondents talk about taking over women’s responsibilities, many talk more about taking over specific tasks. There is an important difference between the two. For example, the responsibility to cook consists of several tasks: deciding on the menu, do the shopping for the right ingredients, and preparing the food. The person in charge might delegate specific tasks to her/his partner (or others), for example, for buying groceries or a specific ingredient on the way home.

In a household, certain tasks might be delegated, but that does not mean that the responsibility is delegated. So, the responsibility remains with the same person, but s/he can ask the other one to help. ‘Helping’ is the typical word used to describe interventions on the task level instead of the responsibility level. Obviously, only delegating a task is a change that is much less profound than completely delegating or sharing a responsibility.

We could say that helping one’s partner to do certain tasks is a surface change as opposed to taking up a responsibility in the household, which is a more profound change.

Examples of both situations can be found in the stories. The example below deals with the ‘surface change’ of helping the partner:

“I never felt any difference about being a woman. Although, in that time, the biggest difference that a person felt was inside our home and in what help is concerned. Because, for example, nowadays any man has no problems in helping, but in that time it was complicated. (...) I mean... later my husband started to help. But his mother didn’t find it funny at all. For example, if he sets the table, or clears it. She thought that it was a lady’s job, women who should do it! But, as I was used to that at my home, my brother also helped, and it didn’t matter if it was a woman or a man. It was the person that was there that should help. The one who was nearby. Well... these are different ways of seeing things.” (PT_F_70_SOC)

In the above text fragment, the respondent suggests that men are involved more in taking over certain tasks in the household like setting the table. However, this example also shows how the respondent’s husband encountered opposition from his own mother about him helping with household tasks. This is an interesting aspect that should not be overlooked. Several respondents noted that women tend to experience the fact that men take over certain tasks (not even a responsibility in this case), as negative. This might have to do with

women's feeling of 'power'. As if the sharing of tasks or responsibilities will lower the power of the women in the household.

Let us now take a closer look at an example where the inter-generational change was more profound, i.e. where not only the tasks but also the responsibilities are being shared. In the quote below, the respondent starts by describing the traditional pattern of how he was raised, marked by a clear division of responsibility between his parents (mother at home, father at work), and how he has a different wish and opinion about how it should be divided between himself and his partner. He clearly talks about the division of responsibilities and not only tasks. However, he also says that he has difficulty in achieving his aspirations. This is interesting because by not translating his aspirations into direct actions, he forces his girlfriend again into the role of bearing the responsibility. It is she who has to get him moving and he aptly describes this as 'taking up the mothering role'.

“This about how I encountered the men-women balance in my environment, let's call it like that... It is determined partly by the past and recently has been apparent to come from the relationship between my own parents. My father was always working, very often away from home, worked abroad also and my mother was a full time housewife. And that was advantageous for me. I am more or less, well, spoiled, yes, spoiled. Anyway. Ok, I did not have to make my own sandwiches so in that sense spoiled. (...) I live together with my girlfriend now. I am convinced that both of us should do our share of the household, so not as my parents did it: my father worked and my mother was busy in the house. We both work, me and my girlfriend, and so I think we should both contribute to the household. That we both are responsible for the running of the house, shopping, cooking and I notice that I have trouble with this, because I used to be spoiled in those things. So, I find it more difficult... And then I oppose my girlfriend. I find it harder to intrinsically motivate myself to do things in the house. (...) I do it, sometimes with a bit more resistance than I would like to show, but in the end I do it. Most of the time, I do it in a slightly different way than how my girlfriend would do it. She dictates a bit more: 'This place is a mess, it should be cleaned!' I... my limits are a bit broader in those aspects. (...) She feels as if she has to be the 'mother' in order to get me – to put it straight – off the couch. (...) Yes, at times she feels forced by me into the mothering role and that is a result of the way I was brought up. (NL_M_34_CRF)

Obviously, there is still a big step between how one would wish to behave and how one actually behaves. The above respondent really would like to participate, but also feels resistance, so he still needs the pressure from his girlfriend to move him towards real action. Many other text fragments that deal with the division of household tasks and responsibilities can be analysed along the same lines: some respondents are more aware than others, some are only changing on the surface, others more profoundly. However, there is wide agreement that there is a shift – minor or major – towards taking over more tasks and/or responsibilities from women in the household.

Below is another example from a male respondent about his trial to find the right new balance.

“[As a boy] I had to participate [in the household]. Not as much as my sisters did, I think they did a lot more housework than I did, but I also cleaned sometimes or... I was the one who put the washed clothes on the clothes line. There were these things... doing the dishes for example - until we had a dishwasher. Then, only putting the dirty dishes in the dishwasher. So... but my father did not participate in all this. So I didn't take it from him, I simply did it for my mother, or I guess my father would have expected me to do this anyhow. Err... But this, for example, I would do it in a way in my home that I also help so that my sons would see that I help their mom in the housework. Although I think that it is primarily for the woman to do the housework. So I don't think that... ok, this will sound chauvinistic... But to say that 50-50% and that this is possible... I think that life brings it this way, and I am also lucky because my fiancée, she actually doesn't want me to participate in the housework at all because she thinks this is a female thing and women should be let alone to do it. But I still will... (...) I think this has developed in this way in society and I don't think that from one generation to the next we should declare that from now on it is 50-50%, because if we say this, we should also say that washing and fixing the car is also 50-50%.” (HU_M_22_CFR)

It is worth to consider that the difference between a task and a responsibility is related to the concept of power. In this view, the person holding the responsibility is the person holding the power. This is also why the delegation of a responsibility is more profound: because this moves the relational power structure. Respondents have much to say on that issue as well, as will become apparent in the next part.



8.3. Relationships

Some stories reveal that people generally know better what they do not want, than what they aspire to. They have gladly given up the norm that tasks should be strictly divided according to sex, but end up in a mud-dle as to what the alternative should be. People easily pay lip service to the thought that it should be 'equally' divided, but how the concept of equality is translated in the everyday lives of the respondents remains to be seen and as described in the previous section, can differ a lot according to the level of change the couple is into (profound change with a re-division of responsibilities or a surface change with a delegation of tasks).

The quote below reflects very clearly the conflict, uncertainties and insecurities felt by many respondents. The conflict that the respondent mentions refers to a situation wherein there is a disagreement among the partners as to how far the change should go: does it only involve delegation of tasks or also responsibilities? And which tasks and responsibilities are concerned? Partners can be on quite different wavelengths with regard to this and this obviously may result in a power struggle.

“It’s an evolution, it is quite interesting. Anyone will have to accommodate to this new situation. Positive or negative. I think evolution is neither negative nor positive. (...) emancipation solves a number of problems, well, it raises other problems since we must also arrange and adapt to new situations, compared to a situation before where I still feel (until our parents’ generation) the roles were clearly defined and that many conflicts have not come up, as each stayed in his role. Once someone changed a bit the roles or someone rebels against the role he/she should play, then there is a conflict zone since it is no longer separated. (...) But on the other side, it is about developing an understanding or compromise or arrangement which is an asset because everyone understands what the other does. And ultimately, if we work together, we can still do much more if both have an idea and can contribute and be mutually supportive in our respective jobs.” (LU_M_29_CFR2)

It is clear that there are no clear-cut answers as to what is the ‘ideal situation’ and most text fragments describe more of a struggle than a new concept or re-definition of relationships.

Most respondents seem to agree that the situation used to be more ‘simple’ in the past, for the previous generations,

since a clear, traditional division of roles and power leaves little room for interpretation and, therefore, less conflict. Nowadays, however, roles are shifting and clearly have not yet settled into a new pattern. For this reason, there is clearly a higher potential for struggle between partners. A further elaboration of this power struggle can be found in the section of this report that deals with masculinity.

In what follows, the specific roles of men/fathers and women/mothers in the household and how these changed over the last few generations are considered.

The role of men/fathers

There are three elements about which a lot of comments have been made by the respondents with regard to inter-generational changes and the role of men/fathers in a relationship: the power they have, their role in the upbringing of the children and the way things are changing nowadays. These three aspects will be looked at more closely.

As mentioned above, a more profound analysis of the power aspects in relationships can be found in the report section on masculinity. Here, it is touched upon only in the light of inter-generational changes. However, when it comes to power, the concept of change is relatively variable. Some respondents say that they - or others around them - stick to the ‘old norms’, i.e. men hold the power and women are more subjugated, while other respondents have made shifts towards a more equal relationship. Nevertheless, the issue of power remains important also in the youngest generation and a topic that can create tension in the couples.

Most respondents agree that fathers hold and held a lot of power in their families. The below quotes illustrate the (common) stories in which the father is (was) the ‘power base’ of the family, sometimes as a ‘protector’ (taking care of financial and other needs) and at other times more as an ‘oppressor’ (being aggressive or bad tempered). In any way, he holds the power and is not inclined to give up that position. Many respondents have experiences along these lines.

“My mother comes from a very humble family, a workers’ family, actually, where the father was kind of an institution. They were four sisters and they had to serve him the soup first for dinner. It was like in a movie, around 1910, a perfect example where the guy comes back from the factory and expects to find his newspaper; for whom it is unimaginable that a woman expresses her own views.” (CZ_M_35_CFR)

“Because my father was terribly single-minded and he really stood for imposing his own views, including if everybody was against. And of course, this firstly applied to my mother. In that sense ... I certainly did not have the best possible example, as regards the way to behave with respect to my spouse... The beginning [of respondent's relationship with his wife] was pretty harsh. It took me some time after we got married and we founded a family (...) to realise that actually, I didn't like the way my father did behave, and that it's necessary and good to consider your partner as an equal.” (CZ_M_71_EDU)

“My father is a typical man. I think, yes, I could say so. He actually does these things. If there is something wrong with the car, my father would do that. He repairs things. Plus it is also the fact that he earns more than my mother. And because of that you could sometimes get a feeling that he thinks of himself as more important. Well, ok, these are my feelings, but maybe it was like that. Because he earned more money and then he thinks that he does more for the family. Or, that a family depends on him more than on my mother. But yes, he is a very typical man, my father.” (SI_F_23_CFR)

Obviously, when one partner in a couple pulls the power towards her-/himself, the other partner has to give up the power. So, a complementary role for women as the subjugated wife can be recognised.

“Yes... most probably he expected this from his wife, to fulfil this role of the Christian woman. And my mother was perfect in this, because basically her character was not that of an initiator. I think my father would not even have married a woman like that, or if he had, there would have been a lot of tension. So they made a good match my father taking the initiative, the leadership. If I use a psychological approach, then he was the dominator, and my mom was the submissive one. Obviously this is not ideal but it made peaceful life together possible. But my father did not expect the same thing from his child, did not expect his own daughter to be quiet. No, they rather let her develop freely. My sister (female name) could develop very well and freely in our family.” (HU_M_22_ID2)

However, the power that is held by men is quite relative and can be undermined indirectly by strategic choices made by women. As a way to avoid conflict, some women seem to be willing to give the impression that the man holds the power, while they are actually taking the decisions. This is an indicator of how power is connected with the essence of masculinity. Men are believed to be not easily willing to give up their power and women deal with this resistance in creative ways in order not to give the impression that the power would be taken away or diminished.

“Or: ‘let the man make the decision, it must not appear that you are making decisions about everything’. This remains true. It is understood as women's diplomacy... That, ‘let him say what he wants, and you ... [will do what you want]’. This (that the man must appear to make the final decisions) still holds. Even though the women of my generation, but also of the older generation, believe they are the ones who actually make the decisions, they think we must use this female characteristic, to make it seem as if he is the one who decides... This is a bit tragic, I think... I believe all ideas should be on the table, and the one which is best should be chosen, regardless of who proposes it.” (GR_F_26_CFR)

Of course, not all female respondents are prepared to manipulate their partner as suggested in the above quote. Many would rather enter into a confrontation and possibly a conflict to defend their right to an equal share of the power. A closer analysis of such reactions is provided in the chapter on ‘dealing with stereotypes’.

Where the relationship between fathers and their children is concerned, the analysis of respondents' narratives about their fathers reveals a typology that includes the following categories: the oppressor and the judge. While such categorisation can be perceived as oversimplifying the reality and reductionist as an approach, it does allow to identify broad patterns in the stories. The two categories can be described and illustrated with quotes as follows.

In the ‘oppressor model’, the father is depicted as ‘the ultimate threat’ in the upbringing of their children. They were the ones who would sanction their children in a physical way. Respondents provide quite negative comments about this type of fathers.



“He [respondent’s father] lost his temper immediately, he started to yell at me immediately. I was actually afraid of him. When I was younger, I didn’t like to go see him, I didn’t feel comfortable there. (...) He did slap me a couple of times and I told that at home and then he was not allowed to see me for some time.” (SI_M_22_CFR)

“I think my husband is the ultimate threat. And I think my father was too, if we did anything wrong it was: ‘wait until your father comes home’. And I suppose because my husband is bigger and stronger, if they’re doing anything wrong, he will take things away from them, he will discipline them.” (UK_F_46_CRF)

The ‘judge-type’ of father can be described as a more distant, cool and rational father who will be there to dictate the norms and values and judge on what every member of the family is doing. This model of fatherhood is not considered very positive either.

“To start with my childhood, I, as every boy, was a mom’s child... But the fact that I was a mom’s child has begun from the change position of my dad. Dad instinctively shows less warm feelings, he wants to be a role model, and he wants to be a strong fist. If my mother wants to smoothen things over and solve the issues in a soft way, my dad, on the contrary, always tells the last verdict which cannot be changed... The fact is that... Well, well, I’m here... I will not tell this as a positive result. Rather I would like to emphasise the negative aspects of this upbringing. My dad has never showed warmth to me. Therefore, now I am not showing any warm feelings to my children. Because I’m exactly the same dad to my children as my dad used to be to me. It is the obligation of a mother to be warm with children. Dad is the one who says only once, and it is either ‘yes’ or ‘no’... My dad educated me with one phrase, this phrase is his motto: ‘I do not like when someone cries without being beaten’... There has never been any physical violence in my family, in my regard. However, my dad has never tolerated my buzz, whining, being dissatisfied with something. In a sense, my family educated me to be like a Spartan...” (LT_M_34_CRF1)

The stories indicate that men would be on the look-out for other role models but these seem to be rather absent. However, this lack of a positive role model does not appear new, as some older men also complain that they really lacked positive role models, both in real life as in literature (lack of literature on the topic).

“Now there is a whole lot more information out there. You know, I watch my daughters and they’re mothering and they are learning about mothering and it is very different from when we... We had 2 books: there was ‘Dr Spock’ and there was a book called ‘Every woman’, which was a kind of handbook. But it was only... ‘Spock’ was about babies and ‘Every woman’ was about women and their bodies, substantially their bodies. There was nothing that might tell me about being a father and all I had was this model that I had conflict with and did not want to become.” (IE_M_60_ID)

Some respondents’ stories accounted of their fathers being very absent from the family. The quote below provides an extreme example of a family in which the mother died just before the Second World War and while the father was left with three young children, he did not assume his role as a parent after the death of his wife but went off to fight in the war.

“They wouldn’t do this now... there were 3 young girls and each member of the family took one of them. No wonder that these children... (...) I mean, all three of them were split instead of keeping them... I suppose they couldn’t keep them altogether. (...) Yes, but the father of course was... he went and joined the RAF and the girls just stayed with relatives. (...) And the social services (nowadays) would go mad! You wouldn’t split three children...” (UK_F_46_CFR)

While the above is obviously an extreme example of an absent father, fathers’ absence is also complained about in less extreme ways, for example when fathers would not be emotionally available or spend large portions of their time away from the family.

“I think our generation is more aware that everything has to be, everyone has to be involved in things and that it is simple to have family time. So, sometimes I can remember, I used to go to bed after... We had a television and after 'the magic round' finished at 6 o'clock, we used to go to bed. And this man came home and for years I didn't know who he was. Seriously! (...) Yes, he was always very busy... (...) he'd go off sailing in the weekend and leave us with our mother. He'd see us during summer holiday and think: 'oh! It wasn't all that bad, but it seemed like that.' (UK_F_46_CRF)

“I have friends who behave differently [from their fathers' generation], in a way which is, I would say, more appropriate to the 21st century, which means that they try to respect some balance as regards the house work. At least (they come to such a decision) when we talk about it or when they go on parental leave, as it was the case for many of them. Many of them also assisted to the birth of their children, something that my father's generation did not, for instance. Because here it was usually impossible, you could not enter. But anyway, they wouldn't have assisted.” (CZ_M_44_CFR2)

In expressing their feelings about the absence of their fathers, the respondents implicitly convey their conviction that a father has an important role in a family since he would not be missed so much otherwise. What exactly is perceived as 'missed' and should be taken up by future generations would be those elements that were mentioned in the above text fragments: warm feelings, positive encouragement, availability in time as well as emotionally. Those are precisely aspects which are considered very feminine. This observation suggests that respondents would like fathers to develop more towards what is considered 'the feminine side of the spectrum'. But most men do not seem to find this an attractive prospect as moving towards femininity might feel threatening for their masculinity, so some men get stuck in a 'double-bind' situation.

“I was thinking about my parents. Although they both worked, my mother was still the one who was doing the shopping, doing the cooking, doing the washing, my father was never involved in that at all. And he'd go off and do his hobbies and have time for himself and she would never have time. And looking back I think: 'how did she cope with four children? Doing that and working?' It was quite difficult! (...) At the school [nowadays] there are quite a few parents where the fathers look after the children, so it is becoming more common. (...) And certainly you get more fathers involved in... You see more fathers at the school gate and taking their children to school. Whereas when I went to school, it was always the mothers. So, that's good.” (UK_F_46_CRF)

The quotes from respondents provided above, illustrate how people perceive their fathers' role at the time when they grew up. As has become clear, there is quite some criticism against the typical roles of a father/man in the household, both with regards to the power held, as with regard to the distant relationship with their children.

Younger generations definitely appreciate the fact that men would be more involved in their families, but this does not actually mean that they really change. Change (as described in the previous section dealing with the household) can be a long and hard road from intentions to reality.

The role of women/mothers

When considering the role of the father, three aspects were commented on that were referred to repeatedly in the text fragments: power, the relationship with the children and the change that is occurring. Looking at how the role of women/mothers is discussed by the respondents, it can be noted that the text fragments do deal with the aspects of power and emancipatory change, but address less the relationship of mothers with their children. This might mean that no inter-generational differences are noticed here. This is an interesting aspect because it means that the role of a father is much more questioned and considered to be changing than the role of a mother.



With regard to power, it would be wrong to conclude from the previous section on male power that women do not have any power at all. On the contrary, some respondents point out that women do have power, albeit in strictly delineated areas and details of family life, whereas men have more power in public life. This is connected to the fact that women hold most responsibilities in the household and therefore also the power connected to it.

“I remember my ex-boyfriend towards the granny, was kind of like really the intense matriarch of the family. You know, she did a lot of the work for it. Now I can't remember if she actually worked for money? I guess she must have actually worked for money, and his granddad did as well. But it was one of those things, you know, where granny is LAW. It is one of those things... I remember him saying when I first met his grandmother, it was kind of like: 'my grandmother liked you so now you're IN! Now you're in with the dog, like!'. So, she gave you the nod of approval, so you're good now. But like his granddad had also liked me and that was fine but it wasn't the same kind of thing. So there was this kind of... Like his granny was just really powerful in that family. ... Talking about that granny being a really strong woman, that is kind of an archetype, like North Dublin, working class women, through the ages, there were definitely women who were treated worse but there was a lot of, you know, strong women who were law in their house. It was one of those things that depend as well, like people, like his granddad was a kind of 'mousy good man', who found a big strong woman and then there was... that's the kind of archetype that kind of exists there. And I think it was kind of... I don't know, maybe stereotype as well.” (IE_F_22_SOC)

“I think of my grandmother. This was one Christmas and we were quite a large family and I was eighteen or nineteen and I was wearing trousers and my grandmother said to my mother: 'She's not sitting at the table in those'. And I said: 'oh, for goodness sake'. And my mother who was an eternal diplomat said: 'please, go and put a skirt on and don't make a fuss'. So I had to go and put a skirt on before I was allowed to sit at the table, because I was wearing trousers.” (UK_F_79_SOC)

The above two text fragments show that the power realm of mothers often also extends to the field of norms and values. In many families mothers, just as fathers, transfer (often conservative) norms and values to the next generation.

“We were... from our childhood... very much influenced by both parents. They both played a very precise role [in the family]. It must be said that both parents are also coming from a very traditional background. They both come from a farm... where there had always been... very clearly defined roles for the men who worked in the barn and for women who were at home and who were looking after the household and aim for a spotless house. And of course, both my parents left the farm, but they still kept these characteristics when they started their own family in which we grew up with them, it was always my mother who looked after the household and in an impeccable manner. And it was... I would say... it was her prowess; it was always the face of the house outward. So it was a part of the face of the house outward.” (LU_M_29_CFR1)

The above text fragment shows that power does not only mean bearing the responsibility of something, but also that one can be praised for the good work attached to it. The pride, joy and compliments connected to the results of their work are at the same time reasons for some women rather not to give up their responsibilities: their good work yields authority and power.

One respondent provides a very clear analysis of what she perceives as the essence of the inter-generational change with regards to the role of women: the possibility to make choices.

“If I think about it, about the difference between my mother's life, mine and the one of my daughter, I would say that's the possibility to make choices.” (CZ_F_38_PRO1)

One of the most important new choices that respondents talk about with regard to women is the choice to study and the choice to work, which indeed have been a prerogative of the last generations only.

“The woman was - as was demanded from her to be - a mother, the accent was on being a mother. It's only today that the accent is more on profession, a small change in accents, although even back then [under the communist regime] women wanted to see themselves professionally fulfilled as well. But back then, there were more housewives. I look at my mother... well it was the fifties...but my mother gave up work to raise us and it was just my father working. Now things have evolved.” (RO_F_66_PRO)

“I have daughters. (...) Daughters who have handled their lives, not good, but perfect! They realised everything I didn't. And all the time I tried, not so much with daughters but more with my elder granddaughters, especially granddaughters, to influence them in a way that they should receive what I didn't - I studied well, but nobody praised me. I tell them all the time (...) that I am proud of them, that they are the most beautiful, smartest, that they will always handle everything and that I rely on them a lot and believe that everything will work out for them.” (LV_F_68_ID1)

But also within the couple relationship, there is a lot of change going on. Some female respondents decided, quite radically, that the power structure within relationships ought to be changed. This has been analysed in the section on masculinity, but it may be clear that this is not an easy or straightforward conflict.

At the same time, however, these hopes of the older generations may put a lot of pressure on the younger generations of women to live up to the dreams and hopes of their mothers and grandmothers.

“Well, I've been explaining [to my daughters], that it cannot be so. There should be some things which should be discussed and somehow a mutual settlement should be reached. One cannot sit as I did, with mouth shut, and wait for something. I always say, 'if you have decided to do something, then tell [him] straight away, let him face the fact, that I will do it this way'. Not to have conflicts, there should be some compromise. [And then] do! Because you have the right not only to sit at home, raise children, and cook food for your husband, and fulfil his follies. But if you want to study or, let's say, to do something else, some other things - I say: 'Go ahead!' I say: 'You have it, if you want, you have to do it! You may not wait for something.' As I was waiting all the time. My husband didn't allow me [to work], and [I] sit and wait.” (LV_F_45_PRO1)

8.4. Education

When analysing inter-generational differences, education is definitely a field in which a lot of changes have taken place. It is clear that in most countries, the situation was completely different about two generations ago, when women hardly had a chance to obtain a good education. This has changed tremendously everywhere.

“When I was a child, I saw it clearly because my brother was always the favourite. I didn't count. My mother thought that my brother should study and then bring up a family, and that I should do what she did: go to church, pray, do the housework and cook well. When I got married I'd be in good hands. That's how it was.” (LU_F_62_CFR1)

Some female respondents also clearly state how they put all their hopes on the new generations of whom they see that they get a lot more chances than they ever got themselves.



“My brother wanted to study, and the two girls and I couldn’t. (...) Because at that time, it wasn’t thought necessary for girls to study as much as boys. That’s all... Because it was men who brought home the bacon – average standard of living etc. In general women, as they did work that was a bit less demanding (inferior), they didn’t need to be highly educated. It’s not the case today.” (BE_F_65_EDU)

About two generations ago, education did not seem so much of a priority for women. This also meant that the curriculum of what needed to be studied was different for girls and boys. Girls’ education was clearly oriented towards preparing them for their role as a housewife, whereas boys would get much more of a professional education. This also means that most schools used to be sex-segregated. Both aspects, sex segregation and study orientation, have largely changed nowadays.

“I think in my generation the youth is most prominent because we lived through the changes. In the family where I grew up, even with my grandparents, the husband worked and the wife stayed at home. My mother, she went to a school where she learned embroidery and household stuff. It was really oriented towards doing the household. The only thing that was common (for boys and girls) was pre-school. There was a nunnery school and that was mixed in pre-school but from primary school onwards, it was sex-segregated: boys on one side of the village and girls on the other side of the village. It might be a coincidence, but that was even done in church: boys on one side and girls on the other.” (BE_M_72_CRF1)

Most respondents agree that education has had an emancipatory effect on women. As a woman in the previous section pointed out, it may open options for women.

“I believe there was a gain of knowledge among men, or at least those with whom I find myself, this means a certain social class (...) but I notice especially among girls, especially girls who have a university education, and are really emancipated from traditional roles.” (LU_M_29_CFR2)

However, the great change that education has brought in the lives of women does not mean that men – who had access to education all along – were not restricted in any way. Interestingly, a number of stories show how being a boy often meant that you would inherit the farm/family business or career of your father and this could be experienced as very restrictive indeed.

“My father started a turkey farm. That was something very exclusive in those days. He moved to a forest, bought himself a piece of land and started to raise turkeys. So we were with six children at home: three boys and three girls. (...) It was always taken for granted that they would try to do something on the farm. Or it was an attractive perspective for them. Not only attractive, also at times constraining. I do have brothers who did try to do something else first but all of them tried something with the farm as well. For us girls that was not at all expected. I think - certainly for my eldest sister – they had the idea that: ‘oh well, she’s going to get married anyway.’ So she doesn’t need... She could have easily done gymnasium (highest level of secondary school), but that was not done. We didn’t know of anybody who studied, so it was just not done.” (NL_F_53_PRO)

“In my case, he wanted the name of the family to continue, he wanted the business to continue, because he used to work for his father and so he expected me to work for my father. (...) I mean, he didn’t allow me ‘listen, I don’t want to become a photographer’, no. ‘You have to because this is a family tradition’ and he expected it to continue like that.” (MT_M_40_CFR2)

Some respondents point out that men used to feel this kind of inter-generational burden much more than women did, since women are supposed to marry into some other family anyway. Somehow paradoxically, this gave some female respondents in certain contexts a larger degree of freedom. That is: for those women who had access to education, which was definitely not true for most of them.

8.5. Work

Just like education, work is an area where many changes can be noted to have taken place over the past couple of decades. With regard to unpaid labour, obviously both men and women have always contributed, but with regard to paid labour, significant changes are noticeable in female participation. In Western societies before the Second World War, women were generally not performing paid labour, except for the lower social classes who could not survive without it. For the last two generations, this has greatly changed. Whereas women were first refused access to the labour market, this completely changed during the economic boom period of the sixties.

“No, in fact, school teaching was the one thing that you could do and be married. But that only came in after the war because I had colleagues in one of the schools that I worked at, in London, where they hadn't been able to work because they were married. (...) That was lifted in the war because they needed the teachers, because the men had gone to be soldiers or whatever. So, but that was terrible... I mean to train somebody and then to say: 'because you are married you can't work'. I can't believe it.” (UK_F_79_SOC)

From the sixties onwards, there has been a constant and significant participation of women on the labour market. Not only did women start to participate, also the working conditions changed a lot and nowadays the focus is more on finding ways to combine family and working life. However, the older generations of women, who are now retired, often still suffer from the serious discrimination they encountered on the labour market when they were younger.

“Men fall out a lot younger than women do and women carry on and especially if their husbands are the sole pension earner, the women's pensions are also depleted considerably by that fact. So, yeah, and especially as they get over 75 or so, the mortality for men is much greater than it is for women and so there is quite a considerable amount of older single women living alone and in poverty. Knowing women, they're surviving as best as they can, they do other things and they try. Many of the women in my generation stayed at home because they had to. I'm sure you've heard about 'the marriage bar'. (...) In the - I don't know when it started, but at least when I grew up - in the civil service, women, when they married, they had to give up their jobs and in non-civil service jobs, women were taxed so completely - I think it was about 95% taxes - so it wasn't worth the while to be working. Because the social policy was that women should be at home minding their children. And so a lot of women had to or did give up their jobs. (...) Yes, it was an enormously high taxation when you got married. (...) It is very different now.” (IE_F_68_PRO)

The fact that women started to work was not appreciated by everybody. Especially the expectation (and norm) that women should be the ones to take up the care for their young children appears as an argument against working women.

“After the war, there was a great change in society... Women wanted to start working. They continued working after having children. I do not think it is right for a woman to work when she has young children. She should be there for her family and once her children are married and she is able and willing to work, she can do it. This is the reason that children end up doing drugs and hanging out with the wrong kind of people. Whereas when they have their mother at home... [this could be avoided].” (CY_F_72_CFR)

It seems to be quite typical that the (non-)successful upbringing of the children is solely put on the shoulders of the mothers by this respondent. That fact that the father would be absent at work is generally not considered a risk for the children. Despite the fact that not many respondents voice this concern, it is often explicitly or implicitly voiced in popular media, literature, etc.



Not only may women who work be criticised for neglecting their roles as mothers, some male respondents find their arrival in the labour market difficult because it threatens the power position traditionally held by men.

“In the last years we had a team meeting once a week. I realised that these men are quiet in the team meeting but when they went out of the meeting room, I heard afterwards [that they said], that ‘she is just in need for recognition’. They did not help at all to improve practices. They were just searching for mistakes and telling that this is the way it has always been done. It was really hard for them to accept improvements, especially for older men. (...) It might be a trace of something everlasting. That it is a man who decides. When I started in this workplace at the beginning of the 60’s, the supervisors were always men. I guess it is a trace from the past, that a man gives the orders. It is my impression that it is difficult for men to take orders from women. (...) I felt it was easier when younger men started working there. I think young people are more flexible already. I see it clearly that nowadays young men are different than the men of my age.”(FI_F_70_PRO)

“I think that inside the family there is no such thinking [that a man feels badly if his wife earns more than he does]. However, this matter also depends on the common social norms, because, in the sense, perhaps in Lithuania, you can strongly feel this... I think, perhaps, especially from people you are communicating with ... In Lithuania, it’s still popular to ask ‘how much do you earn?’ and everyone who knows that the husband earns less than his wife... I think that he wouldn’t receive a severe bullying. However, everybody would always try to make a joke out of this situation. And he would probably feel humiliated...”(LT_M_24_SOC)

The above text fragments suggest that men do accept that women have entered the labour market, but may feel hesitant when it comes to them (potentially) taking up real power in this field. The theme of power seems to surface on all domains where the relationship between women and men is concerned and again here – as in the section on masculinity and household – it can be noticed that most men are willing to go along with the changes, as long as they do not touch their power base in a fundamental way.

8.6. Sexuality

The narratives suggest that an important inter-generational change has taken place with regard to dealing with sexuality and bodies.

Publicly displaying (nearly) naked body parts used to be much more of a taboo some generations ago, whereas respondents point out that society has become clearly more tolerant in this respect.

“I also see a big difference... I see how these young girls are completely not ashamed of their corporality. Whereas when I was, I don’t know, in primary school or secondary school, then girls who developed faster, had breasts for instance and so on, they were ashamed. They were hiding it and so on. Now, there is completely no such problem. Neither in Poland. These young girls walk around nearly naked and they are totally not... at least the ones who look OK... ashamed of their own body.”(PL_F_55_ID)

“On Saturdays we would take baths. There was a big metal tub that was filled with hot water from the kettle. First the little ones would take a bath, then they got a biscuit and cup of tea and had to listen to the radio. Then the bigger ones took a bath. But that was very strict. I think I never ever saw my elder sister – an even my younger sister for that matter- naked. Never in my life. It also didn’t matter. That was the way things were. I think it was part of the upbringing. You didn’t even want to see that. It was such a normal part of upbringing.”(BE_M_72_CRF2)

This greater freedom in showing your body seems to go hand in hand with a diminished taboo about sexuality.

“If we had a chance of playing hide and seek with the girls – surely our hormones were working as well – the challenge was much bigger. But, yes, when I look at my grandson now... He turned 16 last week. He has a girlfriend since last year already. I don't have anything against this. I think it is charming. Of course, we had to learn a lot of things through trial and error. And in retrospect you realise: we also made mistakes.” (BE_M_72_CRF2)

However, this lesser taboo should be put into perspective. Some respondents also point out that in the older generations there might have been a bigger taboo ‘on the outside’, which does not mean that there was no sexuality in a covert and hidden way. It was just not openly talked about and would remain secretive, until of course a girl got pregnant.

“(..) I was beginning to find out, roughly, what it (sex) was all about, but... and the ones around me told me about... without getting into details, but they told me about an institution that definitely worked and it was called ‘The Post’ [reference to orgy]... Apparently it's a disaster or a big humiliation for a woman, but things were obviously consented on both sides, because it was about petty neighbourhood prostitutes who accepted it, and that indeed was an initiating institution. They accepted to sleep with more boys in a row and that was called ‘The Post’. And the novice, the virgin, was the last to follow the older boys' tracks, but seriously, it happened in the '60s and I think it was well represented. Now I haven't heard of it. It's true that I didn't seek information either, but I don't think it works any longer, or if it does, it must be very pale in comparison to the past.” (RO_M_65_SOC)

“Now those traditions have scaled down. But in those days, the groom would go and get his bride. The father would say: ‘Yes, you can have her!’ and you went all together to the city hall and the church and afterwards you could take her home. And only at that point did the life together start. Because before that point, making love, ... First of all, every time I had to get back home in time with the last tram because we were living out of town. So going out late is something I only learned when I was in the army. To my disgrace! Even the time when I was dating my future wife, we had to take the last tram home at a quarter to midnight. And we behaved very properly on the tram. On the back seat of a car you could have tried something, but not in a tram. It was unheard of. Although, I dived a bit into our family history and found out that that a lot of them HAD to get married. (...) Yes, my father said: when the fair is in town... (...) [It was] never said, but afterwards it was clear that there were no nine months between the marriage and the birth of the child.” (BE_M_72_CRF1)

9. The changing meaning of 'masculinity'





This chapter focuses on this subject of 'the changing meaning of masculinity'²⁹. In the interviews, both women and men talked about what masculinity means to them. Some topics with regard to masculinity are clearly more frequently raised by the male respondents: power and leadership in relationships, household tasks, work, rationality versus emotions, physical strength, peer group pressure and male friendships, isolation, looks/appearances, sports, sexuality, seduction, finances/material wealth, and communication.

Other topics do appear in the text fragments but are less common: behaviour, media and advertising, homosexuality, women mimicking men, threat/violence, drinking, fear of losing masculinity, looking down on women, hobby, commitment, and relationship with children.

In the text fragments from women, we find basically the same aspects as listed by male respondents but also a few additional aspects like pride and boasting behaviour, vulnerability and violence, sex objects and seduction, immaturity.

This chapter looks into the aspects that appear most in the text fragments from the male respondents: power and relationships between women and men, division of household tasks and responsibilities, professional careers, rationality versus emotions and peer pressure/male friendships.

9.1. Power and relationships

Two traditional stereotypes for men: the coercer and the protector

The aspect of power and leadership was the most frequently listed aspect of masculinity. Power is a relational trait and not an individual characteristic. Power is always exercised over something or someone. If power is assigned to a person, this means that there must be another or others with less power, otherwise the first person cannot be called powerful. Power, therefore, inherently signals an unequal relationship where one person has more power than the other. In this context, the man is almost always described as holding the power – or supposed to hold the power – while the woman is presented as finding herself in the subordinate position. Some examples:

“I mean, it was on the other hand my father, who always used to tell me that because of the fact that I am a man, I should defend my sister. Because my sister, when she was young, she was a very pretty girl. And her male classmates constantly teased her, pulled her plaits and so on. And my father always used to tell me to try to demonstrate here that I am a man and to protect my sister.” (PL_M_65_CFR)

“It is the way it should be, maybe others have a different opinion, but I think that a man has to be a man, this is a wall which the family can lean on, a woman can lean on, a girl, is she yours or not yours, but it is the order of the world - women and men...” (LT_M_45_CFR)

“I was born in a worker's family, and my father he was very harsh and demanding with his wife, sometimes even violent, and this gave me a quite wrong vision of the relation between men and women, as I lived that moment as a male authority imposed on the family as a right and a duty, so for the whole time I was a boy I saw this figure.” (IT_M_71_CFR1)

From the text fragments, it appears that two archetypal facets of masculinity tend to be brought to the fore. On the one hand, there is the image of the 'coercer' and violent man, who is the dominant figure in a negative way (by the use of force and/or intimidation), the boy who harasses girls, the man who beats his wife, etc. On the other hand, there is also the important image of the man as the 'protector': the provider of material means and of stability, and the one who guards the physical integrity of the women in his life (wife and children).

These two facets of masculinity appear to be quite dominant and tend to be perceived as bi-polar, a view according to which any man seemingly could be put in one of these two categories. Such reductionist view denies the complexity of the concept of masculinity and leads to an oversimplification of the reality.

29 Although a similar chapter focusing on the meaning of 'femininity' is missing in the report, lots of data were gathered that would enable such analysis. Such analysis though did not constitute a part of the assignment for this research team.

The quotes below provide some more descriptions of what may be called the coercive side of masculinity.

“Personally I never perceived events of the so-called bullying which is much common nowadays, as I have always been able to command respect and at a certain age I started practicing martial arts, as you never know but... In spite of this I never took part to a fist fight or a brawl or anything similar, and I don't know how but I could always step out from situations where something like that could have happened, or maybe I was lucky, but I never experienced that traditional side of masculinity, being a bit violent.” (IT_M_20_CFR)

“I feel like I need to compete and stand my ground in front of guys. Because otherwise I just think guys tear girls up otherwise. They just ... I don't know, they just... I think a lot of guys see girls as easy pickings in terms of making fun of girls, to gain social status in front of their friends and to show off. I think that is one big thing that I think I kind of recognised when I was growing up, when I was at school, was that socially guys use girls a lot easier, with a lot more ease than... girls could never really do that to guys. Actually yeah...” (UK_F_19_CFR)

The last quote, furthermore, suggests that the power exercised by men over women appears to be grounded also in the power (in terms of status) that can be yielded in men's relationship with (male) peers. However, referring to the five big categories of social power recognised by the social psychologists French and Raven (1959), the types of power that come into play in this case are different: while 'coercive power' is exercised over the women, 'referent power' is yielded among the peers.

One respondent presented a description of the 'typical male' that he recognises in society (in the United Kingdom) and which may be associated with the coercer-facet of the masculine model, while at the same time this dual power relationship (towards women and towards male peers) can be identified.

“And then there is kind of, it is a very classist thing, but sort of more, more physical and manual labourer associated with violence, aggression, heavy drinking, you know, that kind of fuck me, 'fight or fuck' excuse to turn a phrase. The kind of masculinity to walk through the city on a Saturday evening and it is full of guys who come out of their offices or factories or whatever and it is about getting laid or getting drunk. (...) I mean, that is clearly not a positive thing, very destructive. I'm not saying that any particular role or stereotype is positive, but at least if there is a stereotype that says: 'hey guy, men have to be a bit more sensitive towards the needs of other people'. Then surely that's an opening... I don't know for sure, but yeah, the idea of what men do for fun in the weekend is that they get drunk, they get laid and they get into a fight. I mean, that is what a lot of men are supposed to do.” (UK_M_29_ID2)

The above text fragment shows that this specific respondent is not very happy about the 'fuck or fight' type of men. He believes that the association of masculinity with violence, drinking and sex is not a good thing. According to him, men should be a bit more sensitive to the needs of others as opposed to their own needs.

Moreover, the narratives suggest that men in general do not like to be associated with and distance themselves from the coercive and violent aspects ascribed to masculinity. Most of the time violence is not accepted as a way to deal with a situation. Several respondents had experienced violence in their youth (with either intra-family or intra-couple violence) and none of them thought this was the right path to follow or the correct way to deal with the situation. Despite the fact that the male respondents generally do not subscribe to a violent 'model' of men, it is commonly believed that there are still violent men in society. Furthermore, it is to be noted that not all violent behaviour is perceived in the same way. Notably violence exercised by parents (in particular fathers) on their children may not be regarded as (condemnable) violent behaviour, but rather as socially acceptable, especially among the older generations.

In the text fragments on masculinity (coded in the database), there is only one male respondent who openly admits to have shown violent behaviour (towards strangers) in his youth. As the quote below shows, the violent behaviour that is described is again very much related to the perceived need to acquire peer recognition (or 'referent power', as suggested above). The fact that there is only one respondent who admits to it, might, of course, be because of socially desirable answering in the interviews.



“Everyone was acting like they were more masculine or able than others. (...) The summer after the sixth grade we were going around in the city, started the day at ten in the morning and mugged people. It related to... We had to prove many things to ourselves and others. We had to prove that we are not cowards, we had to prove that we are able to do what we do, that we are tough guys. (...) Even though it was irrational violence every day, one of the principles was that the victim had to be bigger than us; older, bigger, stronger. At the end ... it was a growth period, a pilot phase that lasted for a long time. It was related to proving that I am a man. (...) In addition that this was related to proving to be a man, it was also genderless gang identity and peer pressure. One for all and everyone in the same situation. On one hand, there were also girls along. I gained a reputation as a tough guy in the city and among friends: that I will and can do whatever I want. Perhaps the fact that I had gained something revoked the need to prove something.” (FI_M_23_ID2)

Besides the stereotype of the man who displays violent behaviour, also another type of man appears from the stories: the provider, the person in charge who takes care of his family's material needs and ensures stability. This is clearly a more positive role model, which could be labelled as the 'protector' model. The protector is a model that most male respondents would appear to subscribe to. The quote indicated below, as well as the one included earlier (LT_M_45_CFR), presents the protector model.

“No, there wasn't tension in the relationship and that was to do with both of us, I suppose. One is that I was doing this (working very hard and taking care of the financial needs of the family) and she felt very secure and that was a very huge need of her that I recognise now and so does she. (IE_M_60_ID)

This dual model for the man, as well as the (complementary) weak and dependent model of the woman, can also be recognised in popular culture like tales, and are as such transmitted already to children, as pointed out by one (female) respondent.

“Snow-white: she really has to lie waiting in that... I think it is almost a real metaphor – that this woman lays waiting in her glass death coffin and she lays waiting for a prince. And I thought: 'Gosh, couldn't you just spit that apple out on top of those little dwarves?' (...) Little Red Riding Hood! Yes, Little Red Riding Hood is being sent by her mother. So, she does all of that very nicely and eventually she is saved. Not by the mother who sent her, not by some strong woman who says: 'hey hold on! We don't allow this type of thing!' No, she needs a hunter to save her. Again not a woman, not even her father. But it is the hunter, he has power because he wears a green cap and a gun.” (NL_F_69_SOC)

In feminist theories, a comparable reductionist dual typology for women, namely that of the 'whore' and the 'Madonna' (or 'saint'), as the one identified for men can be found (Feinman, 1986; Goldberg Moses, 1984). These models of women can also be recognised in religion, literature, proverbs, etc. The 'whore' is the negative feminine type who does not have norms and values, is very seductive and sexual and often independent. On the other hand there is the 'saint', who typically is discounting all her own needs in favour of the care she gives to her family members. These stereotypes have old roots, and are in Christianity embodied by the female figures of Mother Mary (the saint) and Maria Magdalena (the whore).

Both female and male stereotypes are very compatible: the coercer can be seen as the equivalent of the whore, the protector can be seen as the equivalent of the saint. Furthermore, what both stereotypical male models – the negative coercer and the positive protector – have in common is that the relationship remains unequal. With the first model (the coercer who displays violent behaviour), the woman is subjugated and the victim of the male violence and bad behaviour, with the second type (the protector), the woman remains subjugated but this time she feels secured by her protector.

To summarise, the man is in both the negative and the positive stereotype supposed to be the dominant figure, while the women are subjugated. This might go unnoticed, but respondents describe how men have a really hard time when challenged in their power position.

“The first is the fact that when I was working at the time, I earned more than he did. This put him on the ground. Indeed, so perhaps he talked about it only once but this really, really disturbed him, the fact that I was earning more than him, though he earned well too, and it wasn't like I supported him, or what not, but simply because of this he felt weaker than me. That's it.” (HU_F_31_CFR)

“I remember talking to my ex-boyfriend a lot about gender at one point and he was talking about his dad having said to him at various points that it used to be easier to be a man or something like that. I think his dad was quite an old fashioned kind of guy, that he liked - not much or anything, his dad was quite lovely and like a sensitive and sweet kind of guy - but at the same time those masculine roles were very important to him: to be able to take care of his family and that kind of thing for him and he found it more difficult now that you're supposed to - I don't know - kind of let women take care of themselves or something like that and he found that whole shift towards female empowerment difficult. And not so much, not like, you know, I don't think... maybe he felt a bit lost, by that kind of thing.” (IE_F_22_SOC)

This unequal relationship is not *per se* experienced as negative by women. Being in a subjugated position may be experienced by women as having advantages for not having to take up responsibility, for feeling secure. On the other hand, not all men enjoy playing the role of the protector-provider, either because the leadership position also brings a lot of responsibilities (as in HU_M_30_CFR) or because they want a more balanced relationship with their partner than one in which the partner complete relies on him (as in SI_M_26_CFR).

“Well, yes... the work... Here it is the role in the relationship, which perhaps my wife does not even expect from me, but I still feel it quite a lot that practically I should perform well and support the family, so like... it feels all depends on me, the security and the future of my family, or what not. So it's kind of preying on me and it comes from the fact that it's me who is the breadwinner...” (HU_M_30_CFR)

“But it is really, really unpleasant that she totally devotes herself to you. A zombie. And the problem with the zombie is this complex of a good suffering mother. This devotion is not for free. (...) I think it is not a female trait, it is more a trait of position, a trait of structural position. As well as tiredness after work is not a male trait but a trait of function. The fact that you worked eight hours as a lunatic. If you put a woman into the same position, the same happens. And if a man would have to serve a woman all the time, as men actually do, then he also feels this resentment when he's not getting unconditional, endless, absolute love in return. This is purely a question of structural place.” (SI_M_26_CFR)

Other men (even young ones, as the below quote illustrates), on the contrary, explicitly subscribe the traditional, stereotypical model that assigns clear roles to both partners.

“My idea about a Christian woman is basically... Maybe I would not acknowledge this as it sounds chauvinistic... but still... probably this is what I think, or these are my stereotypes that a Christian woman, a believer, a good girl would leave the boys to initiate things and she is more quiet... with “the unfading beauty of a quiet and gentle spirit.” [smiles a little] So she is quietly there and is active but does not lead necessarily. So, and this was the first step for me when I moved towards leadership, to be an initiator. (...) And I felt this dilemma in me, to move and be an initiator or not. (...) And I find it fundamentally a masculine thing, something that men should do. But this does not have to come out in all circumstances and everywhere and all the time but I think... there are spheres where it always has to show, for example in relationships, where I think no woman would like to have a husband who is inert or clumsy. And I don't think any man would like to be such a man. (...) I do not want to project this on all women but I think women... they are happy when a man is there and they lead and they do their... when they fulfil their role...” (HU_M_22_ID2)

The above text fragment describes how the man is supposed to hold the power, while the woman is supposed to obey. There is the leader and the follower; one cannot exist without the other. The similarity with Hegel's paradox of the 'master and the slave' (as set out in his



work 'The Phenomenology of Spirit' from 1807) is herein striking, albeit that Hegel's master-slave dialectic did not refer to the relationship between men and women. The paradox refers to the fact that there cannot be a master without a slave and vice versa. The fact that they both need each other to be who they are, puts the master in an awkward position, because despite his feelings of power, he is as much tied to the slave as the slave is tied to him. The dependency runs two ways. The same would be true in any power relationship and this has become the source of an endless struggle among men and women and the pivotal point that the first and second feminist waves tried to make. Following these views, women should become independent and cut loose any strings that attach them to men or society at large in a subjugated way. Equality has been the central concept, not only in the political and legal field, but also in the private lives of families and couples.

In this light, it is worth noting that despite many decades of feminist struggle, there are almost no text fragments (dealing with 'masculinity') by male respondents who talk about their ambition to enter into a more equal relationship with women (an exception is quoted above: SI_M_26_CFR). Indeed, it seems that the unequal power relation is not often questioned by the male respondents. In both bi-polar stereotypes that are considered in the stories, men remain in the same unequal power relationship towards the women in their lives.

“Well, for me... I didn't have many relationships like this, with men, because I was in a way too independent and they didn't accept me in the long run. So men don't like it when a woman is too independent and when a woman would like to do something on her own or she wants to do something other than what the man wants. And I, I was not willing to give up my own ideas.”
(HU_F_72_ID)

Quite a number of men stated that they welcome gender equality. However, at the same time, a feeling of loss of their 'power base' is expressed, and this has consequences for men's identity. One man even criticises the feminist movement for depriving men of their dignity. (A more detailed consideration of the feminist movement and its effect in terms of gender change can be found in the section of this report that deals with change.) Various references can be found in the narratives of (mostly

young) men to suffering from an identity crisis. This issue is touching the heart of the power paradox because giving up being the sole power base is precisely what equality endeavours are about.

The problem of men losing their power base shows precisely the point that was made by Hegel: one cannot change without the other. The moment the slave stops being the slave, is also the moment that the master can no longer rule. The existential connection causes quite some upheaval among a number of respondents who feel that the heart of masculinity itself is being threatened. And yet, they seem to find it hard to admit this, since it is not considered politically correct not to approve of gender equality and the prospect of an equal relationship. As a result, people may pay lip service to the idea of equality, but just underneath this rhetoric emotions can be picked up; emotions of frustration and anger associated with having to give up their position. Also the earlier quoted respondent who described his 'ideal Christian woman', started out by saying: *"My idea about a Christian woman is basically... Maybe I would not acknowledge this as it sounds chauvinistic... but still..."* So he realises that his ideas are likely to be perceived as chauvinistic, but they are still there.

One reason why it might be so hard for men to let go of their power position might be the lack of an alternative identity structure. Letting go of something is much harder if one cannot at the same time embrace something new. However, there seems to be a vacuum of what this new masculinity might mean.

Towards a new masculinity?

From the above section, it can be seen that the men who participated in this research do not want to be associated with and condemn the coercive type of men. However, men generally do feel comfortable with the protector role, despite the fact that this can create tension if the women they are relating to do not want to be protected.

There is also another small group of male respondents who clearly try to move beyond the stereotype of the protector. However, these individuals are more aware of what they do not want to be than of what they aspire, and for some this really leads to an identity crisis.

Below are some fragments that reflect the difficulty experienced by young men in finding and defining their male identity.

“I think that most men are so tremendously insecure about their identities that they just don't know what to do. And I think that there is sort of... there is a consciousness there amongst men that perhaps they don't match those masculine ideals. And that's okay, but it's still permeates the culture enough that in a non-reflective kind of way it gets carried on. (...) I suppose the sort of man I would want to be is more about the sort of man I don't want to be. I don't have a clear vision of what to be. I'd like to be the kind of man where being a man doesn't really matter that much. I mean that would be the... I'd like to be upright towards other kinds of axes and identities, but I don't know what that would look like.” (UK_M_29_ID1)

“I travelled to Lapland. (...) There I met the examples of such people that represented my ideal of a man. They had such characteristics. I hanged out with gold diggers. There was just an empty cottage and... I spent three weeks like this. Some of the people there were ex-peacekeepers, some of them border guards and all these kind of masculine people who preached about manhood. How that affected on me, was that I realised that I will never become such a man. I also realised that my ideal of a man is somewhat old fashioned. (...) I started to develop my perception of manhood, after having had these extreme examples and after, in principle, having abolished my own image of manhood. (...) I was maybe nineteen years old when I realised that there is no universal ideal of manhood. That I should forget the idea of becoming a man and aim at my personal well-being. I should create such a place where I feel at home. I have been on that road for a very long time. (FI_M_23_ID1)

When characteristics of women and men are listed by the respondents, there is often little overlap between the two. On the contrary, women tend to be depicted as being the opposite of men (see also the section of this report that describes the dimensions of gender stereotypes). It becomes clear that when dealing with the identity crisis of masculinity as described above, men know what they do not want to be and therefore have a tendency to move away from those characteristics. However, since women and men are presented as two ends on the same continuum, moving away from the male end will automatically bring the individual closer to the female end. The stories reveal however that many men do not find this an attractive prospect; they may even find it downright threatening. Some respondents express a fear of becoming too feminine, as becomes

clear in the below conversation between a researcher and a respondent.

R: Hard sciences offered me more opportunities, so I was set to follow that path. As I mentioned before, I believe it has to do with gender...

I: Why were you scared of the fact that there were too many girls in humanities? How did this argument matter?

R: I don't know, I think it would have been an awkward situation. I think I would have felt assimilated, deprived from what defined me as a man. Because being a man is an important part of my identity and being assimilated would have been a pretty shameful matter.
I: You were thinking that the climate would feminise you?

R: Exactly, that's right. (RO_M_19_EDU1)

The above fragment shows that the respondent is afraid of entering a feminine context because he might lose his masculinity through that. The following text fragment illustrates how being less masculine is automatically perceived as being more feminine.

“Well, life has put us - and still puts every one and each of us - in such different situations that there were such situations, in which I would like very much someone else to drive somewhere instead of me, to do something, to perform this male part of life. On the other hand, I don't know whether I would be ready to take over this part of female life.” (PL_M_56_CFR)

When addressing a new type of masculinity, the notion of the 'new man' deserves to be considered. 'The new man' is supposed to be the man who dutifully does his share of the household tasks and childcare and aims at an equal division of responsibilities in all aspects of the relationship. It is very significant to note that not one male respondent mentioned – either positively or negatively – in any text fragment dealing with masculinity, this notion of the new man. This may demonstrate how much of a female concept this notion really is. For this reason, the paradox of the new man lies precisely in the fact that it is defined by women and therefore any man who aims at becoming a new man is actually putting himself in an 'obedient' position - precisely the position that women have been manoeuvring themselves out of. This is a double bind situation (“you're damned if you do and you're damned if you don't”): as a man, if you



follow this ideal, it means you are weak and obeying the female call; if you do not, you are a bad macho. This presents an ideal recipe for an identity crisis.

The paradox connected to male identity as described above may amount to a real 'war of the sexes'. A lot of anger has been built up at times on both male and female sides. Because of the many disappointments and misunderstandings with regards to each other's intentions and meanings, the opposite sex can, in the end, be seen as the source of all evil in the world. Below are two text fragments that describe this attitude, the first one from a man vis-à-vis women, the second also from a man but describing how he experienced a certain group of women's attitude towards men.

“During that time I was trying to be myself. I had that type of teenage when I would make my girl-colleagues to call me Lucifer as a joke. I mean, as a guy, I had long hair, I was pretty enough. There were very few boys in that high school and we were very much pampered by the girls. But at the same time I was very shy and I couldn't express my affection towards a girl in any way. And my Cioran readings ... I mean, I would remember from Cioran [Romanian philosopher] only those negative quotes about women with the sexual act as coupling of limbs accompanied by idiotic noises or something like that... That the feminine voice is the greatest dissonance and the such. And I sort of had a depreciating attitude towards women, girls, female colleagues.” (RO_M_36_ID)

“In those years, having a girlfriend who became my wife later on, who was very active in this women's group, there was this trend like very beautiful atmosphere, an intellectual movement. (...) You could feel something was changing or they wanted change, there were some very strong 'No' and this was really positive, even essential, the only limit was as I experienced it personally but maybe it is different for other men, (...) they were so angry with men, my girlfriend too, you could understand it on one side, but, they were blind to a man's world, I am not talking only about me.” (IT_M_53_CFR)

To end the paragraph about the paradoxes connected to the power relationship between women and men and its effects on masculinity, the below text fragment presents one respondent's vision on what a 'new' masculinity might be.

“It [masculinity] really depends on the man. For me, it is about taking responsibility for myself and some sense of autonomy and something about accepting who I am. (...) And the other element is really about feeling and feelings that I want to create in groups. Safety: so that feelings can be shown rather than swallowed. (...) Yes, that is the default we were taught very early on: 'Big boys don't cry, stand up dry your tears, be quiet, swallow!'. Those words: 'swallow that vulnerability'. And, you know, we were also taught that our feelings don't matter. (...) And as we grow older and have access to self-medication, we medicate them away, with alcohol or other substances. And so, acknowledging that and creating for me a powerful masculinity is creating this space where men together can express those and be safe and acknowledging each other's struggle and not be successful and not be competitive, so that we can be together.” (IE_M_60_ID)

9.2. Division of (household) tasks and responsibilities.

Many respondents talked about the division of tasks and responsibilities in the household as an important aspect of masculinity. This theme has already been elaborated upon in the section on inter-generational differences, so here only the main aspects are repeated.

It is clear that most respondents - male and female - have a clear division in their head of the tasks and responsibilities and how they should be divided in the household. As explained in the previous section, the power structure in a relationship that is most frequently referred to is the one wherein the man plays the role of the protector and the woman find herself in a more subjugated role. This is also reflected in the way the responsibilities and tasks are divided in the household.

Generally speaking, it seems that women are supposed to be in charge of the household, while men are expected to be responsible for the financial and material provisions for the family. The latter is considered a more important role and a greater responsibility and this makes the man the 'head' of the family. As said, this is the structure that is most commonly described by the respondents, albeit that there are many variations to this theme.

“Also here, the roles are written out. Maybe they are not written out in such a clear and lucid way, where it is enumerated what belongs to a father or a mother, wife, husband, but these spheres somehow clarify themselves. They position themselves. They have their own significance, their order and also in my house or in the upbringing of my children or in the partner relationship with my wife, there is a position of a man and a woman unequivocally allocated. For instance, it has its simplest correlation to the fact that my wife is a pedagogue by education and both of my daughters, humanists by education, have never approached her asking for assistance or explanation in respect to the issues concerning math, physics or chemistry. By assumption, these subjects were somehow mine. It was known that it was me who knows this stuff. Similarly to the thing which is the most natural and which requires maybe not men’s competence but some strength or knowledge of things that results from the fact that one does it often. I think about such household works, purely household works as, I don’t know, the blind broke, a tap is leaking, the internal part of the washing machine, the drum does not want to spin. Or suddenly, the pressure of oil in the car decreased. All this is addressed in a natural way to a man. Whereas, I don’t know, when I cannot find something or if there are no – it’s never the case in my house – clean shirts left or something else is missing, of course, these issues are addressed towards a woman, towards a wife.” (PL_M_56_CFR)

“It’s normal for the man to financially take care of his family. What I am talking about are those situations when, let’s say, I financially take care of a woman, in return I want some sort of stability or emotional support ... A feeling that there is a point to it all.” (LV_M_47_CFR)

“And you discover that being a boy, it means you can’t play with dolls. What’s more, my grandmother lived in the countryside. I was a boy, which meant I should chop wood, gardening, fishing, whatever. A boy shouldn’t stand cooking... What an idea to like cooking pies and other stupid things like this!” (FR_M_39_CFR)

The fact that there is a division in the roles does not mean that the power is equally distributed or that the amount of time spent fulfilling the roles is equally divided. As a general rule, women spend more time doing the household, while men spend more time doing their paid job. This means that women do most of the unpaid labour and men hold most of the power. As is clear in the above text fragments, women’s tasks tend to be looked down upon (“What an idea to like cooking pies and other stupid stuff like this!”), while the male contribution to the household is considered more prestigious and, therefore, holds more power. As said in the previous section, the fact that women have less power, does not automatically mean that they feel uncomfortable in this situation. Some women enjoy having a protecting male above them, while others will revolt against such subjugation.

9.3. Professional careers

The male-female division in the household can also be found and extended to the professional field. In this sphere also, it can be seen that certain professional sectors or certain hierarchical positions within an organisation are more associated with masculinity than others. There are, therefore, two aspects that will be considered: the gendered division of professional sectors (called horizontal segregation) and the gendered division of hierarchical positions held within organisations (called vertical segregation).

Gender division of professional sectors

With regard to the male-female division in the professional activity sector, the respondents make a number of observations which clearly prove that preconceived ideas of typical male and typical female jobs still exist.

“It turned out that the field is dominated by women. For example, there were only five to ten per cent of men there, I cannot count precisely. And with time, most of the boys gave up and moved elsewhere. The only boys left were some who were very talkative and sharp-tongued, some who were more open than me. And the rest were only girls. And I have noticed that it is mostly like that in the Humanities in education. I don’t know if this is due to the fact that more women choose to study for higher education, and men try something else (...) But recently I heard, I have heard often about girls who study Pneumatics and Hydraulics in the Technical University, and I would have never thought that there is even one girl there.” (BG_M_27_EDU)



“And so I chose, I chose to study law. It came again from the fact of me being a man – I have to do manly things, a manly profession.” (LV_M_24_EDU)

“There are still professions that... where a woman is better equipped, not only with respect to physical strength, today a bus is as easy to drive as a 2CV from a physical point of view, but there's still I don't know... I could be wrong but it is my deep conviction... I don't know... that there are jobs that ... such as killing animals in a slaughterhouse... I cannot conceive for a woman to do it ... as well as make war... neither a man actually.” (LU_M_72_PRO)

Some respondents state, however, that things are changing. The sectors which used to be dominated by men are nowadays much more mixed.

“The conclusion is that the veterinary medicine profession can be the same for men and women. In principle, everybody can do the job, but now things are more equal because there are more and more women in the profession, even in the veterinary institutes women are predominant; in the last years there are more women in these institutes. It is not like fifteen years ago, it is different, things are becoming equal.” (BG_M_54_PRO)

Respondents seem to accept quite well that sectors are mixing nowadays and recognise that a strict gender division in the professional sphere is something from the past. This is different from the division of labour in the household, where there is more struggle about maintaining (or not) the *status quo*.

However, there are some fields where the mixing of the genders remains problematic, and this is especially true for fields that were dominated by women and where nowadays some men can be found, like in childcare.

“It is more with my friends and in my social relations more generally that this work I do with children is considered problematic for a man. Working in kindergarten, in our everyday reality we find more women than men.” (GR_M_30_PRO2)

“I kind of was getting into looking at infant teaching, I had no children of my own and before I could get on the course, you needed to get various bits of experience. I found myself in what was for me quite an odd situation. I kind of turned up at a local playgroup to help out and, you know, it was very odd. I mean, I felt quite uncomfortable in some ways there. (...) So, there was a big question in my own head about whether or not - not just was it right for me, but was that right for a man? At the time as well there was a lot of stuff going on - we were going back to early mid '90. There had been - I think it was when in this country big cases about child abuse first started to come through and it is when people first have to fill in forms: police checks to work with children for instance. And, I mean, I remember at the time I did lots of different voluntary work, I did some voluntary work with older refugees and probation things. At one stage I filled in 7 different police checks! And there was - I don't know - there was always a feeling, I suppose, in your mind as a man, people questioning, I think: 'why are you doing this?' Particularly, as a single man, without any children of his own. It was quite a kind of hurdle to get over in my own head.” (UK_M_48_PRO)

Division of (hierarchical) positions held within an organisation

Also, the second aspect of masculinity in the workplace (who holds which position) proves difficult to change, and this issue seems to be more attached to the notion of masculinity.

Leadership positions are considered typically male. This was also described in the previous section on power in relationships. The same holds for the professional jobs: men are typically regarded as the ones in charge.

“I think he wants women to work there, because that gives him an automatic authority. But he wants them to be beneath him in the hierarchy.” (SE_M_52_PRO)

“Men believe that with the title of President or because they assume, as men, to know better, they will get things done, and often they do not use the right approach with people. It's a matter of domination. When you are at the same level or work on the same subject with a man, the man wants to appear to have higher rank than you do, even if he has less experience on the job.” (GR_F_26_PRO)

“The customers were always men, engineers. When I worked with a (male) trainee at the stone laboratory, the customers always turned to the trainees and started to explain why they are there, until the trainee explained that: ‘This is the laboratory technician, not me. She knows things better.’” (FI_F_70_PRO)

Some male respondents noted that if women take up leadership positions, they sometimes seem to mimic features or characteristics that tend to be associated with men.

“What I really miss is why women who are leading some meetings, when they are in the highest position there, why they lack some female charm or something. Why they present themselves so rationally, expressing so curtly, as if they want to behave like men. (...) Because I think, my impression is that women act this way because they feel that if they act like women, the audience would consider it as a weakness, as something inappropriate. That is what I think. They have a tendency to act according to male stereotypes, the way of dress code, they wear a dark suit and a white shirt for a press conference. They imitate men; only a tie is missing... (...) It is sort of hiding a weakness. Weakness, no! Assumed weakness! Short hair, jacket, serious face expressions, curt sentences, these are rather male features.” (SK_M_39_PRO)

As indicated in the last text fragment, also in the professional field women are perceived as challenging the leadership positions.

9.4. Rationality versus emotions

Another aspect that was mentioned quite often by the male respondents with regard to masculinity was the observation that men are considered to be more rational whereas women are thought to be more emotional.

“I think a lot of talk has been about those things of classic male or female things related [with that] women are emotional, men are rational and the like. (...) At the same time there are some sorts of things that have kept the classic masculine, feminine fit. For example, like I mentioned before: money matters, there are [such works as] who enters into a rental agreement, or who pays the bills, or who chooses what TV to buy, or what camera to buy, or where to buy tickets for a trip, for what money, which company. I know that those are all things I do. And I think this is some kind of classical model that the more rational things are for me, and sort of things like screwing light bulbs - that's also more for me.” (LV_M_26_CFR1)

“And I think it is connected to what I have said earlier, that men do act more rationally. And then there is the emotional, even irrational, of course there are exceptions, but it is often irrational. And it is a male role to keep the rational level for the sake of a partnership, if there is a conflict, to keep the discussion on a factual basis, not to make it a power game. And my ideas that this is the male role in a partnership were paradoxically based on the behaviour of my father; that he did not do it. He was a negative role model for me, in other ways he was a positive one but in this it was a negative role model and it influenced my relationships.” (SK_M_53_CFR)

In the opposition of rationality and emotions, there seem to be positive connotations attached to rationality – as if it would be a sign of being mature – and negative connotations attached to emotions – as if that would be a sign of immaturity. In the above quote, being emotional is associated to being irrational, implying a negative connotation.

With regard to emotions, the four basic emotions people experience can be considered: anger, sadness, joy and fear. While anybody can experience all of these emotions,



they are very gender differentiated when it comes to social acceptance³⁰. Generally speaking, boys and men are not supposed to show sadness (crying) or fear, while men displaying anger appears to be more acceptable. On the other hand, girls and women can show sadness and fear, while anger on the part of women tends to be socially regarded as less acceptable. However, this is very context driven. For example, one can think about a football match where the male fans of the losing team may start crying, which would be regarded as acceptable in that specific context. However, in a broader societal context, persons who violate these unwritten gender rules are likely to be sanctioned. For example, a woman who behaves rudely at the workplace may easily be labelled 'a bitch' whereas a man displaying similar behaviour will be regarded as an assertive leader. Women who cry at the movies would be seen as 'sensitive', whereas a man who cries risks to be called 'a wimp'.

Even though certain emotions like anger might be regarded as more acceptable when expressed by a man than by a woman, this consideration does not rule out that there exists a general negative attitude towards male expressions of emotions in general.

“While men are taught that they have to provide money for the family, to support the family. Of course, it's no longer the case, but anyway, even nowadays there are differences. (Men) have to always sublimate their feelings, to look impenetrable towards everything around them.” (RO_M_19_EDU1)

It seems that boys and men tend to adapt to societal expectations and suppress their emotions. This means that men's emotions tend to be considered as 'underdeveloped'. Still, not all respondents in the present study would agree that the 'emotional underdevelopment' that men would suffer from, is a situation that needs fixing. The quote below is from a respondent who claims that on the contrary, the problem is with women who delve too deep into their emotions and become quite unhappy as a result.

“It is a bit of a statement that I sometimes think about and then I think: 'Yes, in fact I am happy to be a man!' It sounds stupid, but well... No, there is also a disadvantage attached to it (but men are much less complicated) especially emotionally, because... I notice with my partner that she can really rack her brains about something. I do have this as well at times, but most of the time I can much more easily put things into perspective. And I notice that my girlfriend gets much more involved and gets carried away by things and can lose confidence and feel unsure. (...) In general with women, even if you do something minor wrong they will be angry for a year so to speak. For men it is much easier to get over such things. (...) Yes, men at times can be a bit blunter because they are much less complicated.” (NL_M_34_ID)

Obviously, the above is an example of a situation in which women and men feel pushed into a bi-polar scale with on the one extreme rational men who suppress their emotions and are therefore 'emotionally underdeveloped' and on the other extreme women who are emotionally so overwhelmed that they become quite unstable. Since neither of these extremes appears attractive, this would mean that both women and men should be developing both sides of the spectrum. However, the gendered context of written and unwritten rules tends to push women and men respectively in only one direction. The next quote is another illustration of how feelings experienced by men are perceived as having to be sublimated.

“While men are taught that they have to provide money for the family, to support the family. Of course, it's no longer the case, but anyway, even nowadays there are differences. (Men) have to always sublimate their feelings, to look impenetrable towards everything around them.” (RO_M_19_EDU1)

Another aspect of the suppression and sublimation of male emotions is that often men do not want to talk about their emotions. They tend to not discuss their emotions, as this might only make these grow and is regarded as feminine behaviour. So, women are not only freer to experience their emotions, they are also freer to talk about them.

30 A more detailed analysis of gender-relaxed and gender-intensified prescriptions and proscriptions can be found in Prentice and Carranza (2002).

“But, yes, and we both came from traditions that our families were... ‘Don’t talk about it; don’t mention it if it wasn’t a problem’ would have been the way and that’s the way we were for a long time. And so we’ve gone with it, it was the process. So, that was another stereotype that I just got on with and... (...) It wasn’t really questioned, that’s the way things were! (Nodding approvingly) and the other stereotype: ‘I’ve been stoic in dealing with this rather than talking about it’, would have been the way of a man. (IE_M_60_ID)

The lack of talking about emotions is perceived as ‘naturally’ increasing the underdevelopment of these emotions. This tends to lead to feelings of isolation.

“But the point is that this was a very intense period, which caused some difficulties, yes. And I think the idea was also lingering somewhere in my mind that after all I am a boy, so I have to bear these difficulties, this trial, the idea that a man endures the fact that perhaps his body is weak, or that it’s hard, or that he is alone...” (HU_M_22_ID1)

“On the other hand, we again say women are the soft sex, but in some cases, women are even stronger than men... Maybe in terms of psychological strengths... Men get angry more easily, men do a lot of nonsense more often, they hurt themselves, they get drunk. On the contrary, women somehow avoid that. For women it can sometimes be enough to chat with a friend and automatically she will be relaxed, everything fades away. Men somehow store everything inside; women may release their steam through tears. A man keeps everything inside, I don’t know why this is so, a man will not allow himself any tears. He would better carry this burden inside than show it to others. Well, men... There is a settled tradition tears are not acceptable to a man, man must always be strong and so on...” (LT_M_45_CFR)

The narratives also indicate that men may have troubles with the societal denial of emotional expressions by them. These gender norms are, therefore, contested by some, as the below quotes may illustrate.

“I don’t know [why boys don’t cry]. (...) Sincerely, I think that there is a certain feeling of: ‘ok, I’m a boy, I have to be strong and these things of crying in public are ridiculous, it’s not a masculine thing of me’. I think this is the thought. I don’t know if it is correct, but, sincerely, for me it makes no sense.” (PT_M_26_EDU)

“I did not think a man could react like that. It’s quite strange as... I saw men crying at their workplace. (...) Whatever organisational change brings emotional reactions. It has nothing to do with the fact that you are either a man or a woman. However, that it can manifest itself differently, that can perhaps be discussed, I don’t know but, yes, perhaps. But... these stories about the fact that being a man, well you have no right to emotion, that’s typical... This is typical of the kind of situations I encounter.” (BE_M_39_PRO3)

The emotional isolation experienced by men is directly linked to their ways of building up friendship relationships with other men. This is the last theme that was listed frequently among the male respondents.

Masculinity is clearly still linked to avoiding emotions and this seems to be accepted as such by most male respondents. At the same time, it is apparent that many respondents suffer from the consequences of adhering to those restricting rules.

9.5. Peer pressure and male friendships

Many respondents mentioned that throughout their childhood, especially from the onset of puberty onwards, women and men did not mix easily in friendships. There are female and male peer groups and having friends of the opposite sex is regarded as strange. As described in the interviews, the typical structure in which youngsters’ friendships evolve would be girls among girls and boys among boys.



“And children thought I was different because I spent more time with girls. I never felt that it was some kind of a handicap, that boys did not accept me. It got better as we grew older. Of course, they called me names but it was a period when we all taunted each other. I taunted others as well. So I took it as that being with girls is my thing to be taunted about. So I was different. But later, after the taunting period was over there was no discrimination. I had interesting collaborations with boys.” (SK_M_23_ID)

In the narratives that deal with male friendships, a number of aspects are frequently mentioned, appearing as inherent to these friendships: a macho attitude towards women, competitiveness and intimacy.

In group with their friends, some men seem to like adopting a ‘we, hunters for women’ attitude and talking about women. Moreover these macho attitudes towards women tend to be rather negative and condescending. However, it must be pointed out that respondents underlined that this behaviour is displayed by a certain type of man: ‘a macho man, a dominant male who shows his masculinity verbally as well’, but not by all.

“At that time all people of that age especially boys, they meet and they behave like a herd, and being this a very tourist town, we had this famous ships’ arrival, (...), and there was the word-of-mouth ‘French girls are arriving’ that was spread around all suburbs and all boys were gathering at (name of the square) which was not so much crowded with teenagers at that time as each group was staying in its own suburb, but French girls arriving was as a kind of window, a way to meet and there was this need of trying to win these girls over and to be honest, I didn’t like it a lot. Some friends of mine they asked me to join but I really didn’t want but at that time you could not avoid to do it, otherwise you would have been considered as the one who is out of the flock and maybe they could have thought of other things too, so...” (IT_M_53_LEI)

“One of the first occasions when I felt I was a man was kind of funny. When I started to go out for a beer with my father in our country house, because in Prague we never went to the pub, I realised that the guys who stood there were talking about their wives, or women in general with some sort of disdain. They were making fun of them, they didn’t show much respect and... I was 16, I was perhaps collecting firewood with my father and after one hour, I could drink a pint of draught beer, and it was the first time I noticed that I was really different from... those women. Because I had also noticed that neither my aunts, cousins nor (any female relatives) were talking so contemptuously about men like men did about women.” (CZ_M_44_EDU)

“So there are situations in life when men are together, amongst each other, and they are trying to work out some kind of masculine behaviour. And of course, not all male who happen to be in this community, due to the fact that they belong to the male sex, will behave according to this masculine behaviour. Well, the point is, what I want to say is, that there is a milieu where men suddenly start acting masculine and there are men for whom this kind of masculine behaviour is not attractive. And they do not shout, and when, half-drunk, they do not talk about their sexual escapades, they do not expose their ex-lover or girlfriend or one-time partner, or just their road-side adventure. Then they go against a general, or no, not general, just a certain type of male behaviour. So there are these manly games and there are men who do not participate in these games. These are opportunities to consciously learn how to become a macho man, a socialisation scene to become a macho. In these opportunities one can decide if one would like to become a macho man or not, if one would like to become a dominant male who shows his masculinity verbally as well. So I think these are confrontational moments in one’s life.” (HU_M_57_SOC3)

“I don't know, I find, I have sort of in-built anxieties about what am I being complicit in my behaviour and I find it quite difficult to take part in that sort of 'men's chat'. You know, there is a group of us at the university who are all men and we work in the same office and sometimes the conversation goes to that sort of very sexuality oriented conversation. And I think to myself: 'why? I don't even have an affinity with this sort of thing. Why is it broken down to this sort of base level of discussion about sexuality and what not?' And actually I'm not even sure that those guys particularly think like that or feel like that, but it just happens because that is the way in which people are supposed, men are supposed to interact.” (UK_M_29_ID1)

It is clear from the above text fragments that there is much competition going on in male friendships. Competition means, again, power relationships. The peer pressure seems very high. So, as we have seen in the section about power and the male-female relationship, here again power appears to shape the male friendship relationship.

“I have the impression that men always argue too much amongst themselves. Each would like to force... his wisdom on the other one, and they don't really want to accept the other person's better or not better idea, or they don't try to convince the other person of their knowledge or skills, but they want to dominate the other person.” (HU_F_72_PRO2)

“I think that most men are so tremendously insecure about their identities that they just don't know what to do. And I think that there is sort of... there is a consciousness there amongst men that perhaps they don't match those masculine ideals. And that's okay, but it's still permeates the culture enough that in a non-reflective kind of way it gets carried on.” (UK_M_29_ID1)

It is noteworthy how men may regard condescending behaviour towards women as a way to get higher up in the (male) hierarchy (as has been recognised also in the section on inter-generational change). This peer pressure can get very big and violent, as illustrated by the quote that was provided earlier in this section (from FI_M_23_ID2).

Other aspects are clearly taboo when it comes to male friendships: emotional and physical bonding and communication, showing weakness or asking for help. Rather than promoting intimacy, there seems to be a tendency to keep a certain distance in the relationships with other men.

“Just giving kisses or hugs is a situation which, for two men, depending on the culture they grew up in, might be considered a situation of homophobia, or homosexuality. Not homophobia, of being homosexuals. And you frequently feel forced to say that you aren't a homosexual, even if you kiss or hug another man. Otherwise you seem... And who cares if you are or not... The thing is that your classmates force you to define yourself. As a man, a woman, a heterosexual, homosexual... This was an experience that... At that point it wasn't pleasant for me.” (ES_M_30_LEI)

“In the military service, where men predominate, certain norms are being created. You have to behave according to the norms and if you don't you are considered as a gay or a girl. I think it is wrong in a way. Those who cannot fake that model or who are not like that have to suffer. In the military service, if someone was gay, if people knew someone was gay, it was really bad for him. Or if you were a woman, you had to stand (many things).” (FI_M_25_SOC)

Not all men enjoy this macho attitude of isolation and keeping distance though, but it seems hard to react against it, because striving for a more intimate relationship might label them as too feminine.



“I was eight or nine years old and therefore this influenced my relations with peers a lot, as I was choosing my friends, as the boys I was selecting as friends and I was sharing my time in playing and later on in social and political activism when I was a bit older, were boys who didn't have this chauvinist mind thinking that women have to be housewives and to be used to make children and to have sex, so as boys were expressing their minds I didn't approve it and did not build relations with them. So I also had many girls as friends and I have never been one of those who goes around boasting about the amount of love affairs even if I actually had many of them, it is probably one of my features for winning women's heart, not to be such a chauvinist.”
(IT_M_39_CFR)

Many of the above text fragments on male friendships talk about a feeling of discomfort. Clearly, the macho attitude is not very much appreciated. But at the same time, there does not seem to be an obvious alternative to shape the relationship. This situation reinforces feelings of isolation. There seems to be a lack of authentic intimacy, which might suggest much tension with regard to how men should relate to each other.

10. Actors and factors that trigger or prevent change





One of the objectives of this study is to gain insight into how women and men understand their life experiences in what their gender is concerned and how this particular understanding shapes their behaviour and practices.

This study captures many situations in which various aspects of change can be identified. However, the respondents are not the only ones who can point out the mainstream breaking points in their lives. While the respondents, as active agents, reflect about their sex/gender and may make choices accordingly, the change elements which have not been pointed out by the respondents but are considered as enabling/constraining factors or actors by the researchers are presented in this report alongside the perceptions of the respondents about 'change'. This chapter therefore not only presents the perceptions of the respondents but also the researchers' perceptions and interpretation of the collected data, in what actors and factors triggering or preventing change are concerned. Bearing in mind the importance of 'reflexivity'³¹ in the context of qualitative research, the instances where the interpretation of the authors is given are explicitly pointed out.

The analysis of the empirical data focuses on actors and factors who/which trigger change towards more egalitarian attitudes and behaviour. Also, one of the objectives of this chapter is to identify and briefly discuss the key actors and factors that are the main obstacles for change. As far as constraining/enabling actors (factors) are concerned, in most cases the respondents have stressed that the same actors have played both roles: having the experience of being limited or oppressed by gender stereotypes and gender inequality dynamics may push one to a strong reaction and enable a person to free her/himself. For this reason, a strict line between the enabling and constraining actors/factors cannot be drawn. The most common situations in which actors exercise enabling/constraining forces will be briefly discussed in the following sections, distinguishing between the private and public sphere. Even though the private and public spheres of human lives are usually intertwined and can hardly be treated as independently standing from each other, these two areas will be separated in order to analyse more concrete settings in which opportunities and barriers for change occur.

Firstly, a brief explanation of what is considered to be 'change' in this study is provided. Sociological literature identifies two broad types of views/perceptions/beliefs about gender roles (Berridge et al., 2009; Lenton, Bruder, & Sedikides, 2009; Oswald, 2008; Prentice & Carranza, 2002):

A traditionalist type of view. People's beliefs about gender roles are rooted in segregated gender roles in which women are responsible for children, home and other issues related to the private sphere. Meanwhile, men are considered as 'breadwinners' and 'heads of household'.

A non-traditionalist type of view is considered to be more egalitarian and more 'symmetrical' because women and men have shared roles in the private and public spheres. These views are considered to be conducive to more egalitarian behaviour.

Based on what has been stated above, change in this analysis will be considered as the transition from *traditionalist type* of views and behaviour patterns to *non-traditionalist*.

10.1. Key change actors/factors in the private sphere

In the vast majority of the collected quotes/narratives the respondents reflected on their private lives (family life, childhood, and reconciliation of private and public spheres) in which such key actors as a partner, parents (mother/father) and 'myself' were mostly mentioned. These actors can be considered the key figures in what people's private life is concerned. Some of these actors and factors were considered as change triggers/constraints by the respondents themselves, others were interpreted as such by the researchers of this study.

10.1.1. Partners as key change actors

Partners are one of the most important actors who can trigger or impede change towards more egalitarian behaviour patterns and an even distribution of roles within and outside the family.

Many respondents told stories about the division of the household tasks and taking care of children. In most cases, the household tasks and responsibilities for care/upbringing of children are considered to be the woman's domain, which are the main factors creating the obstacles for change. If one wants to make a distinction between the enabling and constraining forces, the role of the male partner becomes significant. If the

31 As Nightingale and Cromby put it (on page 228 of their work): *Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgment of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of' one's subject matter while conducting research. Reflexivity then, urges us "to explore the ways in which a researcher's involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research"* (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999)

household tasks and the care of children are shared evenly between two partners, the change element can be identified. For instance, if a male partner shares family responsibilities with a female partner, both can remain active in the public sphere (e.g., UK_F_38). That is to say, the even division of labour in the household can be considered as the factor triggering change towards more egalitarian division of roles not only in the private, but also in the public sphere.

As it is more common for women to be in charge of the private sphere, the even/uneven distribution of roles in the family can be considered as the main factor which enables/constrains women's choices and behaviour. Both scenarios (partners as enabling and constraining actors) can be encountered in the stories told by the respondents.

Partners as constraining actors

Some narratives reveal that partners can play a constraining role. In the collected narratives, there are many examples in which the deeply rooted gender stereotypes and traditional gender roles are vivid and dominant. In the collected stories, one can find much evidence across the countries and respondents' age categories that people's beliefs about the gender roles are rooted in segregated gender roles in which women are responsible for children, home and other issues related to the private sphere. Meanwhile, men are considered to be 'breadwinners' and 'heads of household'. To illustrate this with concrete examples, quotes will be used to point out more precise situations in which partners act as the constraining actors.

The fact that only the women are exclusively in charge of childcare³² is considered to be constraining, since such practice maintains the traditional gender roles and creates obstacles for change.

“Actually I will put it like that: I did feel a tendency that she wanted to take the initiative and activate herself more and start to be involved more **but it was really hard because the children were small**. Before that she didn't take this sport so seriously. Later, now she is quite serious. I did feel some, I would say, initiatives. I wasn't against them, **when the conditions were right**, of course.” (SI_M_53)

“**I raised the children mostly on my own** (...). He (husband) used to leave early in the morning and returned late at night and he was able to be with the children only in the weekends, but when the children were little, they attended the Sunday nursery school, because I was studying (...).” (LT_F_63)

In more extreme circumstances (in the stories told by single mothers), women are the ones who take over all childcare responsibilities (e.g., LT_F_55).

“He was around thirty or something, maybe several years younger, but he said that it is too early to him to have children. But I don't know when the right time for such a person is – it's always too early. (...) Here, in my situation, it's neither fair nor unfair. This was my decision. He expressed his decision. **He suggested, he said 'why do we need it' (speaks about the baby and suggests an abortion)**. And then I said that I wasn't asking an advice from him. Then everything was fine, however, **he disappeared when my child was born.**” (LT_F_55)

In addition, the household is considered to be women's domain.³³ This situation (women in charge of the private domain) is perceived as unfair. However, this is not always the case. The fact that women perceive the traditional roles as unfair might trigger change, since they start opposing them actively.

32 Further examples available in the database, e.g. HU_M_22, SI_M_53, LT_M_34, DE_F_33.

33 Examples include: UK_F_79, SI_F_34, HU_M_22, BG_M_27, BE_F_52.



“I find it very unfair, that I should contribute the same amount to family budget plus do a lot more work and because of that have lesser free time. It is because of that. At my home it is very divided. Mother is a housewife, father takes care of technical things. But she is not technical type at all and she finds this ok. And she actually serves him. I don't know. I don't like it. I don't like it this way.” (SI_F_34)

Situations wherein women only are in charge of the private domain directly and/or indirectly lead to the sacrifices. When women are exclusively in charge of children and household, the choice between a career and family life is at stake. This point can be illustrated with many examples provided by the interviewed people.³⁴

“Now it sometimes happens that fathers take paternity leave. That did not happen in the past. I cannot remember that happened with us in the past. But it starts now. But it's still the women, and you can find it here too (she refers to a staff magazine of the police she had with her), **who more frequently ask for office service, or a nine-to-five job at the office. Always for the children, of course.** Not because they like this more, or because they suddenly have no ambition anymore in their job. But, yes, it's the mothers who have to take care of the kids...” (BE_F_38)

“Well, in a sense, the baby has cost me that position.(...) Indeed, on the one hand before becoming pregnant I thought that it (motherhood and career) is perfectly reconcilable and that women with children are protected, but as the reality shows - this is not true and that, indeed, the choice of having children should be carefully considered. All positive and negative aspects of the maternity leave and career have to be thought of. And I believe that, well, let's say, all kinds of challenges are still in front of me because my kid grows, will have to go to the kindergarten, she might be ill... Everything can happen...” (LT_F_26)

“And then in principle, **my whole career path was subordinated to the fact that the baby needs to be brought up. So, I resigned from various lucrative jobs.** I remember, I had one very good job in a newly-established newspaper but I had to leave work around 3 pm in order to get to the day-care room around 4 pm since my son became in the meantime a 6 or 7-year old and attended kindergarten. So, in this respect, the fact that I was a woman... and then I was in a stable relationship and we could have shared this childcare, but as everybody knows, a man works longer because he earns more and so on, so... At least, this was my case. After all, in each relationship, I was always in the role of a person, who is stereotypically a woman, so she earns less, works less and takes care of the household and children.” (PL_F_55)

“The women who stay at home and only care for their child are not really respected because they don't really do anything else; they don't really work. And when one, after 6 months leaves the baby in the care of the father or a crèche, people will call you “Rabenmutter”. You can't really do anything right (as a young woman) I see it very often with my friends who have children and who've always said they wanted to continue working and keep their freedom. But it does not happen that way; the practice is different. **Even those friends where I never thought that could happen have children and stop working because, naturally, the husband is working.** It is not like they tell us; that we all have equal rights. If men take half a year off for parental leave, they are considered “kings”. It's absurd.” (DE_F_33)

34 Further examples are available in the database, e.g. SI_F_64, NL_M_67, LT_F_26, BE_F_38.

The behaviour patterns in which women tend to refuse or downsize their careers in order to be able to have a family are quite featuring in the collected narratives. If the 'burden' of the household tasks and children care is left to women exclusively, it limits the women's actions outside the family. Even though the majority of the respondents do not consider the situation in which one has to choose between the family and career as unfair, the researchers still decided to consider such situations as a constraining force. There were several narratives in which women indicated that they had to choose either to seek a career or to have a family³⁵. This decision usually falls onto the women. Therefore, family in most cases is a constraining factor for women, rather than for men.

“And then after three months or so I go for a meeting. And I announce myself to this professor and I wanted to say 'yes, I will come.' But 10 days prior to the meeting I found out I was pregnant. And at that moment I thought to myself: 'what do I care about philosophy?' I realised I am not interested in that. And I went to see this professor and I said 'you know what? I am pregnant, so it is out of the question'. And he said 'It doesn't matter, we can postpone it for a year!' 'No, no', I said, **'I am interested in having a family. I am not interested in scientific career at all.'** Because I ought to do MA and PhD right away. I saw what was going on at our house. There had to be silence for 12 hours a day, because he was writing and working. He got his PhD before he was 30. I was instantly not interested anymore. I was happy to have that job.” (SI_F_64)

“And there I found myself yet in another situation - there really were only boys in my group. And in my group of physics. And I stayed there only thanks to the very good professor I had, who taught very well and not because I was a very good physicist. And when there was a choice to make - what to do next, **I had a child at that moment already. And I graduated a little later. That was the moment, when I understood, that - again with a minus sign - I won't be able to handle science as a woman. (...)**” (LV_F_68)

choices to act freely outside the private sphere by leaving the private life burden to their female partners. However, partners can act as the active constraining actors as well by forbidding their female partners to do something. There were several narratives in which the respondents indicated that their activities were questioned by their male partners.³⁶

“(..) Living in a marriage with my husband, raising two children... **I finally wanted to get a job, to somewhat increase the budget of my family. And my husband just said "no"** (...) that "you would rather sit at home, are you in need of something?". (...)The man was not giving me money! I had to ask him for it. (...) And so that not to ask for it, I said - I'll go working myself. (...)Well, Mr husband said that - there is no need to go to work, cause I am not in need of anything. Well that hurt me a lot. And the situation of our family was really like... Money wasn't sufficient really. And when I wanted to add something of my own to the budget of my family - I am such a person, I love to work, I'm not lazy. (...)"(LV_F_45)

“(..) Yet when talking about women, we (respondent and his brother) start to argue after 2 minutes, because our points of view are completely different. The best example is that **he had to divorce because his wife wanted to work, and it was nothing like a big career, and his second wife, she didn't ever consider this option.**” (CZ_M_35)

The above-mentioned situations reflect that partners can play an indirect constraining role by limiting women's

35 Examples include: HU_F_72, SI_F_64, LT_F_26, UK_F_38, SI_M_62, RO_F_59, LV_F_68, CY_F_72, LU_F_57.

36 Further examples can be found in the database, e.g. LV_F_45, CZ_M_35, IT_F_62, IT_M_71.



“(...)I saw he was really bothered and I decided not to go there (to work) anymore but immediately afterwards I regretted it and I still regret having accepted this compromise, as I would have found myself in a different positions, I would have become a clerk and with my skills I would have gone a longer way than I did. **In any case the ambition to work and to be independent was still in me as I am not the one who likes to ask “I need for this, please give me this and that”, even if he came home and gave me the money without asking “what did you do with the money?”.** But it was something as a part of me that I could not accept, right? Then I was engaged in other jobs, and I started working with him when he started up his independent business, and I was working in a confectionery for many years against his will as he didn't agree but I stood out as I was still angry for that time when I renounced, I wanted to go to work even if I had children, to prove my capacities.” (IT_F_62)

“I married when I was 23 years old and (wife's name) started her family life as a housewife, then one day she revolted and told me: “(Interviewee's name), I cannot accept these conditions anymore, I need to find out my identity” and I **suffered and was refusing this as I saw myself as the one who had to earn money for the family** (the word “breadwinner doesn't exist in Italian). I identified myself with my father and the fact that she had this kind of need was embittering to me, but **she legitimately found a job and a good one; as I said I was not happy about that** but we had agreed on it that she would have continued and when she came home with her first salary she was enthusiastic about it and I said: “I don't need that money”. And she reasonably answered “Look, I have lived on your own money for many years”. From that moment on, I started to reflect and to understand that men are not superior to women and that relations have to be based on mutual understanding”; and I adapted to it, as I had that experience with my first job that taught me to do things that were usually considered as feminine chores, to strip down bed, to clean and do the washing up.” (IT_M_71)

These quotes suggest that women have to fight to be able to work outside the private sphere, because due to various circumstances male partners do not want their female partners to work. Although the quotes illustrate the resistance for male partners' requirements, the fact that the female partner is not allowed to work can be considered as a constraining force. Generally, the male respondents in the study seem to be in a more autonomous position than the female partners, both in terms of the situations they have encountered and in terms of their experiences within them. Many of the female respondents talked about problematic relations in their families and about disturbing experiences that have influenced their choices and behaviour, thus infringing their autonomy and control over their lives. On the other hand, the male respondents found it hard to think about the importance of their gender in the first place, and when they talked about it, it appeared to be relatively unproblematic.

The concepts of ‘control’ and ‘autonomy’ are relevant in this study because they reveal unbalanced gender power relationships. There are several situations in which asymmetrical power relations between two partners can be captured, meaning that one partner has relatively more power than the other. It is more common (when unbalanced power relations are present) that a male partner is the one who holds superiority and a female partner is the one in the subordinated position. This point can be illustrated with the examples from these narratives³⁷ in which respondents reveal that the male partners have power to take important decisions, force female partners to do something against their will.

“(...) **However, my wife did not like it at all. She did not want to go there.** She would have preferred me to go to town C because she liked that more. She did not want to go to B. **But, the husband was the boss, the profession...** It was not that she had concrete reasons for not going there, it was more an emotional resistance. (...) Anyway, so we ended up in town B.
I: Against her will?

R: Yes, but that doesn't mean that she didn't get involved straight away (...). Yes, in those days that was it. Especially moving to that village was a very sensitive point. That is what she says now: ‘I really did not want to, but I just did it’. **That was normal, she could not influence that choice.** She would have preferred me to go to town C.” (NL_M_67)

“To tell you the truth as well, something which hurt me when we were getting married (...) My husband started looking for a place where to live anyway (...) We had a choice between an apartment and a maisonette. (...) I chose the maisonette, so that I could have my own front door and my own house. But my husband, because an apartment was rented for five pounds less per year, he decided himself that we would live in this apartment for twenty-two whole years. That still hurts me to this very day: the fact that I could not even choose where to start my married life, where to start my own new family. I didn't have a choice and this because the woman always had to say 'Yes, Sir.'" (MT_F_64)

“(..) **We got married, and this is where the drama starts.** It starts ... well, I married someone who was supposed to be a super modern, surrealist artist, or who knows what. Who turned out to be not only conservative! **I almost had to wear a burqa! I did not have the right to go out of the house, or the right to entertain anyone at home, on my own ...** No one came to visit us during the four years we lived together. In a basement, in 22 square meters. In a basement! Imagine that the judge came and checked the place and said, 'she's going to die in here'. And my pregnancy there as well. I mean I can hardly describe the situation." (GR_F_90)

“So, it's for sure, that in this whole relationship my femininity was quite 'squeezed,' and there were some issues with it. (...) the first is the fact that when I was working at the time, **I earned more than he did. This put him on the ground. Indeed,** so perhaps he talked about it only once but this really, really disturbed him, the fact that I was earning more than him, though he earned well too, and it wasn't like I supported him, or what not, but simply because of this he felt weaker than me. That's it. The other thing was, that... (sigh) ya... **that about half of my clothes I was not allowed to wear because how they look,** how big the cleavage is, things like that, and so, why I was wearing that thing, that I was showing myself, to everybody, or stuff like that (..) After this of course I changed, because I constrained myself, and then, well, **then my boyfriend came with me to the shop and we bought the clothes he approved.**

(..) I think he wanted to prove to himself how potent he was, as **he always wanted to have sex and to show with this how strong he was and ...** I think it was because of this. What he told me was that many times, or not many times, but at times, he pushed it (...). And yes, it happened quite a few times, when for me, it had an absolutely opposite impact on me.(..) **It was not that he would be too pushy or violent ever, this didn't happen, but it did happen that we were physically together without me really wanting it...**" (HU_F_31)



In several narratives, the topic of domestic violence, to be more precise, physical violence was mentioned by the respondents. In many cases when acts of domestic (physical) violence were present, the victims were women while men were those who abused power (e.g., BG_F_47). In most cases, the stories about physical violence were told not by those who have experienced or practiced it, but by observers and those who wanted to reflect on this phenomenon.³⁸

“We continued to live together for 10 years afterwards. **We were together like that. I didn’t want to get divorced, but if somebody tortures me and beats me up, I cannot allow this.** [And I continued to live with him] because the kid was 10 years old, and you know, if there are some unknown men all the time... You see on TV...” (BG_F_47)

As sexual violence is a very sensitive topic, the respondents were careful and only small details with regard to this topic were disclosed by the interviewees. However, those small details imply the existence of this issue (violence) and the ways how those in the disadvantaged position managed to handle such situations.

“He always respected me very much. And we were in an agreement that **if he came back drunk, then he did not make any claims to me as a woman [no sexual intercourse].** He always kept this respect, even during the most difficult times.” (LT_F_63)

Partners as enabling actors

Views related to egalitarian behaviour patterns are considered to be the breaking points, since the non-traditional views might stimulate egalitarian actions. Consequently, if women and men share the roles in the private and public sphere and, by doing this, challenge traditional gender roles, more egalitarian and more ‘symmetrical’ practices can be exercised. In some quotes, the line between the strict female and male roles appeared to become blurred. The change from the traditionalistic type to the non-traditionalistic type of views can be identified in the stories told by the respondents.

The practices in which both partners engage in the daily household and childcare duties are perceived to be a crucial breaking point by the researchers of this study. One can find much empirical evidence in the quotes from all 27 Member States that partners can be the key enabling actors.³⁹

Some respondents identified that a balanced share of care for the children provides an opportunity for women to realise themselves outside the private sphere or at least lifts a heavy burden from women’s shoulders.⁴⁰

“[My husband] also works part time. Although he does more hours than me, but **it means that we share some of the childcare between us.** So, he has, I work three days a week and I have 2 days at home, and he works 4 days a week and has 1 day at home, so that’s just 2 days that the children have to go to childcare. Which again, for me, I didn’t want a child having to go to nursery as a one year old, 5 days a week. That is not what I wanted. That works for us and actually quite a few of our friends have husbands’ partners who also do some childcare or work at reduced or flexible hours.” (UK_F_38)

“So, I have to tell you that when (name daughter) was born, there was a problem with her because she ate very poorly. Very poorly. But me... Since **I saw that (name wife) was very tired, the moment I came back from work, then already I [used to feed] at 9 pm, at 10 pm, no at 12 pm, because then you fed a baby every three hours.** So I did it at 9 pm and at 12 am; she was already asleep and I got up at 12 am. Since she did not breastfeed, I was able to do it. And also at night, when she woke at 3 am, it was me. So, at 6 am, it was also me and then I went to work. And then she used to take over the nursing. So we shared and it was not like this that I go to work, so she has to stay with the baby for the whole day, because it is after all quite tiring. Although such a small baby just lies, she cries every minute and every minute you need to do something around her, right? **So, we shared this work around the baby. I did not feel for instance that if I work, I shall not help.**” (PL_M_65)

38 Further examples include PT_M_60, PT_F_33, UK_F_19.

39 Examples can be found in the database, e.g. UK_F_38, UK_M_48, SK_M_23, SK_M_39, SK_M_53, PT_M_60, PT_F_41, PL_M_65, MT_M_40.

40 Examples can be found in the database, e.g. PL_M_65, BE_M_72, EE_M_36, FR_M_51, CZ_M_35, CZ_M_63.

If the 'burden' of the household tasks is shared by both partners, the opportunities for change occur.⁴¹

“In other activities it is not stereotypical at all. **I vacuum clean; wash the dishes, floor, the same as [name wife] does. I think it is equally divided. I cook; I do all those activities that might be considered as female from a conservative point of view. I do them as well. Although it is a bit different when it comes to [name baby]. It is my wife who mostly changes the diapers. I am not good in it. I do it when [name wife] needs to sleep or so but she does it more often. A man and a woman should discuss these things in order to make it right; because we are a team, it needs to whizz, the time is running. So they should have a deal about these activities, discuss it. A woman gets nervous if there is no deal. And it changes throughout the time so they should regularly discuss it. I completely agree. And I think, I want to say that this is not that common in Slovak families, the stereotypes.**” (SK_M_39)

“We were lucky to be able to always educate our children, so it was always there the father or the mother, till they were able to go to kindergarten (...) when there are many of people (at home), I cook. (...) In certain times, it was me who ironed, etc. So, we always shared tasks, **it never happened: “you do it because you are a woman, or I’ll do it because I’m a man”.**” (PT_M_60)

“I have mentioned the roles, I know that now when we live together there is some sort of classically feminine thing like cooking - I know that my girlfriend is not like she definitely does not know [how to cook], but nor she likes it, nor she’s great at it (...) - and so somehow I’ve taken over the role fully, and that is a classic issue in this male-female conversation. I do not know, we’re doing it both – things like something washing clothes or something - either a time. The same [situation is] with house cleaning. **Well, somehow we have very successfully shared these roles in such a way that never it seems that only one [of us do something] - well maybe cooking, I do it - but in principle we have shared it successfully.**” (LV_M_26)

In addition, behaviour patterns which are considered to be uncommon and atypical (men taking paternity leave, overtaking all household tasks) can be noticed in several narratives. Practices in which both partners discuss who should take care of children and who should continue working instead of *a priori* assigning these tasks to women were mentioned in several narratives⁴². However, such practices are rare and require determination and courage because as this phenomenon is not familiar to the wider society, people displaying such kind of behaviour are likely to receive societal pressure (e.g., UK_M_48).

“**Yes, I have been on parental leave (literally: ‘maternal leave’ in Czech) and my best friend too, and I really enjoyed it.** I would never change this and it was... it was great, one of the best moments of my life (...). I think it is a fundamental experience, because as far as someone lives without children, with her partner, then most of life is just pleasant and nothing... there’s no obligation. But then with children, things change dramatically, and this service is - ,service’, that’s an awful word, but that’s the correct one – is so demanding and has to be efficient. Then the classic role division between men and women is no longer valid (...).” (CZ_M_44)

There are few narratives telling about role snapping in which male partners act as the enabling actors by overtaking household tasks and by letting their female partners climb career ladders⁴³. In some cases it is visible that the traditional gender roles disappear and decisions on who will take care of children and household tasks are not defined by one’s gender.

“My parents discuss things a lot. Probably they came up with some scenarios how it would be and were ready to reactions of a society. There was this thing – my mother was called Mrs Mayor (in Slovak it is used as an adjective signifying a wife of a mayor) and my father explained to everyone that it was her who was the mayor not him. So he supported her. **That is why he probably accepted the role change at home.**” (SK_M_23)

Furthermore, male partners can be supporting and enabling by expressing psychological support and

41 To be found in the following examples: SK_M_53, PT_M_60, PT_F_41, MT_M_40, DK_F_65, CZ_F_24, CY_M_23, CY_F_23.

42 Examples include UK_M_48, CZ_M_44, HU_M_57.

43 Examples include HU_M_57, UK_M_48, SK_M_23.



encouraging women to seek what they are dreaming about. Such support and encouragements are crucial factors leading to change.

“And so we lived like this, we had a nice life; we were married for more than twenty years, till he died, so we had no big issues. Somehow, we learnt how to live with each other in harmony. I accepted his skills, what he could do. And I relied on this to get strength and motivation, that I could freely, freely realise my ideas. **So he let me go on, he let me, he didn't pull me back by saying “you won't make it anyways” or “why are you doing this” or things like this. No, he didn't say this. He rather said: “Give it a shot.” This was his approach. So, this worked well like this.**” (HU_F_72)

10.1.2. 'Myself' as an enabling actor

As the collected data has shown, both women and men (as individual beings) can be an active agent stimulating change towards more egalitarian attitudes and behaviour patterns. As the quotes below indicate, the influence of an individual can be crucial. For instance, a woman who is conscious about an unfair situation in her private life can make some endeavours in order to change this situation.

Individuals, especially those who are being subordinated and become conscious about this situation, are able to make huge changes on the micro level. That is to say, individuals cannot change the thinking and behaviour patterns in the society, however, changes made by a single individual may be relevant on the micro level (e.g., family). It can change everyday practices of another individual and lead to change in the private sphere. In the collected narratives, there were several male respondents who revealed that they have changed because their female partners wanted and required them to change.

“It's good for me to have a partner with an autonomous life, a profession, a cultural level. It's clear that this is good for me too. And to be with someone who puts me in my place. Indeed, **I had a partner who put me in my place. I began to do things that I had never done before. To cook, to make my bed, to iron, even to do housework. I hadn't done it ever before! My relationship took me there.**” (ES_M_62)

“**Yes, it is quite natural to me (taking care of my children) but it is also something quite induced by my partner who is very demanding on these issues,** and in any case I developed this belief that on child care you need to have equality as there is a right to be equal in career, in my wife's job. (...) I cannot really say, if the fact that we had these type of discussions, to what extent this influenced my behaviour, if I had a partner who wanted to be housewife expecting I would be the breadwinner, I don't know how I would have reacted; for sure it's also a pleasure to take care of your kids, it's not only a duty, then it also depend on the type of job that you have.” (IT_M_39)

Several female respondents emphasised the importance of being independent from a male partner. By some female respondents independence appears to be perceived as a value. In a few more radical cases, women revealed that the choice to be alone was made consciously by weighting all advantages and disadvantages of cohabitation or marriage with a male partner. This indicates that these respondents are active agents who are aware about their situation and consciously direct their practices and behaviour. This could be a good example of self-awareness because the respondents consider perceived constraints and make a conscious and well-weighted decision to act against such constraints.

“**I like to be independent. In general, one must not depend on the man. Because you never know what may happen later on, when you have a family.** You might not want to go on living with him ... And if you want to survive on your own you must have some money set aside. And also having some kind of work to occupy yourself with is very important. You can't be closed up in a house all the time. You have to get out sometime. Even if you are taking care of the children, you still need to get out, especially if you are an active person. You want something more. This is how I see it. ... In our society, OK, most people believe that “We don't mind if a woman does not have a secure job, because, anyway she will find a husband who will take care of her needs.” But, OK, my personal opinion is that a woman has to be independent. (...)” (GR_F_20)

“It means that **I want to go on with my life whatever that may entail**. Whether I find a partner or not, I will have my own base and my own opportunities, financially, work-wise, home-wise.” (GR_F_26)

“I left home at an early age and started working, **I wanted to be independent, and I worked, I did things on my own, to prove myself, to prove I could manage on my own**. This was the most important thing for me.” (GR_F_43)

“At the moment, I feel it is quite important and I have thought that it is a choice of womanhood or a choice of a way of life that **now when the children have moved away and that part of life is over, I have consciously chosen to live alone**. To live alone with myself. I don't want a relationship. I have chosen it as it feels like my thing to do. This way I can live the life that I want. It wins the thought of living in a relationship. Now when I am thinking about it, about my network and people whom I know, I was surprised. There are women of different ages in my social circle and in fact I have also spoken with them about the issue. It does not only mean that I have made this choice at this point in my life, but that women of different ages make the choice that they want to live their life alone. Of course, the situation can change but what does this tell about our world at this moment? Somehow I think that there are much more men who live alone but when one really starts to think about it from the point of view of one's social circle, I think there are many women who live alone. I have talked about it with some and in fact it is so that as a woman I can make this choice in the Finnish society. **I live, do well and enjoy my life. I can truly say that I enjoy my life. I am not missing anything. This is the life that I have chosen. This is it.**” (FI_F_55)

“In the moment I decided to get a divorce he was against it, he said: “What, you're 40, God knows what you'll end up!” and I said: **“I'd rather be independent than be married on paper!” And I consider I did the right thing, because it helped me to psychologically handle my professional work and taking care of my mother**, who is very old, she is now 88. I consider that women in the Western world have been in this state for a long time, they don't have to put up anymore. So in the moment the road becomes bumpy, a woman can manage to be on her own, I think. Maybe it's more difficult for a man. I never consider not being able to cope. Sure, there can be moments, you consider getting sick and...But everything works out. But to have your dignity broken ... Romanian women just put up with too much and I have always opposed these things.” (RO_F_66)

“Well, when you are in a social realm they say to you ‘oh, you never got married and whatever!’. There are always some colleagues who make me...What is true is that I haven't seen that the people I've met, who were married and had children, were happier than me. (...) Sure. **I haven't felt the necessity to depend on other people**. No, I must work because I had to live, just as any other person; I had to face some difficulties and to eat every day. I had to pay my house, the water bills and the phone bills. I think that all of this might have triggered on me that feeling or that attitude of boldness, of moving forward, of not complaining and not to keep wondering what might have failed or what haven't.” (ES_F_68)

10.1.3. Parents as key actors

Parents play a very significant role in triggering change or establishing barriers for change, since they are the ones who transfer norms, values and behaviour patterns which are going to be actively internalised by their children. It is very probable that behaviour patterns established by parents will be replicate in their children's families (when they create their own families). The behaviour patterns established by parents can be challenged by a partner and a partner (or any other actor in the later stages of socialisation) is able to trigger change. However, primary socialisation and behaviour patterns employed by the parents are likely to be vivid in one's own family. Therefore, in short, parents play an important role in triggering change towards more egalitarian



attitudes as well as creating constraints for change by transferring a family model with the traditional gender role division in the family.

Upbringing is crucial for change. Sociologists recognise that primary socialisation establishes the basis for the further socialisation processes. It can be assumed that once a certain behaviour pattern is established in someone's mind as the 'right' one, it is difficult to change this perception. Therefore, the examples of upbringing which transfer the traditional gender roles will be considered as an obstacle for change.

“They (parents) brought him (respondent's brother) up like that. Because, even if you take dinner time, for example, he does not even remove his chair or his plate. He just sits there because they brought him up like that. He doesn't know otherwise. And now he takes advantage of it. In fact even when he visits my mother he still behaves in the same way. He's not going to change. **Given that my mother is happy to serve him, he's not going to change, you understand.**” (MT_F_45)

“I noticed the way I was educated as a woman when I got married. As I said before, my husband's family was a family in which just the ones who wanted, the men, studied. My sister-in-law was the only one who didn't study. What is more, despite the fact that she is only three or four years older than me, she was taught to embroider, which is curious, to embroider, to sew, and all of those things, that I don't know how to do any of those things, I don't like them, I've never been able to do them. They tried, since at school these things were taught. **My sister-in-law did have to sew, to embroider and this kind of things, and to be at home. She wasn't as lucky as her brothers or as other people like me.** Even if we were almost the same age. It was very hard for me to make them understand that...There is one thing that has been always pretty clear to me. I wanted to be economically independent, always.” (ES_F_53)

Some stories told by women reveal that to change the behaviour of their male partner is not an easy task, especially for those who had mothers who were engaged in traditional gender roles. In this case, change has to be actively forced by female partners who want to break this pattern.

“Well, I had some conflicts with my partner since... He supported me but it was difficult for him to assume certain things. **It was hard for him to assume that in case he wanted a shirt which was in the basket, he had to iron it. Especially, it happened because he came from a family that was totally devoted to the children and to the husband.** It was difficult for him to understand. Then, you use your astuteness and the ways in which you can 'trap' him. For instance, I trapped my husband by using the children's issue. My husband loves children. I used to say, 'well, I do the ironing but you take care of the children'. Indeed, he always got up at night, always...He was always in charge of them. I went to work and he took care of them, he fed them, changed diapers, and so on...I said, well, you might not be in charge of housework, but you take care of children. That's how I started to ... Moreover, **later it came a time when I said 'I'm sick of educating, of educating my partner'. I think I gave up.** I said 'screw you!' I'm sick of telling him to clean the bathroom properly, to do the laundry correctly, to do...**I think it was too much fight, too much change in a very short period of time, so it comes a time when you say 'screw you!'** He doesn't want to do the laundry, don't do it, I don't care. I'll do it myself.” (ES_F_53)

“Maybe because when he saw his mother do the cooking, putting his socks on perhaps (laughter) (...) **When she never asked him to do something on his own and she always does it for him, then he learned that this is his role: to order and women will do as he pleased. Of course now that he has a relationship I think he started to change** (...) although he says he believes the same things, in his actions he seems to have changed his mind. One time we saw him mobbing (...) it was a great shock! But his girlfriend was around and he was helping her. In the past, he used to sit on the couch and expect everything to be done by women.” (CY_F_23)

“My father was always working, very often away from home, worked abroad also and my mother was a full time housewife. And that was advantageous for me. I am more or less, well, spoiled, yes, spoiled. Anyway. Ok, I did not have to make my own sandwiches so in that sense spoiled. I notice now... because, I myself am... **I live together with my girlfriend now. I am convinced that both of us should do our share of the household, so not as my parents did it:** my father worked and my mother was busy in the house. We both work, me and my girlfriend, and so I think we should both contribute to the household. **That we both are responsible for the running of the house, shopping, cooking and I notice that I have trouble with this, because I used to be spoiled in those things. So, I find it more difficult... And then I oppose my girlfriend. I find it harder to intrinsically motivate myself to do things in the house.** So that...” (NL_F_34)

In some cases, the respondents elaborated on the situations when their parents did not allow to do something (e.g., seek higher education, etc.) because they were girls or boys.⁴⁴ Parents treating their children differently depending on their gender (or parent who allow/do not allow doing something based on the gender of their children) can be considered as the constraining actors because they continue maintaining and transferring the traditional views to their children. Traditional gender roles are perceived as limiting (by the researchers of this study), since they reduce an array of choices which can be employed by women and men.

“My mother has a character quite...She was a bold woman. She encouraged me to be independent, to be autonomous, to do whatever I wanted, but at the same time I was a woman. I think she did it unconsciously, she didn't...**She did it because things were this way. It's not that she did it consciously, that she said to me 'no, you have to take care of your brothers, or you have to do the beds or you...'**” (ES_F_53)

“My first story leads me back to my youth, to a time when I had just finished school. **I wanted to become a sports' teacher, but my parents felt that they did not have the financial means in the first place, but secondly they also felt that a girl will marry sooner than later and that therefore paying for an education would be a waste of money.** But in the end I became a sports' teacher because there were stipends available from the land RF. There was also a lack of sports teachers. I passed all the exams and could begin my professional training.” (AT_F_65)

“And it's probably because I am a boy, because my sister's upbringing was a bit different...

I: How different?

R: **He (father) was warmer and better with my sister.** My sister even now, she is thirty years old, when she is in city X and her tyre is damaged, she can call to our dad who lives in town Y and ask to come to inflate the tyre – he goes... My dad behaves like that with my sister. **She is still 'working' as a daughter in our family, thirty years old... Dad gives her money to pay for the rent of the apartment; dad gives her money to pay for something else and so on.** Her upbringing and her life was completely different.” (LT_M_34)

“Well, yes. In relation to my choice of education – even if my interests and my dreams or imaginaries about what I would like to do in my life, what I would like to become, have been somewhat different, **I always have been ready to return to what I have chosen, to what was my father's choice and to how I saw myself as a breadwinner for my family** later on – I would choose a profession where you can earn well, if you work a lot, a respectful profession. (...) And if my father said that he thinks that it would be a good choice, then I heard it like “it's the only right choice”. (LV_M_24)

44 Examples are available in the database, e.g. LU_F_47, IT_F_41, IT_M_71, GR_M_51, MT_F_45, RO_F_59, MT_M_40, IE_F_61, AT_F_65, AT_F_47, AT_M_63.



“No, I think that if it had been someone in my life to guide me towards different fields that I could have chosen, I think that maybe I would have had peace and satisfaction and... (...) I can't really negotiate, most of the time I make appeal to force, I take it into my head to do something, but not in a constructive manner, because I could have set my mind... Getting back to music, I could have set my mind and say that was the only thing I wanted to do” (RO_F_59)

“(...) because then girls [of a certain social standing] had to have their piano, their French. And my parents gave me all these things with all their heart, with generosity. But I was not interested in these things. In essence, bourgeois families decorated their daughters ... like a bull you prepare for sacrifice ... dressed with ribbons. You understand? They wanted me to make, until the end this is what they wanted, for me to make a good bourgeois wedding, to find a good husband, at that time a good husband would have been many years older than I. He would have had to be a financially made man. Preferably a doctor, or something, and then I would have been a lady, a lady in society; I would have had my servants, my nannies, these things. So, this was the idea. When I decided I wanted to do the School of Fine Arts it was still 1938. The War hadn't yet happened. My father was completely against the idea. So, we made a deal. He forced me to go to his office – a commercial office – for half the day. I learned the typewriter, to write letters in German. You never know when such things can come in handy. Nothing is lost. So, so, I had to learn how to type, something I considered absolutely needless of course, and I made 500 drachmas and could with this money pay for my studies at the School of Fine Arts.” (GR_F_90)

“There is one incident from the time when I was trying to get into Architecture School, which was a school of high standards. At that time we were concerned that the family's efforts do not go to waste, both my own reading and efforts, as well as my father's work, his money in other words. That these efforts do not go to waste but accomplish their goal. **My father was not very concerned that I study something I like, but that I get on with a profession and start producing.** Because of his work, he was master builder and knew various men of property, and bosses, he had an acquaintance that was an army officer and told him to put his son in Police School.” (GR_M_73)

“I would start with something that some years ago was really surprising to me: for many kind of family problems it happened that **I got totally drunk** (it was the only occasion in my life) and I got many troubles as I got lost and lost my mobile phone and someone found me in the street and I was quite confused, dizzy, and when they took me to the hospital everybody thought of I had been beaten. In that occasion the fact of being a man saved me when they discovered my only problem was to have a too high alcohol level; policemen and even medical doctors considered it as just having a hangover as I was a boy and without any further investigations, and when I came back to my state of mind what struck me was their saying **“well, after all he is a boy, then this is something that may happen.”**”(IT_M_20)

In this study, parents are to be considered as one of the most important actors restricting their children's behaviour and creating control mechanisms. There are many narratives in which the respondents revealed that in some cases the control of parents directed to their children is crucial. However, control towards children is different depending on their gender. That is to say, many female respondents indicated that their behaviour were restricted more because of their gender. Also, male respondents admitted that their female siblings were controlled more than they, which leads to the conclusion that, according to the respondents, girls have less discretion to express themselves, to take up various activities, to have love relationships, etc.⁴⁵ This could be considered as a constraining force, especially, for women. From the collected information one can notice that daughters are more controlled or, in other words, protected against various 'dangerous' situations than sons.

45 Examples available in the database, e.g. RO_F_59, MT_M_61, MT_M_40, MT_F_64, LT_F_55, PT_F_70, BE_F_25, IT_F_19, IT_M_20, IT_F_62, GR_M_51, GR_F_90, ES_F_41, ES_F_68, ES_F_53.

“I remember one thing. I wanted to go on holiday with a friend who was my boyfriend at that time. I was almost 18 and I wanted to go away with him. He was the son of a friend of my father, so (my father) knew him well, and we wanted to go camping but my father forbade and told me that it wasn't done for a girl, and I said: 'but your friend allows his son to do this with me', but he said: **'yes but he is a boy'**. It's still something that I have here. I recall that it was to go on holiday, I was already 17 years old but well the argument was **"you're a girl and you can't do that."** (LU_F_47)

“**And I realised that while a girl of a certain age is not allowed to go out at night, a boy may be allowed to do it, to stay out with his friends earlier, at least this happened in my experience;** I have an example of something that happened in these days, as my brother who is 16 years old asked to go on holidays with some friends of him. If I would have done it at 16, I think my parents would have not allowed me to do it with my own girlfriends; if on one side I can maybe say 'you did not behave like that with me', I can understand that parents may be more worried about their daughter, as women risk to a wider extent than boys in the world outside.” (IT_F_19)

“My sister suffered. She had a little affair and my parents were really awful to her, they locked her inside, tore up her letters and read her diary. It was like a rape of her personality, this thing. And I believe she closed up and wilted after this. I remember she was a young girl like all the rest. Ready to blossom and then in high school she got washed out. **And since then she was always very timid and she underplayed her female side. I can't quite understand what happened.** And the husband she married in effect was like a substitute of my father. She never fell in love. Something she discovered thirty years later. (...)” (GR_M_51)

“**When I was dating my first boyfriend I was late to come back home, as is usual for teenagers, both boys and girls, and I was just in front of my house saying goodbye to him.** It wasn't that late but my father got worried, although he never does, because he's very calm. **He went to look for me and he found me with that guy. And the face and the expression, all was [she opens her eyes showing the kind of face]** ... He has never had that reaction again in my life. It was a gut reaction, very upset, as if I was ... He didn't scold me, but it was his anger, his annoyance and his ... He went upstairs home and his annoyance at this respect was what ... **Considering that my brother was also dating a girl much older than him and that he had a lifestyle that didn't correspond to his age, sixteen. And I was the drama!** So this event... I thought that the fact of being a girl, even if my parents had gone through the political transition in Spain and had been re-socialise, that kind of things have a strong influence. And it hurt a lot, very much.” (ES_F_41)

The researchers encountered that love relationships for parents promoting traditionalistic gender roles are at a particular importance. Parents, in several narratives, are particularly controlling and strict about their daughters love relationships with different sex partners/friends. The collected narratives (especially by the respondents representing older generation) reveal that parents can be radically protective against their daughter's relationships with boys/men. The researchers of this study perceive such behaviour as constraining because it has a negative effect on those who are being controlled.⁴⁶

46 Examples include IT_F_62, IT_F_19, ES_F_41, PT_F_70, ES_F_68, ES_F_53.



“Women were put in a glass bubble. However I never felt it. I didn’t feel, but ... but I saw it, I saw people that were treated like a little flower that should be well kept. (...) There were so many people (women) that couldn’t leave the house. **Parents that didn’t let their daughters even get out of the house. Nor go to the church celebration alone. Not even that! Because they thought that it was inconceivable to let a girl walk by herself on the street.** So ... I say go to the church because ... Oh God! I mean, go to the café, that nobody did. Ladies couldn’t go. I remember, when I was a child, my parents took us, many times, up there to the pastry shop (...) my parents, my father and my mother, took us, many times, to the pastry shop. But there, well, I think about it: ‘my mother didn’t take us there because only my father was able to drive’. So, my father took us all. But, perhaps, I don’t know ... Is it only that? I don’t know ... Because I continue saying: I think that my family was, even so, very open-minded. No, they even let us... I remember that they borrowed the car to my oldest male cousins so that we could, for example, in an afternoon, in a beautiful day like this, to take a ride. And we went as much as we could fit in the car. And there we went. So, it wasn’t like... There wasn’t that prohibition, I mean: “You don’t go out, even to this place!”. But they liked that one of the brother’s would come with us (girls). If a boy was with us, they thought that it would be more respectful. (...)” (PT_F_70)

“I did. I did feel a pressure. I felt that my mother ... First, my boyfriend, she didn’t like the guy I started dating. And I said, well, whom I should date? (...) I was 17 or 18 years old. So I didn’t like it. **What is more, my mother used to send my father to follow me, to watch what I was doing.** I went back home walking at night and I heard my father’s steps. Since there weren’t many people and it was a narrow street ... I thought ‘there he is following me’. I got home, I remember, I went upstairs, we were restoring the house, I heard my mother telling my father ‘you didn’t find her, you didn’t tell her, she went out, she was...’ I said: ‘That’s it!’ And after that, what I didn’t like is that they bought me a knitting machine, because it was her idea, my grandmother’s, this was my grandmother’s idea, sure...” (ES_F_68)

“My brothers came home with girlfriends and they did it. And if I wanted to introduce my boyfriend to my family, at least I had to ask for permission. It seemed that...It didn’t occur to me. They didn’t. They brought one girlfriend today and another one tomorrow...And another one the day after tomorrow. And nothing happened. They went camping or went to some other place, and they said ‘I’m going with my girlfriend and so on.’” (ES_F_53)

Parents are considered to be important change actors if they break the stereotypes and transfer more egalitarian values to their children. The resistance to raise children according to the deeply rooted traditionalistic social patterns can be noticed in several narratives.⁴⁷

“Well, I happen only to have daughters so I won’t be able to compare with what I would have done in case it was boys. But they have joined my husband on some of his sales trips or picked someone up in the airport. **He has taught them how to mend their bikes, to clean the chains, to use tools.** The oldest one has talents in both directions, she can do everything.” (DK_F_65)

“I would never pressurise my children to choose. I would just let them decide for themselves and stand by their choices. **But I would never say to my daughter, ‘because you are a girl you cannot be a pilot, because it is for men’.** Because profession becomes a way of life and if I made her do something else she would be unhappy for the rest of her life. So the choice of profession is not about gender.” (CY_M_46)

In addition, the stories indicate that the non-traditionalistic family model employed by parents is crucial for change. The egalitarian behaviour patterns are usually ‘inherited’ from the parents and the examples they show to their children⁴⁸. Especially, mothers play an important

47 Examples available in the database include MT_M_40, SE_F_23, IT_F_19, ES_F_53, DK_F_65, FR_F_32, CY_M_46).

48 Examples available in the database include SE_F_23, ES_F_53, GR_F_20, BG_F_24, ES_F_68, CY_F_45, AT_F_35).

role in providing their children with an example or model what is the role of women in family and society.

“**I think the women in my family had a great influence on me, great, great.** I think my grandmother taught us incredible lessons on how to be a woman. She was a very smart woman. (...) I think that the fact of having those women breaking the path had a great influence on me. If I had grown up in other family, I wouldn't have been this way. **If I had grown up in a family in which women stayed at home, in which men tended to work and women stayed this way, I might have been this way too.**” (ES_F_53)

“I was thinking about us being three very different families. In my family I feel that there is another kind of awareness, and **my parents have the same level of education, while among the other parents', the man earns much more money and has a fancy job. That could also affect which role you take, I guess.**” (SE_F_23)

“[My willingness to be independent] was always inside of me. I think that regarding this I am like my mother, because **my mother was very brave, she dared to do a lot of things.** Well, there wasn't any knitting machine here, she bought one and brought it home and she managed to do all the work. This is to take risks too. (...) **Many of my characteristics come from my mother, my way of being, of taking risks, of keep going.**” (ES_F_68)

“As a child I had never experienced intense discrimination since in my family, both parents were working. **My mother was quite independent for her time, taking into consideration that she worked for the British Basis.** So, I had some advanced experiences for my time without saying that there was no control generally in the family. But, I had no serious discrimination in comparison to my brother, who is 5 years older than me.” (CY_F_45)

“That meant practically that a girl was not allowed to take a seat at the table or to ask questions, which would have been the worst, because it would have meant she wanted to participate. (...) **But I was enormously lucky to have had a very emancipated Dad, because of his mother who was a midwife and managed the company. That means that his image of women was diametrically opposed (NB: to the predominant views) and he always kept saying that, whatever these men tell you, or whatever anyone says, you are allowed to remain sitting, you can ask questions.** And if that is not accepted, just say that your dad told you so, that you can, and that nobody has the right to chase you away. That way, I was always conscious of my Dad's protection and therefore could never be really irritated by these people. That was probably the biggest exception and perhaps I had a well-developed self-confidence, so that I could rebel against that. And this reinforcement, the positive reinforcement of the role model by my father, made me relatively immune – as a child – even when people kept saying that the way I acted as a girl, always spouting my opinions, I would never find a man...” (AT_F_35)

10.1.4. Carer as an enabling actor

Some female respondents told stories in which they revealed that persons who helped to look after and take care of children enabled them to continue their activities outside the family. Many female respondents emphasised the importance of both individual (e.g., mothers, grandmothers, friends) and institutional actors (e.g., nursery schools, kindergartens) who/which provide help in childcare.



“And then, of course, without telling anyone I stayed in St Petersburg to take my entrance exams. (...) When I returned home after ten days (the respondent spent 10 days in St Petersburg without telling anybody). I returned home and told everyone that from now on I study not at University, but in St Petersburg. My husband immediately wanted a divorce. He was terribly angry because I did not discuss this with him. This was the main reason he was angry. (...). **Just my grandmother said, ‘Child, if you need to study, go, we will bring up the children. It’s not every day but only several times a year during the exam sessions’. Well, this is thanks to my grandmother that I continued studying** and had graduated with cum laude. I loved my studies: Art, culture, theatre and art history! (...) My family was not particularly satisfied, because I always left home early in the morning and had to work from morning till night. I had to ask my grandmother to look after my children, because the children at that time were still quite little: one-year-old, the other two and a half. **They were too little to go to the nursery. So, my grandmother had agreed to look after the children. Once grandmother had agreed, I had the possibility of taking the suggested position.**” (LT_F_63)

“So, we have a couple of good friends, and, you know, they will babysit for us some evenings. And we will babysit for them, we kind of share it. Last year for example, my daughter, we had to take her into hospital for a couple of days. So, our friends looked after my son for a couple of days, so we do have some help, but we don’t have family close by whom we can call on. My mum lives about an hour and half away. So, she will come up every so often, but she can’t really come up at short notice because it is too far away. And my husband’s family are much further away and his mum is quite old and has quite poor health, so we don’t really have family help and that is again something that we didn’t appreciate before we had children, how useful it would be to have family support nearby. But in a way, I think the families that we are friends with, I would regard them almost as family. Because it gives you that support network that normally your family would provide if you lived closer.” (UK_F_38)

“Well, I, how to say, I was brought up in the big family; so, I cannot say that I was alone. My parents used to help me. They took care of her (child) when she was little. My brothers, sisters they sometimes took care after her too... However, it is hard very hard financially and psychologically when you don’t have a support. But children grow up in much worse conditions. Well, looking from this side, we never had much in our life. It was difficult, very difficult. Now when I remember it is difficult to comprehend and realise how I have managed to survive this.” (LT_F_55)

On the contrary, if there is not anybody who can help take care of the children, the freedom of women (since in most such cases it is the woman who takes care of the children) is restricted till the children reach a certain age and can be independent.

“So I asked my mother-in-law if she could look after the three children for the weekend. After I’d paid the fees for the congress, my husband also booked a business trip to Paris. So I asked his mother to help us... I can’t quite... I wasn’t asking her to look after all five children because I’d organised something else for the two eldest. When I arrived to drop off the three of them, she said: **‘No I haven’t got the time. Yes, I agreed, but as their father’s gone away too, that means you’ll have to stay at home.’ She said no. She said: ‘I’m not going to take them because [my husband] has gone to Paris. I don’t want to take them. You should stay at home, you don’t need to go off on this...’** – I think she called it a mad or extravagant trip. I said: **‘It’s not an extravagance, it’s training for...’** but she replied: **‘He earns enough for you to stay at home.’ I said that for me it wasn’t a question of money, it was a commitment, an opening. And I remember that I took them and I contacted (name friend) – she also had five children – and she said “bring them over, we’ll sort it out. You shall go.”** So I went. And then as regards the contract, for working for the whole year, I didn’t dare. No, I couldn’t have. Just organising it...” (LU_F_57)

10.2. Key change actors/factors in the public sphere

In this section, actors and factors who/which are relevant in the public sphere will be discussed. Again, as it was emphasised in the previous sections, the same actors/factors can be enabling and constraining, meaning that they have to be discussed from both angles.

10.2.1. Participation in labour markets as a factor of change

Employer (or colleagues) as a constraining actor

Employers and colleagues are important actors that have a power to create barriers for change by establishing various obstacles for women and men to be employed and to climb career ladders. There are several narratives in which women and men state that women have to work harder to prove themselves⁴⁹, women are not considered to be good employers because they have children and family⁵⁰, for the same job women earn less than men⁵¹, etc. which leads women to the disadvantaged position in what their career and professional life is concerned. These various situations, which create obstacles for women to be employed and continue working, by the researchers of this study is perceived as constraining factors because they in one or another way block or limit the possibilities to express oneself in the public sphere.

“So, it’s a fact that **if a woman would like to get somewhere, then she will, she would need to put a lot of energy into that.** One of my colleagues, she is the head of a group there and she specifically asked for something, like a discussion or something that would help her how she could perform well among men. By the way, she is also a very clever woman, and I think by the way, that she does quite well, and finds a way to communicate with men, but she, well, she ... worked in the army before ... so (laughs) this has something to do with the fact that she is quite “square.” But what I am saying is that there are engineers here and very few women.” (HU_F_31)

49 Examples available in the database include FI_F_31, HU_F_31, FR_M_71, BE_F_38, LV_F_68, AT_F_47, DE_F_23, BG_F_65.

50 Examples available in the database include LT_F_26, UK_F_46, UK_M_48, UK_F_38, EE_M_36, PT_F_41, AT_F_47.

51 Examples available in the database include DE_F_61, SE_F_60, CZ_F_63.

“Yeah, we’ve done it in other aspects and it is just uncanny the way you know, **because the woman carries the baby, then the gender division becomes very clear because somebody has to mind the baby.** Normally it’s the woman, because the woman is feeding, because it is the way it has been and there is just another study on-going now in college about professional woman why there is maybe only one child or none. But, I can see the writing on the wall so clearly: ‘why would you put yourself out there in an environment that is completely male driven?’ **Only to be... well, you have to work your butt off to prove yourself to people.** So I think there should be. I don’t know how it can be changed. Expect woman can change it. So, but it’s very, it’s very.” (IE_F_48)

“It’s because they are potential mothers. Because they can be women that, in their whole lives, will never have children; but if you are a woman you can always become a mom, without premeditating, because of a course accident. So, I think that is because of that, and not because they doubt of our intellectual skills, it’s not because they doubt of our leadership skill.(...) The only times that they told me or that they modified my normal path was due to reasons related to my maternity and my gender.” (PT_F_41)

“The first one was when I was interviewed. I applied for a very special job for a woman. The job required working in the field and selling musical instruments. (...) He wanted to hire me. I did pass all the exams that he had given me, but he said that he needed to inform me that **I was not allowed to get pregnant during the first three years working for his company.** That I had to promise him. That was completely unexpected for me. It had been my first interview, which had reached the point of considering hiring me. At first I had no idea how to react. But then I just said “ok, no problem” It was also very strange to me to think that I would let myself get hired and then become pregnant. That was certainly not my reality. I was 23 years old at the time. That was not part of my thinking. I was also confronted with the comparison with men. He had hired two men and me.” (AT_F_47)



“I heard, after more than five years, what a colleague of mine earned. **At that time I earned 1600 Deutsche Mark, and I always assumed that my colleagues earn the same what I earn, perhaps a bit more if they had worked more years than me.** Yes, and then at some point one of my colleagues told me that he earned 3500 Deutsche Mark. I nearly fainted and said to him to repeat what he had just said. And he said: ‘Yes, I am earning 3500 DM and what do you earn?’ (...) Then I asked to see my boss. He asked me what it was I wanted. I told him that I wanted a higher salary. (...) He answered: ‘that is correct, Ms G, but think about it, you have the highest salary of all women working in this company.’ I replied ‘what do you mean the highest salary? I am not interested in what other women earn here whether they are assistants to the CEO, or whether they treat incoming offers, whatever. I want to be compared to my colleagues. That’s simple.’ He just replied, that no, that is impossible and I should realise, that it is after all the man – he said this verbatim – ‘it is the man who is the breadwinner of the family.’ Then he asked me to leave his office. I drew my conclusions quite quickly and decided to leave the company. And that was what I did.” (DE_F_61)

“I think that (gender) played a role in that sense that I was hired as a female broadcasting director, I mean, they hired me because there must be some balance, maybe 50% of men, 50% of women, so they tolerated me, but I think that things remained much easier for men. And, although I have no concrete data about this, because these issues are never dealt with publicly, but there are those rumours, which allow me to think that my salary was a bit lower than the ones of other, male, directors.” (CZ_F_63)

“Maybe I could not fight with this, but then politics had a decisive role in the enterprises, you understand? If you were not a member of this Party, you cannot go up in the hierarchy in any other way. **I had to either become a Party member, or sleep with the Party secretary, or both.** (...) Yes, at one point you go back in your shell, you close up, you go back to your old job and you work, but a long time passes until you live through it, this bitterness, until **it goes out of your soul because you cannot share this with everybody. Neither with your family, and I was married, right, you cannot share it in the family.** Nor with a friend, or a colleague... you cannot share this. Because they would either blame you for it, or would not believe you, or both. So you live through it by yourself, with the time passing you live through it, but you know that there was this bitterness...” (BG_F_65)

In addition, it might be that employers hold stereotypical perceptions which define what kind of job is suitable for men and for women. There is an array of professions which is considered to be feminine or masculine and it is hard for the opposite sex to be employed and accepted in these fields.⁵²

“(...) this work I do with children is considered problematic for a man. Working in kindergarten, in our everyday reality we find more women than men.” (GR_M_30)

The researchers have encountered only one extreme example when in order to get a higher position, a female economist had to choose among three options: become a party member, have sex with the man who could promote her or do both. The idea that one had to enter the communist party in order to achieve something in a career was not perceived as striking by the respondent, since it was believed everybody (men and women) had to do this if they wanted to achieve something in their professional lives. However, having to engage in sexual relationships in exchange for a higher position can be considered as an obstacle for female professionals, since in such situation one is forced to either accept the proposition or to refuse to have a career.

52 Examples available in the database include LV_F_68, UK_M_48, GR_M_30, UK_M_48, BG_M_58, BE_F_38.

“I was connected to science (in the field of physics). I sort of assisted. But we had very strange atmosphere in our institute. (...) We had predominant male chauvinism. And this chauvinism had penetrated me so much already from study years – that it really is so, that **men are superior and women not**. (...) I didn't even think [about it]. (...) In a moment it did start to cause trouble, because I understood that I'm not dumber. At all the seminars, where you had to deliver speeches and present papers, tell about inventions young men were superior, but I understood that there are many fields where I am superior.(...) [and] there were no advices, not psychological, nor feminine, nor any. At home we didn't discuss such things [of woman's position] either, no, somehow didn't. And that's why I have such crippled beliefs. But when I understood that I am not worse, I wanted to prove that I as a women - I understand things not like worse but even much better.” (LV_F_68)

Family business as a constraining force for women

There are various indications in the collected data that family businesses can be a constraining force, since they seem to lead men and women to more traditional roles. In several stories the respondents revealed that family business might be constraining for both women and men⁵³. Women working with their husbands complained about asymmetric power relationships within the family business, whereby women may be oppressed (e.g., LV_F_45). Stories were collected from women who are or have been involved in a family business with their parents (or parents-in-law) and who mentioned that they were exploited and occupied disadvantageous positions.

“So, anyway, it was a seaside resort area and the pub was very lucrative, but I wasn't paid. And as well as that - well, we had a good lifestyle, but I only got my housekeeping - and as well as that, I found out later - in Ireland it is called 'stamping a card' - but is was paying social insurance. **Nobody paid social insurance for me, so when I came to retirement age, I didn't get a good payment although I worked every day of my life! So, that was another gender issue, because my husband always had social security and as well as that, he put money away in a private bank.**” (IE_F_68)

“Yes, my sisters could do whatever they wanted because they would get married. They will become mothers and so they don't have to provide for the family and so they could make their own choices. In my case, he (father) wanted the name of the family to continue, he wanted the business to continue, because he used to work for his father and so he expected me to work for my father (...) **I mean he didn't allow me 'listen, I don't want to become a photographer', no. 'You have to because this is a family tradition' and he expected it to continue like that.**” (MT_M_40)

Employer (and colleagues) as an enabling actor

Employers can also be actors who/which promote change by breaking existing stereotypes and introducing new behaviour patterns⁵⁴. This is particularly visible in the narratives told by elderly people. They explain how they broke the existing traditional patterns, which at that time was considered very 'progressive' behaviour.

“(...) Because a lot of the children in that area, their fathers were either absent or they were children of one parent families or their fathers were in prison.(...). So they didn't really see men in a good light, which was why, when the lady who had been the head of infants... (...). She had to retire, that was the rules and so we had to have somebody new. **So I thought, well, why don't we have a man? Well, shock horror! Hands up! Do you know what that woman's done now? Etc... Etc... And everybody thought it was terrible, including - I might say - some of the staff especially the nursery school teacher who was my age but you would have thought was at least 20 years older. She was very set in her ways. She was a good teacher, but she didn't welcome anything that she thought was new.**” (UK_F_79)

53 Examples available in the database include MT_F_61, MT_M_40, DK_F_65, LV_F_45, IE_F_68.

54 Examples available in the database include UK_F_79, SK_F_23, PT_F_41, FR_M_71, CZ_F_63, BG_F_65, BG_M_81).



“**(In the late 1970s) we experienced the arrival of the first women, which, I must say, did not suppose major problems.** I had myself women under my orders and they were at least as efficient as men... It was quite surprising, I had worked only with men, so far, and I discovered a slightly different working style. **They... they brought something to the service that was positive for us, because that’s true; they are like us (men), but with slightly different methods.** I don’t think we can call this discriminating. They do have qualities we don’t have, and they do have defaults we don’t have.” (FR_M_71)

“**And the gender, how to say, the gender – this is nature, it is given; and if we consider which gender is better suited for which profession, it is hard to define this because we know now that both men and women become good doctors.** The same is in aviation, there were many good men aviators, and not that good, as well as women, there were a couple of very good female aviators. Although there was some underestimation, a woman, that is, the weak gender”. (BG_M_81)

“I think that, because of the education that my father and mother gave me, I think that there must be an effort from both parts. I mean, there must be... the husband must work and the wife too and, in a perfect marriage, in my opinion, there must be almost like a union between them, equally, because both contribute, but with different salaries, of course. And that, sometimes, is a big issue, **who earns more has much more decision power.** But, for me, I don’t think that is important; it’s important to understand that being the 2 of them the contribution parts of the family’s money, I think that both must have an equal opinion, an equal weight in the most important decisions in what financial family issues are concerned.” (PT_M_18)

“**And I didn’t want to accept that I am a “kept women” that is, that I live on my partner’s salary, or I didn’t want to accept to be treated as an inferior because I earned less. I wanted to be allowed to have my own salary too. So I never wanted such things and that’s why I didn’t even find one who... whom I would have... whom I wanted to choose in fact. I didn’t want to be chosen (laughs). Unfortunately, this is not typical of a woman, but... (laughs)**” (IT_F_72)

Financial independence is liberating

Many female respondents (or male respondents speaking about their female partners) emphasised that having a job which provides financial resources is a crucial factor for change⁵⁵. Financial independence is a powerful tool which can enable or disable a person’s actions.

“**Yes this is a fact. When they fought, this feeling that he thinks that without him everything can be destroyed was often present. And with that he sometimes, not blackmail, but that he thinks that he has a power over me and brother and mother because of that. Financial power. That my mother couldn’t provide for us if they got divorced. In this sense he considers her a bit helpless. Or incapable. That too, yes. Here you can notice this male pride, that he earns more money.** Some sort of conviction that he keeps everything together.” (SI_F_23)

Financial independence provides much freedom and power and, on the contrary, being financially dependent on someone, creates constraints. In the stories provided by the respondents, financial independence/dependence can be considered to be a relevant factor defining someone’s position and power relations within a family. In many cases, the possessor of financial income has decision making powers, and is in more advantageous situation that someone who depends on her/his partner. In most cases, in the stories provided by the respondents, women are the ones who have to struggle for financial independence in order to be able to act independently, have freedom, and decision making power.

55 Examples available in the database include SI_F_23, PT_M_18, IT_F_72, HU_F_72, IT_M_71, GR_F_20, GR_F_90, ES_F_61, FR_F_55.

“I always have tried to be independent, may I say so, my parents have sort of taught me that. And later on, when I got married, I never asked anybody for money, to help me.(...) **Well I, I was kind of afraid to be against.... to oppose, to be in a conflict with my husband.(...)** And then he told me: **“Why did you borrow money, why didn’t you ask me?”** I said: **“Why should I ask?!** You have to give me money [without asking]!” And at that moment I had such a feeling, like “why I have told that at all”, when I get cursed for that. (...) Well, I, after my parents’ family model, I’ve seen that the father, the husband, took his salary home, even the mother earned money herself. (...) And I thought that it’ll be completely the same way in my family: when I will earn, my husband earns, he will bring his salary to me, will give it to me: “Here! See, spend it for that, pay for this, or buy something”. It wasn’t that way! (...) Afterwards he kind of gave me something for a while or so. Other times, when I asked for it, he said: “I have no [money]”. (...) So, what should I ask then anymore – that was it, I had to get along – [my finances managed] - on my own.(...)” (LV_F_45)

“When we got married my wife did not work professionally for a very, very long time. Now, she runs such a small company so that she has something to do, some tasks of her own, some problems of her own. And she fulfils herself in this and she has something tiny, something of her own. I am the main recipient of her services, so she even has a person who will for sure make use of what she does. And what is extremely important, I pay her. Yes, I absolutely... [...]... this is a commercial thing. And that’s all. Wife is a wife, but for each thing, my wife... frankly speaking, I make myself a bill, but she gets remunerated. We think that this is such a healthy arrangement. She has her own money, which does not result from the fact that she was given it but she earned it. She earned it this way. And this has been working already for some longer time and it’s good.” (PL_M_56)

“I always wanted to have my own dry cleaner’s. So I had to borrow some money. My husband stopped me because he was afraid we wouldn’t be able to repay because we wouldn’t have enough customers. It wasn’t even a question of power, because I knew what I was doing.” (BE_F_68)

“But I was always financially independent. While I’ve been at my parents’ they supported me, but after I left home, I didn’t like depending on anyone, asking for money. I had to make my own money. And I didn’t like to receive gifts either, or to receive things out of nowhere. I liked working and being independent and having control. And I was.” (RO_F_59)

10.2.2. Church

Religion and institutionalised conservative heritages appear as elements explaining why gender roles and stereotypes have not been transformed that much so far. Here, women’s sexuality and proper behaviour seem to be especially marked by the religious context. The respondents perceive religion and in particular the church as an actor/factor creating constraints for change. As CY_F_23 states, if the church plays an important role in society, the opportunity or change is very unlikely.

“Due to the important role of our church in the society, if we start dividing men and women then this inequality is transferred to the society. And this is why in the work place men are advanced easier. The patent is transferred from childhood to adulthood.” (CY_F_23)

Church is an active actor imposing its norms and values on society and individuals. In many cases, church plays a constraining role (e.g., CY_F_23). Church transfers traditional gender roles and social patterns which situate women in a deprived position.



“**But I do have the impression that in general, the church has had a very negative impact.** You see, the more orthodox a church is, the more it will attach itself to stories that it takes for granted (...) Because yes, the patriarchal structure, that is very obvious. **The abusers can very often defend themselves with... we are all sinners right?** So, that is also negative. So, I don't see a positive role for the church. Now, they have reluctantly done something, to write something about it. Also from the protestants' side. So, I expect a lot more from humanism. And I think that religions... yes, you can admire them, but I only see disadvantages in them. I also think sometimes: 'If I would not have been raised religiously, I would have liked that more.' Although I still do go to the church from time to time. Not because I think the church services are so important, but just to meet the people. So I have a bit of a religious trauma.” (NL_M_67)

Differently from the other constraining forces, belief systems and values propagated by the church and its followers are hard to change. This can be indicated by two almost identical stories told by the 52 and 22 years-old women (e.g. BE_F_52). Although, the age difference between these women is 30 years, they both faced how the church can marginalise female believers. As the respondents suggest (BE_F_52), the only opportunity for change in this situation is to refuse taking services provided by the church.

“I have 2 brothers and 2 sisters, and we had a very catholic family then, and the 2 brothers were of course altar boys – or at least they had been. Then it became my time, I was 10 and also wanted to serve in the mass. So I just went with my youngest brother who is five years older, he went with me to the parish priest. (...) Anyhow, my youngest brother went with me to the priest and the priest said: “No, because you are a girl.” And then I was so angry that I wrote a letter to the bishop. And my parents let me do this. They did not encourage me, they found... My mother said: “yes, if that's how you think about it, then you should do so.” I was not stopped either, like “you can't do something like that”, or anything like this. Not at all. **And I received a letter back that regrettably it was not possible. As a woman you couldn't do anything... that was not allowed and so on. And then I decided that I wanted to have nothing at all to do with the Church anymore.** (...)” (BE_F_52)

10.2.3. School

In the narratives in which the respondents decided to speak about the school, they reveal that in many cases the school as such is a constraining actor⁵⁶. The majority of respondents reveal that in the school boys and girls are treated according to the existing stereotypes. Stereotypical behaviour is led by the existing prejudice (see sections on dimensions and effects of gender stereotypes) which causes different treatment of male and female students. Even though the researchers expected inter-generational change, the collected narratives reveal that both elderly and younger people name school as a constraining actor. One can notice that prejudicial and biased treatment of different sexes was 'softened' meaning that the schools tends to evolve towards more and more egalitarian behaviour patterns, however, differences in treating different sexes is still vivid and can be clearly identifies in the stories provided by the respondents.

“She (respondent's sister) went to the Nun's School in [name city]. The oppression was unbelievable, on a daily basis. And the reading requirements too. Whereas I went to [name school] that was a good school, but where we had a lot of free time, and no control or anything. OK, they were after us for our long hair. But this was of no importance. (...) It was just very strict. It was a daily school. Regular. But they came home later because they had three hours of French every day and there was a **puritanical... There were regular nuns there. The environment was terribly puritanical. In high school, they checked the students when they entered and left if they have plucked their eyebrows, or painted their nails, or they checked under their skirts if they shaved their legs. Terrible things for a young girl.**” (GR_M_51)

⁵⁶ Examples available in the database include SE_F_23, NL_F_69, UK_F_19, UK_F_46, FI_F_24, GR_M_22, GR_M_51.

“Yes and the first thing I thought was: ‘Would the nun (I was attending a nunnery school) have said: ‘No, she’s too stupid for this?’ Because you cannot imagine that your own parents, in whom you place all you trust and who allowed you to take all the extra lessons - French etc. - that they would say: **‘No, not you, because you are going to get married anyway!’**. Getting married was not on my mind at all at that time. I wasn’t busy thinking about such things, I was playing cow-boy and Indian and was not at all thinking about marriage. ‘And your brother will do it!’ Yes, there were many years between the two of us. So, the trust was heavily shattered...” (NL_F_69)

“(…) [The respondent has later in life worked at his former school, alongside his old teachers] I know that there are teachers who really worked not to use such categorisations [..] **they tried to address people as individuals, with their names, not as groups**. One teacher I worked with was very good at this, she knew where everyone was [in the classroom, thereby being able to address people with names, not ‘you boys in the corner’], **but she could still be very normative and talk about girls and boys as groups...**” (SE_F_23)

“Once, a boy was expelled from school only for cursing. But a girl who wrote that same curse on the wall didn’t get any punishment. (...) This says a lot. This is how inequalities come about. The unruly boys and the good girls. Maybe it’s also true, I don’t know, but we shouldn’t put everything in the same mould. (...) If it could change. I don’t know” (GR_M_22)

10.2.4. Education as a change factor

Most of the studies conclude that one of the main determinants for egalitarian attitudes is education. These studies give empirical evidence that women with higher education are more likely to hold more egalitarian views. This, in turn, suggests that these attitudes lead to changes,

which have implications for individual behaviour and opportunities leading to the different functioning of society and people within the society. Several respondents who spoke about the relationship between education and gender issues, revealed that they believe that education do play an enabling role.⁵⁷

“I believe there was a gain of knowledge among men, or at least those with whom I find myself, this means a certain social class (...) but I notice especially among girls, especially girls who have a university education, and are really emancipated from traditional roles. And I do not know if the knowledge that we (boys) have gained from one side is enough to compensate the other side (girls). So, actually there is a loss of traditional knowledge that has its origins in the (repartition of) role of man and woman, is certainly... I feel it is fading out.” (LU_M_29)

“I do not know [what made me act differently from my parents’ model]. **I think it’s all very concerned with education and intelligence level, I think, and with people [themselves]**. It sounds strange, but [nevertheless] - I think the smarter, more educated one is, more open to all sorts of things, such as gender equality, one is. (...) For me it is an empathy - that it is important to me that this other person feels good, and that it will never be that some sort of things are enforced or the like. This, I think, is important. (...) This kind of equality anticipates that you would not do anything what makes you feel bad, and especially - bad in some gender equality terms of bad – that somebody gives you something just because you’re a man or a woman. It seems to me silly, yes. But, I think, it is also likely changing.” (LV_M_26)

“Women are becoming more self-consciousness, because they have more knowledge and are more daring to step into spheres which were forbidden for them in the past. At least there was some invisible line. And now they are stepping into these spheres and they are right...” (SI_M_62)

57 Examples available in the database include EE_M_23, LU_M_29, LV_M_26, SI_M_62.



10.2.5. Feminist attitudes as a change factor

Based on the collecting narratives, one can notice that the most important change actor for male respondents triggering the change towards more egalitarian behaviour patterns is a female partner with strong feministic and/or egalitarian ideas⁵⁸.

“I would say to be presumptuous that all the critiques to men, I was accepting them totally, on certain respects **I was feeling to be very different; of course, this doesn't mean that I've never been a chauvinist myself** or I never hurt a woman, or that I am a perfect person to anybody, but I have to be honest, when they spoke, when they were living together and I lived with them for a whole month in a very peculiar place, I was totally agreeing on what they said, as this was what I wanted for women too, not only for women as it wasn't a women's only discourse, but it was about relations, but we know how it is from right things and principles the protest's methods and forms may be right or wrong, history is teaching us this (...).” (IT_M_53)

“**Women were the ones who changed us (men).** It wasn't our will... No, no. With their claims they made us think and reflect. (...) This sort of thing made me rank equality as one of the first political claims. That is, along with social and labour rights. There was also equality, something that we used to invoke by proclaiming 'liberté, égalité, fraternité'. But we had equality right there in front of us! And it's difficult to convince someone that you are fighting for equality and freedom when you are denying these rights to a human being. A woman is a female human being! So, what is the reason for discrimination to exist? And you start... I might be complimenting myself ... but this enriches me. This, this takes time to become true. You end up saying, well. This is also good for me.” (ES_M_62)

“I think in the social sciences feminist literature has had some ... an impact. It has left a mark ... Even the establishment of a [new] research agenda, of [new] concerns. The fact that you attend a conference and since the very first there is always a group of women. Then, even if you don't take part in this group, it is visible. These things are relevant in regard to educating all this huge scientific community. Some people might not take it seriously. And I've noticed that at work. I've noticed some differences in this respect.” (ES_M_43)

“I have noticed situations caused by dominance and sexism but... Maybe [because of] the education I got. My father was a republican and, in fact, feminist, both due to his ideology and his sensibilities. **So he prevented me and my sister from being marked with earring holes when we were born. I don't know other people who had that experience.**” (ES_F_61)

Feminist ideas and social movements stimulate changes not only on the micro level (when partners change their partners' attitudes and behaviour) but also such movements can have an influence on the whole society and public policies.

“(...) I'm not quite sure to what extend the campaign the feminists did kind of support that or feed into it or make it more possible. (...) But, yes, but, I mean, there were several attempts. I mean, the attempts to legalise divorce, started long before that. There were three abortion referendums but there was more than one referendum about divorce so that went back a long way. But, you know, there was a lot that went on here. There was a whole thing about that. Up to the '60 if you were a civil servant, you had to retire when you got married if you were a woman. And the feminists fought and changed that. And there was a thing about inheritance right and they fought and changed that, there was probably quality in the social welfare law, so they did. They made a lot of difference. They really made an awful lot of changes.” (IE_F_61)

58 Examples available in the database, include UK_M_29, RO_M_44, IT_M_39, IT_M_53, CY_M_66, ES_M_62, ES_M_43, IE_F_61.

Feminism as a constraining force

Respondents focusing on feministic ideas and how they have influenced their personal lives, reveal both sides of feministic ideas. Firstly, as it was presented above, they point out the positive points which were brought into the day light by feminism movements. However, some respondents also mention a negative side of feministic ideas. Female and male respondents revealed that if feministic attitudes become very radical, they might affect a relationship between a man and a woman negatively. Also, several men noted that feministic attitudes might be constraining for men because the anger is aimed at them.

“(..)... well, I certainly think that trying to be a whole person as a woman and trying to be a whole person in a relationship, it’s still complicated. You know, it is still complicated! That’s what I would still say really, that it’s still complicated. Because I don’t think, **I don’t really think the model has got great currency of relationship where a feminist couple - I would say - have a successful relationship.**” (IE_F_61)

“(..)... I lived quite directly an historical period where there was a women’s movement, a feminist one, even if I don’t like the word (...) and so the fact of being a man without being presumptuous who never thought of women being as something to exploit or to run away from, **being a man of that kind was a limit.** In those years, having a girlfriend who became my wife later on, who was very active in this women’s group, there was this trend like very beautiful atmosphere, an intellectual movement (...) you could feel something was changing or they wanted change, there were some very strong “No” and this was really positive, even essential, the only limit was as **I experienced it personally but maybe it is different for other men, (...) they were so angry with men, my girlfriend too, you could understand it on one side, but, they were blind to a men’s world,** I am not talking only about me (...) who never related to them in terms of men/women (...). I was suffering about the fact of walking together with my girlfriend, we were really much in love with each other and we had a wonderful time, we walked around hand in hand, we went singing and playing together and when we were together it was ok, while when we met the hard core of the feminist group, suddenly the roles changed and the way she behaved with me too, she was completely different and she ... (...) closed her doors and windows so to speak, (...) and I came to be totally excluded from her life, I can understand we were only 20 years old, and still...” (IT_M_53)

10.2.6. Enabling and constraining public policies

27 Member States of the European Union have different welfare systems which to some extent have an influence on creating institutional opportunities or/and constraints for change. Each Member State has its own mechanisms to deal with the market failures. In what gender issues are concerned, governments provide different policy interventions, for instance, different conditions for parental leave, single-parent families, teenage pregnancies, etc. These interventions might result in different social patterns, norms and values. That is to say, not only belief system, values and underlying norms, but also legal laws, general rights, financial subsidies and allowances create certain circumstances in which specific behaviour patterns can flourish.



In some cases, the decisions regarding some public policies which have been created to correct for market failures can cause unexpected outcomes. These outcomes not always correspond with the original intentions and even have negative consequences. Therefore, they can be called 'institutional constraints' for change. An illustration of this can be the narrative told by the 19-years-old woman from the UK who claims that a high financial support trigger negative changes: due to decent allowances for young women (teenagers) decide to have children rather than seek a higher education or employment.

“Yeah, and not with good qualifications either. I think maybe they lack a sense of purpose or direction. And I suppose one thing that a lot of women feel that they're naturally inclined to do is be mothers and for them that [getting pregnant] was a very easy way to give themselves a permanent occupation. (...) It is very, yeah... You know, but they are all living in their own flats and they are all... You know, the government has provided so much for them that actually... You know, if I get a degree, I still have to do years of internship and not get paid and things like that. Their income, they probably get from the government, would be more than I will get from my first few years of being a post-graduate.” (UK_F_19)

Further in the interview the 19-years-old woman adds that being a teenager and pregnant is not shocking, rather it is quite common phenomenon. This is considered an important issue, since as other interviews and literature analysis indicate the level of education is one of the most important factors triggering change towards more egalitarian attitudes.

Another example (in what institutional opportunities and constraints are concerned) can be the different public policies in relation to parental leave. In Central and Eastern European countries, parental leave lasts from two to three years. On the one hand, this policy enables parents to take care for their children and assures a financial support till a child reaches a certain age (two or three years). On the other hand, this policy might become constraining, since all women are expected to take a two or three-years-long maternity leave. Most of the interviewed men and women do not think that it is unfair for women leave the labour market (and in some cases devote or suspend their career) for two or free years.

The fact that women can take a 2/3 year long maternity leave started to become not only something which is optional to every parent, but also as an obligatory rule for a woman. The conception of a good mother is

defined in this perspective. A good mother has to take a (three)two-year-long maternity leave. Deeply rooted perceptions that a child needs a mother for at least two/three years are very common and obliging⁵⁹.

“By the way, to be very honest, speaking about fatherhood as such [we are talking why the interviewee decided not to take a paternity leave], I have never been going to sit at home for one year. Because for me, it's completely obvious that a child needs a mother. **I can appreciate and respect fathers who take a paternity leave but I am furious on mothers who return to work just right after giving birth. A child needs a mother.**” (LT_M_34)

“(...) these are male ideas about childcare. **Men do not deal with, I do not know whether women think differently, that it is great to be at home for three years but at the same time it is a great burden for a woman. This is a deeply rooted stereotype that a woman should stay with a child up to its three years. A child in a nursery is wrong, people disapprove, that you are not able to take care of your child that a woman should stay at home and take care of it.** But there are lots of things that are not considered. On one hand it is OK if a woman is at home. But at the same time she loses, she cannot be a full time teacher, cleaning lady, pedagogue and mother. And a child in a nursery gets socialised, has new stimuli, new... just stimuli. So, I think that even for a child it is better to go to a nursery. The best model is to spend a half-day at the nursery to get used to it and a half-day with a mother. A child gets socialised and has stimuli and a mother can rest and she enjoys the time with a kid much more.” (SK_M_39)

Divorce/separation as a liberating and a constraining factor

Stories told by divorced women reveal that in some cases divorce from a partner can be a crucial trigger for change. In most societies divorce is considered to be a negative phenomenon. In some countries (e.g., Malta), the legal right to break the marriage was established only recently. However, even in those countries, in which the legal right

⁵⁹ Examples available in the database include LT_M_34, LT_F_26, SK_M_39, SI_F_34.

to divorce was established earlier, the maintenance of marriage is considered to be an important value.

As one respondent indicated such phenomenon as 'breakdown' always existed but it was considered as shameful and completely unacceptable. Moreover, it had to be disguised from the public. Consequently, at a certain period of time a step to make it 'official' and lift the societal pressure from those who decide to divorce became a necessity. The legal right to divorce can be considered as a move towards the official legitimation and justification of such kind of practices. It is important to note, that the most active advocates of this legal right were women because as later in this section it will be revealed, divorce might be liberating for women.

“(...) there were plenty of marital breakdowns before we had divorce. (...) But it was silent and secret and shameful and horrible. Right, and there was no support. No, well, there could be very little support; it was really, really hard, because the problem didn't even have a name even. But there was marital breakdown. (...)The divorce law, I mean, **there has not been a rush to courts for divorce AND it is mostly women who initiate the legal divorce.** So, and the people were saying: 'Women are foolish!' They were saying, well, one of the campaigners said, one of the anti-campaigners said: 'you know women voting for the change to allow divorce, change in the constitution to allow divorce. It's a bit like turkeys voting for Christmas!' But in fact it's women who - I don't know what the percentage is - but most often take the case for divorce. And there has not been an epidemic of divorce.” (IE_F_61)

“Divorce didn't exist. And a woman...Women had some legal obligations that nowadays would be inconceivable. If at that point, in 1974, my husband called the police and asked for them to look for me at the place I had been hired in city A, where I was living on my own, I would have had to go and live with him again. **If he had gone to the court and said that his wife was not living with him, yes, and if at that moment they found me committing adultery I would go to prison,** me and the man who would be called 'the adulteress' mail'. It was legally termed this way. **Nothing would have happened to him but I could go to prison.** This wasn't the case, but it might have been. And in 1981 I got divorced, by mutual consent, and with a legal agreement.” (ES_F_61)

Those stories revealing that divorce can be liberating usually associate with the beginning of a new life, freedom, a space to express themselves, etc. This is especially the case for female respondents.

“(...) **I see around lots of divorced women who just started to flourish,** they realise their dreams. Of course they are emotionally frustrated or they sleep alone that is not pleasant all the time and maybe they want to have someone on their side, but the feeling that they need to catch up with something or experience something different; it keeps them in a distance. Of course they have lovers and so, **but I can see how they wake up their individuality, how they figure out what they really want, they are just different.**” (SK_F_38)

“**Now [after the divorce] my work brings me pleasure, not that much the family. The child grew up... Now I feel like a free person.** (...) Then when I got divorced, I started studying again, I always wanted to study. After 10 years and 10 months of marriage, I got divorced and I started studying in (City!), graduated, and now I have a Master's degree in Social and Political Psychology. Yes.” (BG_F_47)

In relation to what has already been mentioned above about divorce, one respondent indicated that the death of her grandfather made visible and positive changes in her grandmother's life, which indicate that the relationship between her grandparents was oppressive and clearly constraining. Therefore, if a partner exercises oppressive behaviour, his/her death also can be enabling.

“My grandmother after my grandfather died, for whom my sisters and I were sins, I saw her turning into a different person! She used to be oppressed and as soon as my grandfather died **I saw a grandmother with confidence, she took over the house, she knew how to deal with her money, she rediscovered her identity and she was fairer than my grandfather.**” (CY_F_23)



However, as several stories told by male divorcees' reveal that divorce can be a constraining factor for men. Divorce from his wife can mean that a man will not see his children as often as he used to see them. This issue was noted by several men⁶⁰. As the quote below shows, the man could not establish new relationships with other women because he was too much attached to his child from the first marriage.

“And during this time my first son was born. And then somehow **I wanted to break away from this relationship, I didn't find it stable, I didn't feel committed, and then we divorced.** But... it was a strange way of divorcing... well, the kid was there, who could not do anything... could not help what their parents were like. **I was there with him (the child) every night, until the point... he reached adulthood.** And even beyond that (laughs a little). And of course, **my future partners could not really tolerate this. They were always suspicious of me chasing some women, but I did not, I just kept my son company in the evening, I was telling stories to my kid, until he fell asleep.** Mmm... **So this made my future relationships more difficult,** and there were very few women who were willing to tolerate this, well, my current partner was one of the few exceptions, but I overheard a conversation when her female friends tried to dissuade her from starting a relationship with me, who was divorced and had a child already...” (HU_M_64)

“My older son has a child, and he is not living with his partner anymore. I saw things went wrong and now they are separated. They have a 9-years-old boy, and they share custody (...). That's not usual, in the Czech Republic, but it starts to be quite frequent, because before ... it changed because under communism, the custody was automatically granted to the mother, only occasionally to the father, but this shared custody is getting now more frequent. I don't see it as something ideal, but that's still better than, let's say, when the father visits his children twice a month (...). **(My son) is very satisfied with this, he wouldn't have accepted to be deprived of his child.** He wants to have him, he loves him, so he did not even consider another option. But... **that's a good deal, kind of, basically a week for each parent, sometimes a bit differently, but, well...**” (CZ_F_63)

As one of the respondents explained, in these days divorce do not play such a constraining role for men as it used to play and as elderly men indicated⁶¹, since these days such options as shared custody is available. The respondent argues the shared custody is a relatively good solution out of such situation.

60 Examples available in the database include HU_M_64, BE_M_72, BG_M_54, HU_M_57.

61 Examples available in the database include HU_M_64, BE_M_72, BG_M_54, HU_M_57.

11. Culture and tradition





A society is built upon and influenced by its own history, culture and traditions. Socialisation allows each individual to assimilate norms, values and behaviours that are part of a certain society, generation through generation. Regarding *culture and tradition* in the 27 Member States, the interviews performed show that *culture and tradition* play an important role in (re)producing gender stereotypes. This section addresses people's perceptions about traditional portraits of women and men, traditional masculinised settings, education and professions, law and legislation, literature and media, religion, cultural and political events, and cultural collisions/shocks. Some issues were already addressed in other sections. For this reason, in this section, there will not be an extensive analysis about those issues (e.g. female and male portrayals under 'dimensions of stereotypes'), but just relevant references related to facts, events and perceptions about the influence of culture and tradition.

Before presenting the main findings, it is important to highlight that issues related to *culture and tradition* are more present in the speech of the older generation of respondents (over 60 years old). However, it is also relevant to emphasise that there are common topics that were taken into account by all the respondents.

11.1. Traditional portraits of women and men

The specific roles of women and men in the private sphere are constantly underlined by all generations of respondents. Traditionally, women are depicted as responsible for household tasks and for taking care of the children, whereas men are portrayed as (the main) breadwinners and chiefs/representatives of the family. This traditional male portrait conveys a position of power at the expense of women's subordination, in which men usually are the ones who make the rules and who make the decisions. The expectations that were created around these traditional roles are generationally inculcated: they are transmitted from one generation to another through upbringing. Role models may influence gender roles and, therefore, gender stereotypes.

“I think in my generation the youth is most prominent because we lived through the changes. In the family in which I grew up, even with my grandparents: the husband worked and the wife stayed at home.” (BE_M_72_CRF1)

“Our time was like that, that you have to listen to your man, that the woman has to listen to her man, you know. They don't teach you this now, but they used to teach us that. (...) That is how they taught us. The parents teach the girls that they have to listen to their men.” (BG_F_47_CFR)

“My mother does the housework. My older sister used to help but not anymore. She doesn't live with us but even when she visits, she does nothing. My mother always tells her 'when are you going to become a good housewife? You have to learn to do the housework because you will have to be in charge of your own house'. It is her destination to get married and until last year she was put under a lot of pressure a lot and then my mother and her had a big argument. (...) My father is the chief at home, the pillar of the house. If he says we are going out for dinner today we will. We all have to follow, both boys and girls and we do not have a choice.” (CY_M_23_CFR)

“But, well, I think it's a matter of education, subtle things, of little details through which a woman's obligation to perform certain tasks is created. And the enjoyment, the benefits for men related to not doing them. And at the same time the necessity or the obligation that other tasks be done by men.” (ES_M_43_LEI)

“And in terms of the society that I grew up in, I grew up in a rural area, so, yeah... like the men would always have been the representative of the family (...). The kind of behaviour would be that with very notable exceptions it would always be men who socialise, they would come out at night. The women would... They (the men) would work during the day, the women would cook dinner for them. The women would look after the kids. They (the men) would bring home, they would arrange money, they would be the face of the family and at night they would go out, and they would go home and even when they were out they wouldn't even talk about their wives. (...) In terms of the society I grew up in, it was dominated by a male figure, you know, who was the face of the family.” (IE_M_21_SOC)

“I am upset that people still think on these levels, that they do not want to move further. They are not aware of the fact that some women do not want it and are placed only in domestic sphere simply because everyone expects them to do so, that this is the society’s pressure. So women do not have ideas about being single, without a partner, even without children. I do not know, as if a woman still does not have a choice. (...) They are educated in that way since their childhood. They are not aware of other possibilities. (...) Men do expect a wife to be at home.” (SK_F_23_SOC)

Some of the younger male respondents (who talk about their parents or grandparents) seem to aspire to reproduce the role models they had in the families they are going to constitute. Nevertheless, a slight cultural change on men’s view towards a balance in power between partners can be recognised.

“My family works along a rather traditional pattern, I guess. My father goes working and my mum takes care to maintain this cosiness, and to make the house clean and welcoming for us. And my father respects her a lot for that, I mean there is nothing unequal in this relationship, in that sense that he would say something like ‘I am the one who pays, so I decide’, definitely not. I think it’s quite balanced and... it seems to me that (this relationship) perfectly works and that’s just perfect.” (CZ_M_24_CFR)

“I mean that is about providing you to get yourself to a stage where you can provide for something like a family. But I wouldn’t say under the heading of a provider in... just because I’m providing money maybe, wouldn’t mean I was seeing myself as the provider, because even if my wife wasn’t working, I’d still see her as providing something else and don’t see that’s any less important than money. I think there’s two things needed. You know, and society might say: ‘oh, we need money, we need money!’, but I would say: ‘yeah, we need money to survive’, but we also need the attention of a mother and the details of a mother’s care, to keep the family organised and to develop the way we want.” (IE_M_21_CRF)

“Then at some moment I realise that it is not in my interests, but at the moment when I know that it has to be done, I will not stand aside and ask someone else to come and do it for me, because I... I think, I know that I am a ‘man’, I know how it’s done, and I will go, because my father has always done it like that. (...) My relationships with my father, I know, they’ve been exactly the same as he had with his father. And I know that to some extent I’ve always said that I don’t want to have such relationships with my children, but I know that they are going to be like that. (...) And the more I grow, the more mature I get, I feel that maybe back then these qualities of my father were unpleasant and irritating me, but these – these are the right qualities. These are the qualities every man should possess. And maybe our communication isn’t like among the best friends, but I don’t believe that I should... That I wouldn’t want such ‘best friend’ relationships with my son, I would like to serve as an example, I would like to... Because I have great respect for my father and I also would like [to have] such relationships with a child, when I am an example and you don’t have to ask twice why it is so.” (LV_M_24_ID1)

Other examples of cultural changes in gender roles in the private sphere may be found among some of the respondents, such as the inversion of gender roles, sharing household tasks, not having only the male breadwinner in the family, and women’s desire to break with the traditional roles in order to get (financial) independence (e.g. ES_F_53_CFR2). These issues are reported in detail in the section “Actors and factors that trigger or prevent change”.

“I like to be independent. In general, one must not depend on the man. Because you never know what may happen later on, when you have a family. You might not want to go on living with him... and if you want to survive on your own you must have some money set aside. And also having some kind of work to occupy yourself with is very important. You can’t be closed up in a house all the time. You have to get out sometime. Even if you are taking care of the children, you still need to get out, especially if you are an active person. You want something more. This is how I see it. ... In our society, okay, most people believe that ‘We don’t mind if a woman does not have a secure job, because... anyway she will find a husband who will take care of her needs.’ But, okay, my personal opinion is that a woman has to be independent.” (GR_F_20_EDU)



“The fact that our relationship works, it is also because – at least, that’s what I think – because he wants to participate to the household’s works, and also because he helps me from time to time – with domestic work, cleaning, doing washes, he would surely iron too, but he can’t do it (. . .). (He doesn’t think) like ‘the wife at home and the husband working’, but, of course, the man (but not always, though) earns more. . . He earns more than me, for instance, so he spends more time at work and I stay at home and if I am available, then I do what needs to be done and if he has time too, then he gives me a hand for domestic work. And I surely would like – and I think that he would like too – him to participate to the education of our children, to spend time with them, and not spending all his time at work as a pure breadwinner.” (CZ_F_24_EDU)

In all generational groups within the sample, there were respondents who emphasised that it is culturally valued to have a male descendent in the family⁶². The reasons that support this societal expectation can be summed up as follows: continuing the surname of the family, maintaining the patriarchal descent line, working and continuing the family business, inheriting family properties, and helping in taking care of the family (especially of the female members). However, this cultural preference might have some consequences for the individual himself and to others that surround him (as also mentioned in the section “Effects of gender stereotypes”).

“The fact to be the eldest son in a family of Italian origin, and also the first grandson of my Italian grandparents, the parents of my father, I was carrying all the hopes. . . I was supposed to be the one who would maintain the line of descent, the one who would assume the workload, who would be able to take charge of my sisters if they could not live on their own, so. . . There was this kind of pressure, yes.” (FR_M_51_CFR2)

The male surname of the family appears to be an important cultural issue that is directly related with the male descendent of a family. In most European countries, children are given their father’s surname. This rule might explain the perceived importance of having

a male descendent. Another important fact about male surnames is that when a woman gets married she can have the possibility to also hold her husband’s surname. However, as presented below, some female respondents of the younger age groups questioned this tradition that continues to relegate women’s identity to that of the men of the family (her father or her husband).

“And as they said in some of my university classes [the respondent is studying psychology] the woman gets first the surname of her father and then the surname of her husband. This means she is transferred. (. . .) It is as if she has no identity of her own.” (CY_F_23_CFR)

“In the Netherlands, both partners are entitled to choose the name they will use after they get married: either they can keep their own name, or they can choose the name of the partner or both names and decide in what order they should be put. And I remember that we were going to get married and we went to the city hall to arrange it and automatically the clerk gave me a paper to fill in about the name issue. (. . .) I did fill in the form and I don’t know if I specifically asked at the time: ‘why doesn’t he get this form?’ I can image that I must have said something, but not something like: ‘He should get this’ (. . .) [I chose to have] My own name first and the name of my partner behind it. (. . .) I don’t think this is unfair, but I do think that it is a sure sign that the law might have changed but that the standard mentality it still that women will change their name and men don’t. . . So legally there is a choice, it is not automatically arranged. But the clerk at the desk still thinks that: ‘the women will change her name and the husband doesn’t.’ So in that sense, it wasn’t that I felt discriminated against, but I was just surprised that automatically it was presumed that only I would use the option.” (NL_F_32_SOC)

The stories also indicate that the type of relationship/marriage that is regarded as ‘typical’ is a heterosexual one. It seems to be the most socially accepted form for people to get involved intimately with each other and it seems to be conveyed that it ought to be the man to initiate the relationship (e.g. PL_M_56_SOC).

62 Examples available in the database include CY_F_23_CFR; MT_M_40_CFR2; BE_F_52_CFR2; NL_M_54_CFR; NL_F_69_HEA; UK_F_46_EDU; IE_F_61_CFR.

“The process of relationships: starting relationships, going on dates. It is always, well not always, but generally the man is meant to instigate that. So, approach a woman and ask her on a date, pay the meal, all of that. (...) There are some ideas of women approaching men. (...) It is not expected I suppose.” (UK_M_21_CFR)

The older respondents mentioned in some of their stories the tradition of ‘arranged marriages’ that used to happen and the ‘dowries’ women needed to have in order to be able to get married⁶³. There is no recent evidence in the database of these traditions in the 27 Member States.

“Because then girls [of a certain social standing] had to have their piano, their French. And my parents gave me all these things with all their heart, with generosity. But I was not interested in these things. In essence, bourgeois families decorated their daughters ... like a bull you prepare for sacrifice ... dressed with ribbons. You understand? They wanted me to make, until the end this is what they wanted, for me to make a good bourgeois wedding, to find a good husband, at that time a good husband would have been many years older than I. He would have had to be a financially made man. Preferably a doctor, or something, and then I would have been a lady, a lady in society, I would have had my servants, my nannies, these things.” (GR_F_90_EDU)

“Don’t forget that in those days the girl needed to have a dowry. The dowry by force you had to buy it.” (MT_F_64_CFR1)

Regarding the labour market, in some of the Eastern European countries, women and men were obliged to work and there were childcare facilities provided by the State. On the other hand, in some of the southern European countries, women usually did not do any paid labour (especially reported by female respondents of the older age group). Nowadays it seems to be commonly accepted that women work outside the house.

Nevertheless, household tasks remain seen as mainly women’s duty. In spite of the fact that generally both women and men work, salaries still differ: men earn more than women as pointed out by a respondent below and confirmed by Eurostat⁶⁴ figures.

“There has been an evolution essentially not derived from men’s understanding about the relevance of equality between men and women, but women’s relevance was essentially dictated, in the majority of societies and ours [Portuguese society], I suppose, it was imposed for economic reasons. (...) In the fifties/sixties, for me, there were reasons, economical reasons, that lead women to the labour market. (...) Their role in the household economy turned to be important because of the salary they brought, in spite of the fact of being a lower salary, as the salary inequalities always existed and still exist today. It became increasingly indispensable. So, to their job as a worker, the mother’s work was added, aggravated by men’s general mentality that thought that household tasks, children’s education, etc., etc., always were women’s duties, because it was what they saw in their parents, grandparents, and so on, when they looked to the past. They saw that and they didn’t question themselves because they thought that it was what ‘good women’ do and, many times, they still had the nerve of saying that women didn’t work, because if even they were at home working and had a dozen of children to raise, the husband would have the nerve to say that she didn’t work.” (PT_M_60_CFR)

11.2. Education and professions

The older respondents stated that single-sex education was common back when they were studying. In addition, some respondents mentioned that the schools for girls were usually run by nuns.

“There was a nunnery school and that was mixed in pre-school but from primary school onwards, it was sex segregated: boys on one side of the village and girls on the other side of the village.” (BE_M_72_CRF1)

63 Further evidence can be found in CY_F_72_EDU, GR_M_73_CFR1.

64 <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&plugin=1&language=en&pcode=tsiem040>



Both female and male older respondents highlighted that sometimes women were prevented to study (because it was not obligatory) or going further in their studies, because of the traditional expectation for women to get married, to have children and to stay at home to take care of household tasks. On the other hand, men were stimulated (and sometimes obliged) to study so that they could have a proper job to be able to get married and to provide for their families⁶⁵.

“Mostly girls in rural families used to be deprived of their education. My mother for example went up to the third grade and her older sister did not go to school at all. The family wanted the girl to do the housework...”
(CY_M_66_SOC)

“The working conditions for a naval officer or sailor, in the merchant marine, hardly let us imagine that it would be a job suited for women. At least for a simple reason: we had to spend months at sea, and very few days ashore, in family. Of course, you have to put this into the context of the 1960s, when women were the core of the family unit and therefore, nobody would have expect... a woman to spend months at sea. (...) They certainly do have the same skills as men, but I think it was mostly a family issue, and I didn't see much evolution in this profession. I spent some time on a liner, and there were some women, but it was just because there was a nursery, things like this, and they were mostly restricted to rather subordinate roles.”
(FR_M_71_PRO1)

As elsewhere discussed in this report (see chapter on ‘Dimensions of gender stereotypes’ and ‘Effects of gender stereotypes’), certain studies, professions and positions are traditionally stronger associated with one sex than with the other.

“Well, when people ask me, especially boys, what degree I am studying, I tend to say nursing, law, education. So I have a game with my friends. When I go out with other girls and a boy asks us what we are studying... And of course the other girls study medicine, mathematics and I study political science, which are not studies that they consider traditional [for girls].” (ES_F_21_EDU)

“It turns out that I work in an area that is quite feminine – human resources. It's pretty funny because when you look at the reality of things, basically up to a certain level it's still feminine and when you go up the hierarchy, well, it becomes very masculine.”
(BE_M_39_PRO1)

11.3. Law and legislation

Besides the ‘unwritten codes of conduct’, there are also the laws and legislations that rule a society and that may play a role in perpetuating gender stereotypes. Legislations about intimate citizenship (such as parental leave, divorce, and domestic violence) and about the conscription for military service were the most common issues that were referred to by the respondents.

Intimate citizenship

Parental leave varies across the countries in the European Union. The common trend that could be identified across the interviews was that women are the ones who usually stay at home with the new-borns. This tendency reinforces the gender stereotype of ‘women as caregivers’. Legislation may entail discrimination through the distinction between maternity and paternity leaves, whereby women have more legal advantages (period of time and payment) than men when a child is born (in some countries, like Cyprus, it happens that the parental leave is unpaid, so men usually do not take it). However, this legal distinction may have negative consequences for women in what employment is concerned, when they are denied the same job opportunities as men due to the fact that they may get pregnant and take on the maternity leave.

65 Evidences can be found in NL_F_69_EDU, PT_F_70_EDU.

“For me, staying at home was a kind of value, and I see it as an advantage that I had this opportunity. Yet I know there are still some stereotypes at stake, which make it more usual for mothers than fathers to opt for this possibility.” (CZ_F_48_PRO)

“I remember we were entitled to take a three-day-leave for delivery. (...) I was an employee when my first child was born. So I took those three days, and after those three days, I went back to work. (...) And I know it was really very, very strange and that not having this daily, permanent relationship with my children, made me feel a bit strange.” (FR_M_51_CFR1)

In what divorce is concerned, according to Eurostat (2010)⁶⁶, the countries that have higher rates of divorce are Belgium, Lithuania and the Czech Republic. A relevant fact to mention is that divorce is still not legal in all the 27 Member States. For example, in Malta, a referendum took place in May 2011 concerning the legalisation of divorce (the majority of the electorates voted for ‘yes’). The rather recent legalisation of divorce in Ireland (1997) was a significant event that was mentioned by several Irish respondents due to its implications at a personal and societal level (that were already mentioned elsewhere in this report).

“You know, there wasn’t divorce in Ireland! (...) I was part of the campaign to change the constitution to make it possible. (...) [Before divorce was legal,] unless there was a significant property involved, the law wouldn’t get involved. (...) There was something called a ‘judicial separation’ which was a splitting of the property, but only if it was significant... After a period my mother left and then the children that were still living there left together, set out and that would have been 1968 or ‘69 and that was very strange, that was unheard of.” (IE_M_60_VIO)

“There was plenty of marital breakdown before we had divorce. So the marital breakdown would have been rooted in the social changes that have been started in the ‘60, I would have no doubt about that. There was marital breakdown before that, but it was silent and secret and shameful and horrible. Right, and there was no support. No, well, there could be very little support. It was really, really hard, because the problem didn’t even have a name even. (...) The divorce law... I mean, there has not been a rush to courts for divorce AND it is mostly women who initiate the legal divorce. So, and the people were saying: ‘Women are foolish!’ (...) One of the anti-campaigners said: ‘You know women voting for the change to allow divorce, change in the constitution to allow divorce, it’s a bit like turkeys voting for Christmas!’” (IE_F_61_CFR2)

Also concerning the issue of divorce, there is a common perception expressed by some of the respondents about children’s custody being given to mothers, which may be discriminating for fathers. A slight change may be occurring, as recognised below, since shared custodies are perceived as becoming more common.

“She is very maternal, she has always been, and she really wanted the custody, it was unimaginable to leave us to a man, even to our father.” (FR_F_22_CFR)

“In Austria, fathers do have visiting rights, but don’t have the right that their children live with them. And if one brings this up, most of the time, people will not listen. Society just does not want to know about it... (...) I went to a lawyer and asked him what my chances were because a German had gone to the European Human Rights Court in order to get custody of his child. All the German courts had refused to do so, so he went to Strasbourg and Strasbourg ruled in his favour. I would assume that this would lead to a gradual adaptation of the German jurisprudence and also in Austria. But these are lengthy processes. In any case, my lawyer told me that I would not stand a chance at the moment. (...) If judges interpret the law that fathers have lesser rights, then it will be so. We are of course talking about custody. How much can fathers actually intervene in choosing the school? Custody is not so much about who has the children for how long. (...) I cannot really take important decisions regarding the children.” (AT_M_47_SOC)



“My older son has a child, and he is not living with his partner anymore. It noticed it was going wrong and now they are separated. They have a 9-year-old boy, and they share custody (...). That’s not usual in the Czech Republic, but it starts to be quite frequent, because before... It changed because under communism, the custody was automatically granted to the mother, only occasionally to the father. But this shared custody is getting now more frequent. I don’t see it as something ideal, but that’s still better than, let’s say, when the father visits his children twice a month (...). (My son) is very satisfied with this, he wouldn’t have accepted to be deprived of his child. He wants to have him, he loves him, so he did not even consider another option. But ... that’s a good deal, kind of, basically a week for each parent, sometimes a bit differently.” (CZ_F_63_CFR2)

Another issue that should be taken into account is the legislation that deals with domestic violence. Some respondents acknowledge the existence of domestic violence and its legislation, although there is a perception that society tends to underestimate the problem and, consequently, victims may tend to restrain themselves from calling upon the laws that can protect them.

“Since, the legislation has changed, and we now have the possibility to expel the perpetrator from the house. But since here, nothing is really done in accordance with the Law or the rules, it happens quite often that the perpetrator returns to his place and becomes even more violent with his partner, because she dared to let him being expelled and she dared... to defend herself. It was sometimes really difficult for me to follow these individual fates. (...) Sometimes, the worse was the reaction of the Police, when (the victim) called the Police and policemen negotiated with the perpetrator, maintaining a kind of “man-to-man” dialogue (...). Of course, there was no record for this kind of intervention, because for the policeman, having a man-to-man talk was enough.” (CZ_F_38_EDU)

“The acts are frightening, as the behaviour of people is, men and women, etc., etc., etc. When they know that the male neighbour (because exceptionally it will be the woman to abuse the man, but it also exists) is abusing [a woman] in every possible way, verbal, physical, even getting to death, and people shrug. They say it’s not their business, and they resign from any responsibility and attempt of modifying this situation.” (PT_M_60_VIO)

“In fact, as the years went by, some situations occurred, few, in my point of view for what it’s possible to happen. There are some situations in which we [respondent is talking in her professional capacity as a nurse] even ask between the lines if there is the possibility of... but no. These situations are all disguised as falls, different traumas. People don’t assume it and they go there [to the hospital] because of the discomfort and pain they feel, instead of pressing charges. Perhaps I’ve seen many more women, although in a small number, but comparing male and female, there were more women confirming that they were victims of domestic violence than men. Maybe, in my whole professional career, I had, that I remember, two men that, with difficulty and shame, confirmed they were victims of domestic violence and that they wanted to press charges. (...) But, in fact, there is that fear of shame and it’s more for men than for women.” (PT_F_33_VIO)

Military Service

As described in the section that deals with ‘Masculinities’, military service is defined as a predominantly male context. In some European countries, it is obligatory by law for men to do military service (for example in Austria, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany and Greece). Some male respondents, especially the nationals of countries in which the period of compulsory military service is longer, perceive it as a disadvantage for men and also discriminating for them in comparison with women, because they believe that women may have the opportunity to develop their skills and/or enter the labour market earlier than they will be able to do. Evidence is provided below.

“The army in Cyprus is a discrimination against men and it is a fact that men have to serve the army when they turn 18, for two years. I do not oppose to the purpose of the army, but this means that we lose 2 years of our life! The girls in our class go straight to study and they graduate by the time we start our second year. They can be out in the job market sooner and this means that girls my age now have a job! And a job that I could have tried to get is already taken. This takes you back 2 years.” (CY_M_23_CFR)

“The army in Cyprus is a negative discrimination not because women do not go. It is a problem of professional career advancement afterwards. This means that I, as a teacher, finished university two years after a woman teacher at my age. Therefore, she has two years of extra experience and in future promotions she is in a better position. (...) Now a law passed that gives men 2 extra points for promotions for the 2 years they served in the army and this mitigates the injustice in a great deal. Because now they count 102 points instead of 100 for the promotion and this makes a big difference.” (CY_M_46_PRO)

“There was a certain generational gap. It was known that the first year students are sent to the army at the same time as girls stay peacefully at the university. Clearly very frustrating, very clearly discriminating. (...) in this sense a hurting experience that clearly two years of life were lost. When I came back, others are far away, having their own private lives or whatever.” (EE_M_42_SOC)

11.4. Literature and media

Literature and media also play a role in (re)producing gender stereotypes and in promoting gender inequality. As pointed out by some respondents, women’s and men’s traditional depictions in literature and in advertisements may shape the way they perceive women’s and men’s roles in society and may reinforce some inequalities that exist. Evidence supporting these findings can be found in NL_F_69_SOC (as quoted in the chapter dealing with ‘...’) and in the quote below.

“The best illustration is the one stating that after I don’t know how many beers all women seem beautiful and there are commercials staking on this type of humor. There’s a foreign ad stating that the more a man drinks, the more beautiful a woman seems to him; we (the Romanians) have the one for (Beer brand) of course with the man who wakes up in the morning, handcuffed to the bed and finds some incredible large women’s underwear in bed next to him, without being able to remember anything else from the previous night, but he’s stuck there, because he’s handcuffed.” (RO_M_44_SOC)

11.5. Religion

Religion seems to have a strong cultural influence within the society. For instance, in Cyprus (Christian Orthodox Church) and Luxembourg (Catholic Church), religion is reported by some as very powerful and also connected to politics.

“In Cyprus it is important because people believe. They go to church and the church has an important part even in politics, state affairs and has great power. Church is everywhere. The first president of Cyprus was the Archbishop! (...) Due to the important role of our church in the society, if we start dividing men and women then this inequality is transferred to the society. And this is why in the work place men are advanced easier.” (CY_F_23_SOC)

Malta also appears to have a strong religious background (Roman Catholic Church). In spite of the fact that the power that religion may hold in this country was not directly expressed/recognised by the respondents, it was noticeable from their stories and also in the older respondents’ expressions, as exemplified further down.

“But with the help of God, with my mother’s care (I want to mention that my mother was very careful), we managed to pay for the van. I want to say we never had any debt. And with the help of God we got married. (...) My mother never had any money in the bank. She could not afford it, even if she wanted to. But thank God, we always had enough for our needs.” (MT_F_64_CFR1)



“Well because I also believed that what I was doing, I was doing that with God’s help because alone I can’t do anything.” (MT_M_61_CFR)

Several respondents appear to consider the church as (very) conservative and repressive, supporting gender inequality by the depictions of women and men in the holy books, by the moral values it imposes, and also by the roles women and men may occupy within the institution.

“For example, we say that Jesus preached about gender equality. He cut Adam’s side and created Eva, so that they would be equal. He had not created her from the head to be superior or from the feet to be inferior. Nevertheless, we see things that show inequality in church. For example, men sit in front and women at the back of the church. Women cannot enter the holy room. I just can’t understand it; and when I asked my religious studies teacher at school to tell me why, she could not provide an answer. Or, for example, a woman is considered dirty and cannot receive the Holy Communion or worship the icons (...) when she has her period. What does that mean? It is normal to have that!” (CY_F_23_SOC)

“Church is a big issue. I feel that our religion is discriminating. They encourage discrimination between men and women. It is simple: only men can enter the holy place, in the Old Testament, the woman persuaded the man to eat the apple, to commit the sin and this shows me that women are nasty and cunning and when I was little I could not understand why women were so cunning and evil! (...) Also another issue is the fact that women must sit behind men so that men are not teased. The rituals are all performed by boys. All these for a very religious person, for a child or for my family are important and they promote discrimination.” (CY_M_23_CFR)

“There was a prayer in the Jewish religion in which men gave thanks to the Almighty God for having created them man; while women were supposed to pray that they were resigned to having been created woman.” (HU_M_64_SOC)

“I do have the impression that, in general, the church has had a very negative impact. You see, the more orthodox a church is, the more it will attach itself to stories that it takes for granted, and if you... So, you see the same thing with Muslims. I studied the Koran a bit and immediately you see similarities with the bible. Of course you are dealing with an old book as well and if you take those stories literally, then where does that lead to? Nowhere of course! This is something that you have much less with the protestants: the role of authority. That is much less important. So everybody decides for himself or herself what they want. So I don’t think in that sense religion is... It definitely does not play a good role!” (NL_M_67_SOC2)

Other concrete examples about women’s and men’s occupations within religion were provided by some of the respondents, such as: women cannot be priests (e.g. CY_F_28_PRO), people who usually help the priest during the church ceremony tend to be boys/men⁶⁷ and people who usually tended to give religious courses were women (e.g. LU_M_72_ID).

“My brother was an altar boy and he was very active. He was the prefect. In F (place/name of parish), we also had a vice-prefect of the altar boys. (...) they were having fun, playing. (...) they were always being taken to visit places and they even met the Pope. (...) I always wished to be a member of a group and I used to see the altar boys, I used to like them, I really liked the idea of altar boys. Every year they had a feast (vestiture) which was really sweet; something which I really wished to participate in but could not. (...) in those days there were no female altar boys. I mean, nowadays, in some parishes there are. In our parish, there still aren’t. I know it’s not something... Obviously not something very important, but (...) I think that when for the first time in your life there is something which you cannot do because you are a female or even the other way round... You start, I think, you start... That for the first time, I started questioning sort of (...) that I looked at the church as an institution and I asked sort of “but why?” As a girl, I did not feel rebellious or anything like that but I genuinely asked the question “why are priests men and why are altar boys men?” (MT_F_22_SOC)

67 Examples available in the database include BE_F_52_SOC; LU_M_72_ID; MT_F_22_SOC.

11.6. Political ideologies and local customs

Gender roles may be influenced and assimilated by people who lived or are still living within specific contexts. Moreover, the influence that some events (in history) may exert in a society can maintain/propagate traditions through times and over generations. Some of these traditions may play an important role in promoting or blocking gender equality, because they still may be inculcated in people's minds.

Regarding political ideologies that had/have an influence in the way people perceive the roles of women and men, respondents named some regimes such as the *Franco-ism* in Spain and Communism in several Eastern European countries (e.g. Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, and Romania). Such regimes across Europe were regarded as based on different norms and values and are sometimes also related to religion (e.g. Catholic Church). The 'typical' roles of women and men could strongly differ depending on the regime ideologies. For instance, in some Eastern European countries there was an equality basis between women and men in what work and professional career choice are concerned (both women and men were supposed to work); conversely, in other countries like Portugal and Spain, women did not have access to a career and the majority of them could not work.

“But here in Spain we have a backwardness related to Franco-ism, the culture of repression, Catholicism, Christianity, which still influences many families.” (ES_M_21_CFR)

“There are still some surviving old habits from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, according to which the position of women stem from the position of their husbands. (...) I think that under communism, equal opportunities between men and women were advocated through the opportunity for women to exert the same professions as men (...) and I think it was more respected. (...) [In the Czech Republic], a large proportion of women do consider that actually, working or not is a matter of choice. Because under the communist regime, working was COMPULSORY. No other option was left, then. My mother could not opt to stay at home with us.” (CZ_F_38_PRO1)

Some specific national customs and language expressions related to gender also came up in the interviews. The following fragments present some examples of traditional customs that may have an effect on the perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

“According to the codes women would not smoke. There were no women smoking in the society and other women would make sure of that, not men.” (CY_M_66_SOC)

“I hear stories from the village of my father where they still refer to the man as “adropos” (means ‘human’) while the woman is an animal? The woman is not human?” (CY_F_23_SOC)

“In a traditional culture there are parts of the chicken which are eaten and are supposed to be eaten by men, which women give up, while there are marked, ‘inferior’ parts eaten by women. So for example the wings, the back and the buttocks are for women, while the thighs and the breast are for men.” (HU_M_57_CFR1)

“When I menstruated for the first time... (...) I remember my mother had explained the facts of life related to this episode and she told me ‘now this evening we will go and visit grandma, grandpa’. And I remember we did go and there were all her siblings and she informed them that I had menstruated and they congratulated me. And they told me to be careful and so on and as a girl of that age, the thing that I remember most - apart from the fact that some things I did not understand because I was still young - but I felt that she had invaded my privacy as a girl. (...) Let’s take my brother and all the men: when they experienced puberty, no one in any way got to know and it passed by without anyone noticing it.” (MT_F_35_CFR)



“But in our maternity hospitals it is the doctor giving birth. (...) In Romania you are giving birth with doctor what’s-his-name. He is giving birth, he is giving birth to (name of respondent). I mean the verb ‘to give birth’ undergoes some... It is the doctor giving birth and you are... your baby is just being born.” (RO_F_30_HEA)

“And at one point, his (the groom’s) best friend suggested that we kidnap her, because this is always done with the bride and as it hadn’t happened until midnight or so we were all... We were four of five guys I think... We suggested this to [groom’s name] and he said ‘Ok, why not?! Let’s do it!’ (...) I don’t remember exactly, but I know the bride was kidnapped at the same time.” (RO_M_36_LEI)

“(Me and my partner) we like travelling and we try to spend about one month each year in some remote place, fully disconnected. The last time it was in Turkey, for three weeks. Of course we had read before that since people are Muslim over there, it was sometimes difficult, let’s say problematic, for women to enter some buildings, and that (men) were more straightforward with European women. It was recommended not to leave girls alone and also to wear a ring, even for people who are not engaged. I bought some from a bric-a-brac trader in Berlin, where we transited, and we used to wear it in Turkey and it worked perfectly. (...) We went to some places where local women used to go out fully covered with a veil, and of course, my girlfriend was dressed in quite a Western style, or better said, Czech style: short skirts and t-shirts, and of course it called the attention (...). And although nobody told us anything, it was interesting to notice that those women looked at us very aggressively. I expected that it would be worse with men, those Turks, but on the contrary, they behaved very correctly. Basically they didn’t even notice our presence and most of the signs of disapproval came from those women’s wrapped-faces.” (CZ_M_24_LEI)

11.7. Cultural collisions/shocks

Both female and male respondents pointed out some differences and inequalities between cultures and criticised other cultures. Muslim and Roma cultures and traditions were depicted in a number of interviews as marked by more traditional and stricter gender roles and based on an unequal relation of power.

“She was a friend of mine, during my B.A. A Muslim friend who opted for wearing the headscarf when she came of age. And at the beginning, when I arrived in this degree of... Arabic and English, I had very little experience of people with a migrant background. (...) My point of view about the headscarf was pretty clear-cut, in that sense that, for me, there is no reason to hide. And the veil, the headscarf, implies to hide from men’s view. (...) MEN should be educated in a way, because there is no reason for them to represent a threat for women. We are made to live together – we live together – men don’t have to hide from women so for me, it’s kind of... We shouldn’t have to wear a head scarf or whatever to hide from people who are complementary to us.” (FR_F_22_SOC)

“Among children [conflicts] may arise, because we have gypsy and non-gypsy clients, and they do not like each other very much. They somehow tolerate each other, but sometimes, conflicts arise. (...) Among those gypsy children, that’s completely different. Their families still work upon the traditional model, with the mother, this kind of matriarchy, and doesn’t change very much, I would say (...). And I have clients, a couple who visits the club already for a long time, two gypsy teenagers, kind of and this guy is really aggressive, he gets angry quite often, and he punches his partner. And we talk about this. At least, the good point is that when we talk together, he is eager to change this, and he knows that he has a problem. But at the same time, those gypsy girls often consider that it’s normal that men use to beat women, and that slapping a girl is not such a big thing.” (CZ_F_24_PRO1)

“In their case [gypsies], women are, women are only for making children and for taking care of the children, they do not even count them as people. And they transfer this attitude to other women, who are not their women, they transfer it, and for them there is no point to explain to a woman, as she would not understand. For gypsies, I think, this is a standard situation, but it was funny, because I don’t communicate that much with such people and I could not understand the situation initially.” (BG_M_27_SOC)

“We had one Serb at a seminar who found this seminar an absolute nightmare. He was this typical Belgrade Serb. A total macho and I thought every day that he would lose it. And everybody else was expecting the same and was ready to run. (...) All those extreme English things with liberality and equality among men and women, which even to be it is sort of insanity, but to him ... this total formalisation of relationships. He totally lost it the last evening, for New Year’s. (...) They forbade him to come to the seminar. They didn’t send him home, though, while it was nearly finished, but he totally lost it, started to curse and threatened someone. And the final thing was... He said that a women and men can’t be friends, if they spend a lot of time together this means only one thing. And these English lobbies got mad because of his opinion. They asked him whether he hasn’t got any girlfriends and he said he has but that they are not the same as his male friends. That they are just acquaintances. And this totally got on the other side’s nerves, how he segregates people. And they opposed him and he totally lost it. They said how to approach a woman that you would like to have a romantic relationship with. And he said that this is something you know after two or five minutes, you see if she is pleased and relaxed in your company. They said no, no, this can also mean friendship. It is not necessarily that. And the thing was that you have to ask. You have to ask a woman before kissing her if you can kiss her. That you have to, not that you can.” (SI_M_26_LEI)



11.8. Urban versus rural contexts

Both rural and urban context were mentioned in a quite balanced way in the interviews. There is no significant difference in the number of times they were coded by the researchers. Remarks by respondents concerning rural contexts were usually related to more restrictive and constraining conditions in people's lives. This may suggest that gender stereotypes are more pronounced in rural settings, where a stricter patriarchal structure of families and society may persist. This section will try to describe and summarise the main aspects found.

Rural areas are described, both by younger and older generations and both by female and male respondents, as more traditional, conservative, even oppressive, and with limited/restricted options and opportunities. Generally, rural settings are associated to agricultural/farming economies, in which, sometimes, the whole family may be expected to work in the fields to contribute to the family means of subsistence.⁶⁸

Contrary wise, urban contexts tend to be perceived as liberating (from rural settings), more open-minded and allowing access to a wide range of choices and opportunities.

“I believe that people who live in villages are more conservative whereas in the city they are more open-minded.” (CY_M_66_SOC)

“I grew up in the countryside, I didn't know what opportunities existed” (HU_F_42_EDU)

“I have already mentioned a bit that through my relatives, or through my work I have many times been among people living in the countryside, in a rural environment and among Romani people as well and obviously different cultural norms and value systems operated there, in a certain sense, older, more archaic, if you like, more traditional. (...) I've always had the impression that urban intellectual culture or habits preceded these communities' habits by one or two, or even three decades.” (HU_M_57_SOC2)

Gender roles divisions/distinctions are perceived as more marked in rural areas. The respondents' descriptions depict women as mainly responsible for household tasks and for taking care of the children (they do not have a paid job and do not work outside the house), whereas men are usually portrayed as the ones who do the hard work, as breadwinners (farmers) and as the representatives of the family⁶⁹.

“When I was little, towards the end of primary school, and secondary school, since my parents were farmers, many times if not all times, the two boys of the family (my brother and I) had to go to the fields and help them. My sister used to stay at home and prepare lunch for all the workers at the fields including the family. (...) In the fields one needs physical strength. Girls could not pick up heavy potato cases or oranges. The family preferred that the girl would stay at home and prepare the necessary for alimentation.” (CY_M_46_CFR)

“For instance, in the rural areas most hard tasks are performed by men. Although women end up doing many hard jobs too, regarding whatever business is about in this rural area, in all families they take care of the household to a greater extent. House matters are performed by them, it's an ancestral thing, educational, transferred through some values from one generation to the other. It's still alive, and I think it will be for a long time (...).” (ES_M_43_LEI)

68 Examples available in the database include LU_F_57_CFR, CY_M_66_SOC.

69 This description confirms what can be found in existing literature about farming families in Europe (Brandth, 2002; Price, 2010)

In addition, women and men in rural areas are said to socialise separately in their leisure time: women are essentially depicted as ‘gossipers’, and men would meet at night in pubs (while the women stay at home).

“In social relations in general. In the fact that... it still happens. It happened to me in my wife’s social context, in a rural area. I went to a family celebration and suddenly, before the lunch started, men moved to one side and asked you to join them, as a man. It’s like this. Otherwise they start mocking you and... You are requested to join them as a man. You must stay on this side of the family house patio. Women are on the other side with children. I still experience this kind of things when there is a family celebration.” (ES_M_43_LEI)

“[In the city] They were much more appreciated both at work and even those who were housewives they said ‘at home women are working anyway’ while in my village there was this cliché, the woman who wakes up in the morning, cleans her 5 metres home and then sits outside the door and starts gossiping the whole day long, they were not all the same, for sure, but most of them as their husbands were farm workers and they were housewives” (IT_F_62_CFR2)

“I grew up in a rural area, so, yeah... like the men would always have been the representative of the family like say, my local bar I grew up in, you very rarely see women socialising with men. (...) The kind of behaviour would be that with very notable exceptions it would always be men who socialise, they would come out at night. The women would... They [the men] would work during the day, the women would cook diner for them. The women would look after the kids. They [the men] would bring home, they would arrange money, they would be the face of the family and at night they would go out and they would go home and even when they were out they wouldn’t even talk about their wives.” (IE_M_21_SOC)

about their grandparents)⁷⁰. Women’s financial dependence of their husbands and the tradition of male property ownership (whereby sons inherit lands from their fathers) were also referred to as contributing to and perpetuating women’s inferior position.

“I hear stories from the village of my father where they still refer to the man as “adropos” [human] while the woman is an animal? The woman is not human? (...) And usually in villages the woman is at home... You won’t see a woman working in the village. She takes over the house, cooking, children, and if they have fields she helps her husband. (...) My grandmother after my grandfather died (for whom my sisters and I were sins), I saw her turning into a different person! She used to be oppressed and as soon as my grandfather died I saw a grandmother with confidence, she took over the house, she knew how to deal with her money, she rediscovered her identity and she was fairer than my grandfather. (...) I remember one time she was trying to say something and he said: ‘Silence you, men are talking now.’ My grandfather was traditional.” (CY_F_23_SOC)

“My parents both came from a rural background and being on the farm where my mother had grown up with her parents and... I was very young, I was 4 or 5 or 6 or 7, younger than 7 I think, you know, but at least 4, and I remember playing in the field and knowing somehow that this property would be left to my brother. In fact it never was. But it was just this idea of inheritance and it being my brother (...) I’m not sure if women were being seen as being entitled to own that kind of property. Or expected to operate it for example (...). It didn’t cross my mind that it was odd, that that was leaving me out. That were not the terms in which it was in my consciousness. It was just a bit as if I was processing information that I had had from the adult world, but I didn’t relate it to myself.” (IE_F_61_CRF1)

Another relevant aspect that was associated by the respondents with rural contexts is the subordination of women. This was reported mostly by the older generation of respondents (or by younger generations talking

70 While scholars who studied gender relations in farming families in Europe have pointed out the importance of considering the (unequal) gender relations as power relations in the light of traditional practices in European family farms (Whatmore, 1991), changes have also been recognised in gender relations between farmers and their spouses which are explained against the backdrop of the changing rural economy (Blanc & MacKinnon, 1990).



“Yes, I must say that I grew up in a very remote area of Austria, a very traditional, conservative one. And it was common there that a girl could not sit at the table with the adults, in particular when the table was dominated by men. That meant practically that a girl was not allowed to take a seat at the table or to ask questions, which would have been the worst, because it would have meant she wanted to participate. Yes, but I did it nevertheless quite often when the peasants met, perhaps in a local restaurant, if I happened to be there with my Dad, but also alone nearby, because my relatives also owned such a restaurant, and there I was always asked to get up and help do the dishes, that is to say, to do some housework in order to help my aunt and not sit around idly.” (AT_F_35_ID)

In general, criticism and social sanctions for gender role violations are more striking in rural contexts than in urban contexts and they may take different forms in each setting.

“In my family, for my town, she would be considered a prostitute. (laughter) Whereas the boy is a womaniser. They do the same thing but it is not the same for the society. (...) In a town they act as if they don't care but when I talk with my friends the comments and criticism that I hear about girls who act like this are incredible! In a village people would say it to one's face.” (CY_M_23_CFR)

“I immediately remembered, the story within a story, that, well indeed, when I am at home in (name village2), we live in a village, and so it happened that when we were slaughtering a pig, or the neighbour's pig, I started doing the dishes by myself without a word. Seeing that, my own friends, my buddies, for example at the house where we were slaughtering the pig, started teasing me like 'look, (name interviewee) is doing the dishes, it is women who do dishes.’” (HU_M_57_SOC1)

Some respondents accounted of experiences whereby they felt as if people in rural areas are not 'allowed' to live their lives the way they chose, because other villagers tend to exercise social control on one's behaviour and interfere in others' lives. As a result, people may conclude that living in urban areas offers the advantage of more freedom and they may seek for a life there.

“I don't know if it applies even today, as it was a long time ago, maybe 1992 or 1993 when I divorced but at that time women were blamed for divorce. They were supposed to stay even in a difficult marriage. I was really surprised about that. Maybe it was more in the countryside ... (...) In the countryside, you are supposed to stay in a marriage if you have married. Maybe the milieu there is so small and introverted that people know each other's business. In the city here, it is quite different, we are able to live here quite anonymously.” (FI_F_70_CFR)

“It wasn't ambiguous. The fact of going to (name of the city) was my salvation, as I wouldn't have lived in such a small village, I didn't like it. (...) 'if I shall live this way I would go crazy, I cannot accept it', it was not in my mind, and I had it very clear, then when I arrived to (name of the city) I began living, I said: 'ooh, finally we arrived to a place where there is life, there's movement here!', I like life when you have something to do, otherwise I feel bad, so when I arrived I said 'this is the right place for me, and I do not regret anything, any doubts.’” (IT_F_62_CFR2)

Moreover, experiences that are unusual and unexpected according to one's sex/gender may be more easily noticed, sanctioned and commented on in rural regions (or by people who come from these settings).

“Suddenly, I was made fun of in the village, and people said: ‘Oh, your mother is going to school again, hahaha’. Of course I did not understand at first; I went home confused because I always had thought that school was something positive. At first I thought that they were making fun of me because the car with which my mother picked me up had a sign that said ‘driving school’. But then I told people at home and noticed immediately that something was not right. And then my mother explained to me laughingly, that she was the first woman in the village – she was in her thirties – who was taking her driver’s licence. Of course, all the men had – at least almost all of them – a driver’s licence because they drove the cars. And she wanted to be more independent and have her own car. And then I thought, why do people make fun of women or find it odd or why don’t they all have a driver’s licence like men have. I thought everybody drives a car.” (DE_F_50_ID)

“I live in a small town, right, and if there is a construction site, I don’t know if you have been in such a situation, but what happens is that if a beautiful girl passes by, workers whistle at her or they say ‘you are so beautiful’ or something of this sort.” (HU_F_20_VIO1)

“What comes to mind is that different types of people start bothering you in the streets with different types of intensity. That happened quite a lot when I was younger, was that there were these stupid sexualised remarks, but also other types of remarks. But I must say... I come from the countryside where that does not happen that often. But when I moved to B. and then to K. such things started to happen quite frequently.” (DE_F_33_VIO)

“Last summer, we were travelling to the seaside, and there were people from the whole country, not from the big cities, but from the countryside. And during the whole trip in the train, these people were strongly intrigued by the fact that I am with short hair and could not hide their amazement. (...) They were a mother with three daughters, they were all with long hair, they were not dressed in a “wow” way, but were very feminine. While I was wearing a t-shirt that could be worn by both a girl and a boy, all my clothes were like that, and on top of that, I had short hair. And this seemed to shock them the most.” (BG_F_25_ID)

“I assume that some parents are afraid that ... I don’t know ... that girls will be robbed ... I don’t know ... who knows, raped, abused, I don’t know, sexually abused, and other things. And I think that some things are more susceptible to happen to boys and others to girls. I think that more easily, at least in my opinion, a cell phone pacific rob approach, that kind of things, without too much violence, is more susceptible to happen to boys, while girls, for example, are more susceptible to be sexually abused, obviously. I don’t remember any male friend of mine complaining that: ‘I was sexually accosted.’ (...) I remember that almost none of my female friends used the bus; someone would take them to school, fathers, mothers, even motorists, or they used the school bus and they had to wait for it. But where public buses are concerned I remember perfectly that, once more, only my male friends used it, and this is a thing that I believe that it is a perfectly quotidian thing and there is this distinction that still I understand, but girls will also be exposed to the same dangers. (...) I mean that usually girls are more fragile than us and maybe there are some situations, like a robbery or an approach like this, I don’t know, that are more significant for a girl than for a boy, in a way that I can think that if a male friend of mine was robbed, he would be able to use the bus again, and if it was a girl, it would be more difficult to her to do it again so easily before an approach like this.” (PT_M_26_LEI)

“According to the codes, women would not smoke. There were no women smoking in the society and other women would make sure of that, not men. (...) I remember one time another villager brought his wife at the village, who was raised in Egypt and she used to smoke. And this was the hot gossip in the village for all the other women who could not accept it.” (CY_M_66_SOC)

The stories suggest that harassment of and violence against women may be more prevalent in urban contexts. Different types of violence may occur and this can lead to the (over)protection of girls/women (as laid out also in the section that deals with “Effects of stereotypes”).

12. Concluding observations





Some general observations, based on the analysis of the stories, are formulated in the first section of this chapter. The conclusive section contains some suggestions for further action that can be undertaken based on the present work.

Gender stereotypes are omnipresent and have insidious effects on people's lives

An important observation in relation to the collected stories is how omnipresent gender stereotypes appear to be and how impactful they are on people's lives, in a wide range of spheres. While respondents were asked to offer (at least) two stories, many spontaneously came up with more than two accounts about gender issues. The effects of stereotypes that are reported are overwhelmingly negative, mostly for women but also for men, clearly showing how gender stereotypes cause a lot of (unnecessary) suffering.

The collection of stories reveals the insidiousness of gender stereotypes, with seemingly innocent and often well-intended acts or behaviours being loaded with stereotypes and having far-reaching effects.

People are not always aware of gender stereotypes

Despite the fact that gender stereotypes are omnipresent, respondents are not always aware that something is a stereotype and may neglect the societal influence in their decisions and stress the personal choice they have made. As an example, some women might explain the decision to stop working as being a conscious and personal choice and neglect the societal pressure that may be exercised on mothers to stay at home in order to raise their children. While most decisions are probably based on a combination of personal convictions and societal factors, this is not always perceived or experienced as such.

It is interesting to note that some respondents only became aware of something being a stereotype while giving the interview. This means that the perspective from which people look onto their lives can rather easily change and labels like 'stereotypical' can move in and out of focus and consciousness through reflective processes triggered by such events as an interview for a research project. However, the fact that not everybody is consciously aware of the existence of stereotypes in their lives does not mean that they do not act, react, sanction, according to the mechanisms triggered by the stereotypes.

Sanctions for violating gender norms

Various forms of sanctions for the violation of gender norms (both by girls/women and by boys/men) can be recognised in the stories.

Associations with and suggestions of homosexuality occur when individuals' appearance and behaviour does not meet the gender norms (e.g. in the sport being practiced, in the choice of clothes, in the attention and care for one's body).

Devaluation through identification with the stereotype is recognised. This can happen for example when one's competences are questioned or in situations when skills attributed to one sex are to be recognised in someone from the other sex. Aspired positions or occupations can be denied, notably when the skills needed for these are assumed to those generally attributed to the opposite sex.

Unequal standards are applied for women and for men, notably in those situations where women have to prove themselves harder to receive the same credit as men or where they are denied aspects of freedom which boys/men are granted. The latter happens notably when it is believed that girls' or women's physical integrity or honour might be at stake.

Gender stereotypes function as mechanisms

The stories illustrate how the different dimensions of gender stereotypes (in relation to personality traits, appearance, behaviour, societal roles) are interrelated and function as mechanisms: stereotypical assumptions in one respect will affect individual's situation in another respect. For example, assumed 'natural' skills will affect educational choices and will steer a person to a predestined role in society, like 'housewife'. Moreover, associations and coherence between the dimensions are generally expected: when a person 'fits' the stereotype for one dimension, it tends to be assumed that the other dimensions will also match the stereotype.

Gender roles and perceptions have changed over the years

There is broad agreement among the respondents in the study that gender roles and perceptions have changed over the last decades. Change is recognised in a slow, but gradual move towards the dual earner/dual carer model; a greater respect for women; the coming to existence of different 'masculinity models'; perceptions of a current identity crisis for (some) men.

It is at the same time noted however that not all change that is occurring in Europe is towards more liberal models. Moreover, the stories reflect 'degrees' of change: some change is only superficial (for example when husbands help their wife to wash the dishes), other changes are much more profound. The profound changes are always linked to a re-distribution of the underlying power structures.

In the background of most stereotypes, there is a power struggle

The concept of power is intimately interwoven in all aspects of stereotypes and is also often mentioned by the respondents. The gradual changing of gender stereotypes over the years seems to go hand in hand with a constant (re-)negotiation of power.

This power struggle is clearly felt in the couple relationships. There are no clear-cut answers as to what is the 'ideal situation' when it comes to a more equal power balance in a relationship and many text fragments describe a struggle rather than a new concept or re-definition of relationships.

Crisis in the male identity model

This research gave a specific focus on the male identity. The respondents' stories reveal a changing model of masculinity. Whereas it used to be seen (simply put) as the power base of the family and society, the emergence of multiple masculinities can now be discerned. These 'new' masculinities are currently still under construction. Both male and female respondents seem to have quite negative attitudes towards the classical masculine model, which is regarded as mainly suppressive and aggressive, but it is not clear how this power imbalance can be structurally changed without pushing masculine identity itself into a severe crisis.

The important influence of primary socialisation

Based on the collected stories, it seems that the conscious and unconscious choices made by parents hugely affect their children's lives: how these children develop their own identity, their options in life, how they engage in and develop relationships. A very high number of respondents in the study have pointed to their upbringing as a major explanatory factor for their own gender perceptions: either because they have adopted similar views of the ones transmitted to them by their parents or because they have consciously rejected these models and adopted different ones.

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Annex 1. Glossary of Topical Domains





EDUCATION:

“Education” is the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge (in the broadest sense) from one generation to another. Education implies learning/ the acquisition of knowledge, values, myths and beliefs. This can be done for a particular purpose such as acquiring a degree or getting ready for a profession. Stories about education or educational choices will invariably be related to a certain age, interest of the person/child/ adolescent or a relative interested in the education of the person in question. Choices will be made as to what kind of education is desired or can be afforded. Issues like talent, capabilities, precedents in the family and interests will play a role, so will sex and gender. In order to understand the reasons for choices of this kind, it is important to code text and quotes that relate to these concepts.

PROFESSIONAL CAREER:

A professional career denotes the engagement in a given activity as a source of livelihood. It includes the choice for a particular career path. The occupation or the job, which can be part-time or full-time, usually (but not necessarily), comes with a salary or an income. Issues of reconciliation between family and professional life will necessarily be part of some narratives as well as their relationship to retirement. Other issues that are of relevance in this domain are competencies/capabilities/ capacities, selection/promotion, etc.

CHILDHOOD, FAMILY LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS:

This domain encompasses the process of growing up and the relationships and interactions that people experience by living together and or being related by family ties. Some important elements are marriage, divorce pregnancy, child rearing, support and caring. The table of topical keywords lists the whole range of experiences that are related to childhood, family life and relationships. This domain may provide a myriad of stories on stereotypical gender perceptions and their consequences since gender roles may be particularly pronounced in the context of family and relationships. Like in all other domains, it would be very interesting to find out how and why individuals ‘escaped’ or broke with the stereotypical gender perceptions.

HEALTH:

Health denotes the state of complete physical and mental well-being. In our case, however, the domain captures the whole range of health and illness including mental and physical wellness/illnesses. We are interested in the way health and illnesses are managed by individuals, doctors and patients, social services, etc., that is stories that speak of stereotypical gender perceptions

and their consequences as perceived by the individual person. Stories may include issues of access to information, doctors, medicine, treatments or therapies. Issues of reproductive health may feature prominently in some narratives and may provide interesting materials as to stereotypical gender perceptions in that domain.

LEISURE:

Leisure is generally referred to as the freedom from time consuming duties and responsibilities. Leisure time may be spent on a hobby such as a sport, with friends, going out or going on vacation among others. Experience shows that some – not negligible – leisure time is spent in a gender segregated way. There may be some interesting stories to be discovered where people have broken such gender stereotypical segregation.

VIOLENCE:

Violence denotes using a physical force against another person inflicting pain and hurt if not worse. But pain and hurt can also be the result of psychological violence. The person who inflicts violence is referred to as the offender or perpetrator while the person who suffers the violence is generally referred to as the victim. There are many forms of sexual violence including rape, genital mutilation, harassment, intimation, sexual abuse and incest among others. And there are of course other forms of violence, which are not sexual in nature, but may still have a strong gender dimension.

IDENTITY:

The domain ‘identity’ attempts to capture the many facets that make a person a person. Included here are names, age, nationalities, ethnicities, language, appearance/beauty, character, behaviour, etc. among others. Some people may find that their sense of identity depends on one or only a few of those aspects. Narratives that describe how identity may have been modelled by stereotypical gender perceptions and what impact that had on a person’s life can be particularly interesting specifically, if such narrative includes a change

SOCIETAL CONTEXT:

This domain encompasses the geographical, legal and situational circumstances, which may shape/influence stereotypical gender perceptions. It is perhaps the broadest domain also invoking the role of media, access and use of the Internet as well as belief systems such as sexism, racism and homophobia. In addition, it probes into services provided by the state such as care facilities, but also patterns of consumption, social class and economic means.

Annex 2. Topical codes: overview and number of coded fragments





Education	Professional career	Childhood, family life and relationships	Health	Leisure	Violence	Identity	Societal context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ School (311) ▪ Degree / diploma (239) ▪ Orientation (234) ▪ Choice (306) ▪ Mixed or single sex education (81) ▪ Prejudice (396) ▪ Different treatment (531) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Occupation / job (614) ▪ Part-time / full-time (60) ▪ Leave from work (79) ▪ (un-)paid work (116) ▪ Career path (311) ▪ Salary / Income / allowance (259) ▪ Family business (72) ▪ Leadership (187) ▪ Labour conditions (199) ▪ Reconciliation private / prof. (271) ▪ Retirement (26) ▪ Selection / promotion (217) ▪ Competences (366) ▪ Ambition (212) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Childhood (164) ▪ Family life (573) ▪ Relationships (436) ▪ Marriage/co-habitation (275) ▪ Divorce/break-up (165) ▪ Adoption (6) ▪ Pregnancy (95) ▪ Single / couple (41) ▪ Responsibility (198) ▪ Caring / carer / care giver (254) ▪ Support (238) ▪ Roles / role pattern (1216) ▪ Motherhood (322) ▪ Fatherhood (299) ▪ Adultery (27) ▪ Housewife/houseman (118) ▪ Breadwinner (183) ▪ Single parent (74) ▪ Extended family (65) ▪ Love (95) ▪ Conflict (290) ▪ Childcare (232) ▪ Upbringing (401) ▪ Household assistance (84) ▪ Power (190) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Illness (77) ▪ Health (47) ▪ Mental health (38) ▪ Medicine (6) ▪ Treatment / therapy (38) ▪ HIV / AIDS (0) ▪ Sexually transmitted diseases (1) ▪ Access (12) ▪ Social service providers (3) ▪ Healthcare (28) ▪ Healthcare providers (71) ▪ Contraception (3) ▪ Reproductive health (49) ▪ Abortion (2) ▪ Body (106) ▪ Disability (47) ▪ Physical strength (96) ▪ Sexuality (92) ▪ (Giving) birth (43) ▪ Death (57) ▪ Ageing (23) ▪ Eating disorder (19) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leisure time (145) ▪ Friends (176) ▪ Hobby (45) ▪ Sports (186) ▪ Activity (78) ▪ Constraints (141) ▪ Social networks (35) ▪ Holidays (36) ▪ Going out (139) ▪ Toys (29) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sexual violence (36) ▪ Physical violence (other than sexual) (85) ▪ Psychological violence (79) ▪ Intra-couple (38) ▪ Victim (52) ▪ Offender (59) ▪ Abuse (93) ▪ Crime (15) ▪ Sex industry (21) ▪ War (27) ▪ Trauma(s) (35) ▪ Accident (12) ▪ Survivor (7) ▪ Self-mutilation (0) ▪ Suicide (3) ▪ Harassment (45) ▪ Sex object (70) ▪ Safety (64) ▪ (Unwanted) sex propositions (37) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Religion (62) ▪ Ethnicity (47) ▪ Name / naming (37) ▪ Sexual orientation (94) ▪ Sexual identity (236) ▪ Privacy (55) ▪ Role model (373) ▪ Community (121) ▪ Age (250) ▪ Nationality (44) ▪ Language (19) ▪ Virtual identity (1) ▪ Peer group (198) ▪ Ownership (19) ▪ Appearance / physical beauty (270) ▪ Behaviour (529) ▪ Character (195) ▪ Strength / strong (163) ▪ Weak(-ness) (125) ▪ Femininity (725) ▪ Masculinity (737) ▪ Plastic surgery (16) ▪ Well-being (71) ▪ Fulfilment (138) ▪ (Un-)happiness (190) ▪ (Not) questioning / (no) doubts (247) ▪ (In-)dependence (284) ▪ Body image (99) ▪ Resistance (169) ▪ Deprivation (75) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Urban context (94) ▪ Rural context (116) ▪ Court / justice / legal rights (59) ▪ Care facilities (20) ▪ Mobility (26) ▪ Media (51) ▪ Poverty (33) ▪ Social exclusion (21) ▪ Homophobia (54) ▪ Migration (37) ▪ Sexism (414) ▪ Legal / illegal (24) ▪ Internet / cyber-world (17) ▪ Consumption (41) ▪ House / housing (43) ▪ Church (45) ▪ Patriarchy / matriarchy (167) ▪ Feminism / feminist (123) ▪ Military service / army (53) ▪ Political activities (82) ▪ Discrimination (411) ▪ Sanctions (38) ▪ Ideological convictions (155)

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