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## Gender Stereotyping in the United States and Spain

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigated sex-trait stereotypes across two nations, the United States and Spain. Past research by Williams & Best (1990) examined gender-stereotyping within the same countries with children, and a more recent study by Best & Williams (D. L. Best, personal communication, November 25, 1991) surveyed 100 students from each of 25 countries. Male characteristics were found to be more socially desirable than those identified as characteristic of women and were rated higher by both males and females. Although the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) has been widely used in the United States in measuring traits considered either masculine or feminine, few studies have examined gender-stereotyping between these countries using the BSRI. 751 male and female students from the United States and Spain enrolled in introductory psychology classes completed surveys. The surveys described a female (Joan, Juana) or a male (John, Juan), and students rated the individual on the 60 BSRI adjectives. For the feminine items, females were rated higher than males on many of the adjectives in the United States, but females were rated similar to males in Spain. On the masculine items, males were rated higher than females on only six items and this effect was consistent for both the United States and Spain. This suggested that in the United States females were perceived as having masculine traits but males were not perceived as having feminine traits. This was not true in Spain where it appeared there was greater androgyny. Future research might focus on why there is an increase in androgyny for females but not for males in the United States.*

### INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotyping and the attributing of sex-role characteristics to individuals plays a significant part in the way people are evaluated. Past research has indicated that there was a strong relationship between sex-role perceptions and an individual's socialization by parents and culture (Block, 1973). The present study examined sex-trait stereotypes in the United States and Spain.

Early studies in Michigan (Miller & Swanson, 1958) and Norway (BrunGulbrandsen, 1958) found mothers pressuring daughters to conform to societal norms and pressuring sons to be "manly" (Hartley, 1959). Barry, Bacon, and Child (1957) found that in non-literate cultures, there was a widespread pattern of different socializations for girls than boys, i.e., girls were pressured to be nurturing, obedient, and responsible; boys were pressured to be self-reliant and to strive for achievement. Further studies in Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, England, and the United States revealed a preference in males for "masculine adjectives" as self-descriptors; and females evidenced a preference for "female adjectives" as self-descriptors (Block, 1973).

In order to further identify similarities and differences across countries, Williams and Best (1990) studied male and female European and American students using the 300 item Adjective Check List (ACL) (Gough & Heilbrun, 1965, 1980). A similar study had been completed in France, Germany, and Norway (Williams et al., 1979). In both studies, students were asked to rate the 300 adjectives on the basis of whether they were associated more frequently with women than with men, men than with women, or not differentially associated. The results indicated a strong cross-national similarity in the traits differentially ascribed to men and women. A variety of other methods have also been employed to determine sex stereotypes among university students in the United States and the Orient, Latin America, and Israel. Each of these studies have reported similar results (Williams & Best, 1990).

One explanation for the overwhelming similarity of results may be that similar cultures automatically produce similar results (Williams & Best, 1990), yet in a study which considered the distinctiveness of elements in similar countries, i.e., the United States, Ireland, and England, there was little evidence for cultural differences in sex stereotypes (Best et al., 1977).

Few studies are available to date which look specifically at gender-stereotyping within the two cultures examined in this study. However, Williams and Best (1990) included 5, 8, and 11 year old children from Spain and the United States in their multinational study. The study incorporated subjects from 24 countries and the data was analyzed in the same manner as that for adults, i.e., the children's data was separated by sex of subject. The intent of the study was to identify the method by which children learn to associate traits with women and men. The Sex Stereotype Measure II (SSM II) was employed which constructed stories for children that represented the traits contained in the adult stereotyped definitions (Williams et al., 1975; Williams & Best, 1990). The results identified different ages at which children became aware of stereotyped traits, with older children being more stereotypical in their responses than either of the other two groups. The study supported the view of male and female stereotypes that was found in the adult study.

More recently, D. L. Best (personal communication, November 25, 1991), looked at cross-cultural, gender-related research through the study of self-concepts such as ideal and actual self. Subjects were male and female university students in 14 countries, two of which were the United States and Spain. The ideal self was described as the "person you would like to be," and the actual self was described as the person "you really are." The Adjective Check List (ACL) of 300 adjectives was employed and results identified a desire by both gender groups "to be 'more masculine' than they thought they were." Scores for male and female stereotypes in the United States reflected a greater knowledge by

American children- than Spanish children of traits associated with males (U.S., 10.3; Spain, 8.4). Traits associated with females were less well-known in Spain than in the United States (Spain, 9.0; U.S., 9.1), and cross-culturally, children in the United States were more aware of male-female stereotyped traits than children of Spain.

Despite the comprehensive cross-cultural work of Best and Williams, there remains very little research from Spain using the BSRI, an instrument that has been used extensively in examining stereotypes in the United States. The BSRI looks at traits that are considered either instrumental or expressive for the masculine or feminine role (Bem, 1974), an important ingredient when determining the similarities or differences in sex trait characteristics between countries such as the United States and Spain.

Although similarity has been found in past research (Best et al., 1977; Williams et al., 1979; Williams & Best, 1990; D. L. Best, personal communication, November 25, 1991), recent personal observations by the author as a student in Spain, have led to the hypothesis that gender-stereotyping would occur across nations, however, the differences in characteristics associated with females and males would be smaller (less stereotypic) in Spain than in the United States.

## METHOD

### *Subjects*

A total of 751 subjects participated in the study which included 386 students enrolled in introductory psychology classes offered at Missouri Southern State College (MSSC), a mid-western school of approximately 6,000 students and 365 students enrolled in first year psychology classes offered at the University of Madrid, a large, European school of approximately 105,000 students. MSSC is located in Joplin, Missouri, a city of 41,100 people with a greater metropolitan area of 135,000. The University of Madrid is located in Madrid, Spain, a city of approximately 3,500,000 people.

### *Design*

A 2 x 2 x 2 factorial design was employed, with all factors manipulated between subjects. The independent variables and levels were gender of the person to be rated (John, Juan; Joan, Juana), country (United States, Spain), and gender of the rater (male, female).

### *Materials*

A survey was developed with two variations. Surveys varied as to the gender of the person to be met (Male - John, Juan; Female - Joan, Juana) and country (United States, Spain). Each survey was translated into the vernacular of the subject (English, Spanish).

The surveys began with a short paragraph asking the subject to "Imagine that you are going to meet an individual named John. You are meeting him for the first time. The only thing you know about him is that he is an adult male from your country. Please rate the extent to which you believe the following characteristics describe him." These instructions were similar to those used by Gerber (1989) and Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, and Broverman (1968).

A Likert scale of 1 - 7 was employed to rate each of sixty (60) adjectives, with 1 being "Almost Never" and 7 being "Almost Always." The adjectives employed were reproduced from the Bem (1974) study and were arranged in a male, female, neutral, male, female, neutral method in both the English and Spanish versions of the survey.

Williams and Best (1990) suggested that when translating into a different language, safeguards be utilized to ensure accuracy. Thus, the sixty adjectives were compared to the Spanish translation of the Adjective Check List (Gough & Heilbrun, 1965, 1980; Bem, 1974) produced in the Williams and Best (1990) study. Several items from the Bem (1974) study differed and were translated into Spanish by two instructors at MSSC. In order to cross-check the translations, two native speakers were asked to read the Spanish versions and translate them into English (Williams &

Best, 1990). Due to the extensive work by Williams and Best, it was not deemed necessary to create a new item pool of male and female associated descriptors.

A cover page was included which described the procedure, gave an example, asked for the participant's personal demographics, i.e., gender, age, nationality, college major, classification (freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, other), and marital status, and thanked each participant for their cooperation.

### *Procedure*

In the United States, surveys were distributed to 11 introductory psychology classes by the experimenter with approximately 35-40 students per class. One gender (Joan or John) per class was rated in an effort to minimize the possibility of participants noticing a difference in individual surveys within the classroom.

Students were told to read the attached cover sheet and to fill out the survey carefully. The experimenter asked students to keep silent throughout the time of the experiment and stated that questions would be answered following the completion of the surveys.

Upon collection of the completed surveys, the experimenter answered questions, debriefed students, and thanked them for their time. Each session took a maximum of fifteen minutes.

In Spain, a similar method was employed with surveys distributed to 2 introductory psychology classes by the Assistant Lecturer and his personnel with approximately 200-250 students per class.

### **Results**

A three-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) for Gender (female, male), Ratee (Joan/Juana, John/Juan), and Nation (United States, Spain) was completed separately for feminine, masculine, and neutral descriptors.

For the feminine descriptors, the MANOVA (Pillai's test) revealed an overall Ratee effect,  $F(20, 702) = 52, p < .001$ . The univariate analyses indicated stereotyping for only 2 of the 20 adjectives

across both countries: soft-spoken  $F(1,721) = 8.8$ ,  $MSe = 2.1$ ,  $p < .003$  and compassionate  $F(1,721) = 18.4$ ,  $MS_e = 1.9$ ,  $p < .001$ . For soft-spoken, Joan/Juana ( $M = 4.09$ ) was rated higher than John/Juan ( $M = 3.78$ ), and the same pattern was found in compassionate with Joan/Juana ( $M = 4.67$ ) once again rated higher than John/Juan ( $M = 4.22$ ).

The MANOVA demonstrated an overall 2-way interaction of Ratee and Nation  $F(20, 702) = 3.3$ ,  $p < .001$ . The univariate analyses indicated twelve interactions of Ratee and Nation. Overall the differences were larger in the United States than in Spain and were confirmed by analysis of simple effects which revealed that Joan was rated considerably higher than John in the United States, but Juan and Juana were rated very similarly in Spain. The form of this pattern was consistent for affectionate, eager to soothe hurt feelings, sensitive to the needs of others, gentle, loves children, tender, warm, understanding, feminine, loyal, and cheerful (see Table 1). A different pattern was demonstrated for sympathetic, with Joan rated higher than John in the United States and Juan rated higher than Juana in Spain.

Table 1

Feminine Descriptor: Ratee and Nation Interactions and Simple Effects

Descriptor	Nation	Joan/ Juana	John/ Juan	Interaction E	Simple Effect p
Affectionate	U.S.	4.47	3.89	7.7	<.001
	Spain	4.85	4.82		
Eager to soothe hurt feelings	U.S.	4.68	3.89	8.8	<.001
	Spain	4.5e	4.46		
Sensitive to the needs of others	U.S.	4.86	4.25	11.4	<.001
	Spain	4.73	4.85		
Gentle	U.S.	4.74	3.99	8.6	<.001
	Spain	4.83	4.81		
Loves Children	U.S.	5.06	4.32	7.1	<.001
	Spain	5.11	5.04		
Tender	U.S.	4.90	3.78	33.2	<.001
	Spain	4.84	4.97		
Warm	U.S.	5.06	4.36	13.6	<.001
	Spain	5.10	5.12		
Understanding	U.S.	5.07	4.54	8.8	<.001
	Spain	5.17	5.22		
Feminine	U.S.	5.40	2.02	6.5	<.001
	Spain	4.95	2.06		
Loyal	U.S.	5.10	4.86	7.2	<.09*
	Spain	5.18	5.40		
Cheerful	U.S.	4.80	4.60	4.1	<.09*
	Spain	5.20	5.28		
Sympathetic	U.S.	4.89	4.14	24.0	<.001
	Spain	5.31	5.61		

\*Approaches significance Range for df (1, 357) - (1, 383) for all effects

The MANOVA (Pillais test) on the masculine descriptors revealed an overall Ratee effect,  $F(20, 700) = 49$ ,  $p < .001$ . The univariate analyses indicated significant stereotyping for 6 out of the 20 adjectives. John/Juan was rated higher than Joan/Juana on each of the items (see Table 2).

Table 2

Masculine Descriptor: Ratee Effect

Descriptor	Joan/ Juana	John/ Juan	F	p
Athletic	3.63	4.66	83.2	<.001
Independent	4.88	5.18	9.5	<.002
Willing to take a stand	4.93	5.18	7.2	<.01
Competitive	4.50	4.91	13.3	<.001
Strong personality	4.82	5.14	8.8	<.001
Willing to take risks	4.37	4.81	16.6	<.001

Range for df (1, 355) - (1, 383)

The MANOVA on the interaction of Ratee and Nation demonstrated an overall effect,  $F(20, 700) = 2.1$ ,  $p < .003$  (see Table 3). There were two interactions of Ratee and Nation indicated by the univariate analyses. John ( $M = 4.57$ ) was rated higher on aggressive than Joan ( $M = 4.03$ ) in the United States, but Juan and Juana ( $M = 2.72$ ,  $M = 2.90$ ) were rated similarly in Spain. The pattern was similar for dominant, with John ( $M = 4.63$ ) rated higher than Joan ( $M = 3.85$ ) and Juan and Juana rated similarly ( $M = 3.57$ ,  $M = 3.47$ ).

Table 3

Masculine Descriptor: Ratee and Nation Interactions and Simple Effects

Descriptor	Nation	Joan/ Juana	John/ Juan	Interaction F	Simple effect p
Aggressive	U.S.	4.03	4.57	9.6	<.001
	Spain	2.90	2.72		
Dominant	U.S.	3.85	4.63	8.2	<.001
	Spain	3.47	3.57		

Range for df (1, 362) - (1, 383) for all effects

## DISCUSSION

The overall pattern indicated that 22 adjectives (14 feminine and 8 masculine) identified stereotyping of Joan and John in the United States but only eight adjectives (two feminine and six masculine) indicated stereotyping of Juana and Juan in Spain.

For feminine descriptors, the interactions for the gender rated and nation strongly suggest stereotyping in the United States but not in Spain. Joan is seen as affectionate, gentle, warm, understanding, feminine, sympathetic, loves children, is eager to soothe hurt feelings, is tender, cheerful, loyal, and sensitive to the needs of others -- but not John. In Spain, however, Juana and Juan are both seen as having these characteristics.

For the masculine descriptors, only six produced the typical pattern wherein John/Juan is rated higher than Joan/Juana. It is important to note that these results were consistent across both countries. This suggests that Joan is perceived as possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics, as do Juan and Juana. John, however, is perceived as possessing only masculine characteristics.

The virtual "swimming-up-stream" ethic in order to attain androgyny that Block (1973) referred to seems to have spawned a more consistent attitude in Spain than in the United States toward viewing males and females with equity. Yet, Bergen and Williams (1991), in their research on stereotyping in the United States, concluded that there has been little qualitative change in the stereotyping of males and females over the past 16 years. In contrast, Scher (1984) reported that attitudes in the United States had changed toward greater androgyny. In studies by Griffin and Babbitt (1989, 1992, in preparation), the androgyny discussed by Scher was seen only in females, with females becoming more masculine but males not becoming more feminine. The inconsistencies suggested in these studies and the present study demonstrate the necessity for further research into the patterns of socialization (Carter & Levy, 1988; Eccles et al., 1990; Hoffman & Hurst, 1990; Unger & Crawford, 1992) for both males and

females in order to obtain a greater understanding of the directional trend of gender stereotyping.

The two gender rated and nation interactions for the masculine descriptors suggest that in the United States John is perceived as more aggressive and dominant than Joan; however, in Spain Juan and Juana are seen almost equally. The same pattern of greater equity for men and women in Spain is demonstrated on these two descriptors and is another indication of the lack of agreement across nations on the differentiation between males and females (Williams & Best, 1990; D. L. Best, personal communication, November 25, 1991). Best et al (1977) found that the appropriateness of behaviors and activities for both men and women was consistent with ideas of sex-trait stereotypes. Swimm, Borgida, Maruyama, and Myers (1989), Gerber (1989), and Triandis et al (1982) have all identified a bias, prejudice, or favorability in the direction of masculine traits. With masculine traits having been shown to be rated more positively than feminine traits (Best, Williams, & Briggs, 1980; Broverman, Vogel, Broverman, Clarkson, & Rosenkrantz, 1972; Williams & Best, 1990; D. L. Best, personal communication, November 25, 1991), the study by Kandido-Jaksic (1985) becomes an important link in that it demonstrates that the masculine behavior model, being culturally more accepted and valued, may motivate females to accept masculine behaviors and attitudes, with males being less accepting of feminine ones. Thus, the movement on the masculine side may suggest a greater societal acceptance of cross-stereotypic traits or androgyny on the part of females but not on the part of males. If, in fact, this is the case, Joan has society's approval for exhibiting both masculine and feminine behaviors. On the other hand, John is caught in societal-flux. He can manifest only those traits that society deems appropriate and acceptable; those qualities that our society has labeled as "manly." Once again, it is suggested that research in the socialization patterns within and across cultures be continued (Triandis, 1989).

The use of the BSRI in the present study as strictly a measure of stereotyping, rather than a self-other measure, could account for some of the difference between this study and previous research. The ACL is often used as a self-other measure and was used by Williams and Best (1990) in this manner through measures of ego-states, affective meaning analyses, and psychological needs analyses, none of which were employed in the present study. The populations surveyed could account for some of the variance also. The student population from the University of Madrid, located in a large metropolitan area, may be more diverse than that of a small, mid-western college. Yet, the student body of MSSC includes foreign students, a variety of socioeconomic levels, ages, and college majors.

It is important to point out that while this study attempted to look at stereotyping across nations, the cross-cultural aspect is, perhaps, a misnomer. Both the United States and Spain have multifaceted cultures within each nation. As a melting-pot of various and numerous cultures, the United States offers a unique opportunity to study the distinctive cultures within the greater whole.

Future research needs to consider why there is an increase in androgyny for females but not for males in the United States and to consider the possible cultural influences working against increased expressivity in males and those supporting increased instrumentality in females.

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## Author Notes

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