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Gender-Role Stereotypes in the Bulgarian Family: Cross-Generational Transmission of Gender Attitudes

Manol Nikolov Manolov *, Ivan Kirilov Ivanov * and Velislava Atanasova Chavdarova *

Department of Psychology, University of Veliko Turnovo, Sveta Gora, 5003 Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria

* Correspondence: m.manolov@ts.uni-vt.bg (M.N.M.); i.k.ivanov@ts.uni-vt.bg (I.K.I.); v.chavdarova@ts.uni-vt.bg (V.A.C.)

Abstract: This article reports a representative quantitative and qualitative study covering the entire territory of Bulgaria, related to the analysis of stereotypes regarding male and female roles in the family and in the society. The results of the study indicate that the factor “age” is significant in relation to attitudes towards the social roles of men and women in the modern family, including in relation to domestic violence. The interpretation of the results enabled the formulation of justified conclusions related to changes in attitudes towards the roles of men and women in a dynamic way. The hypothesis was proven that the tensions between them can be more easily overcome through appropriate differentiated measures tailored to the different age groups.

Keywords: gender-role stereotypes; male–female roles; violence in the family; biological and social roles; patriarchal culture



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1. Introduction

Gender-role stereotypes (GRS) refer to general social expectations towards respondents of a certain gender. Gender-role stereotypes play an important role in the formation of families and the behavior of their members. These expectations are often intensified and sustained when the role of the spouses becomes real rather than imagined, as parents model them for their children, and children internalize them. On the other hand, attitudes have a cognitive and motivational function that affects how people perceive and engage with the world they live in [1]. The term “patriarchy” has been defined in different ways based on its usage in various academic fields such as sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies [2]. In the present paper, we understand by “patriarchy” the social and family structure in which men have more power than women, which is reflected in the structure of the wider society [3]. Patriarchal attitudes are thought to have a profound influence on individual behavior, from everyday family relationships to important life-changing political decisions. The patriarchal status is inherited through the male line by default. Patriarchal norms and attitudes affect people’s lifestyles and patriarchal beliefs, with the idea that men should dominate women [4]. However, the patriarchal norms also include concepts about intergenerational relationships, such as the dominance of older generations over younger generations and an emphasis on children’s submission and a familial preference for the eldest son [4]. Previous studies suggested that attitudes toward traditional gender roles or patriarchal norms may constrain or encourage individuals to make certain choices because of their gender, thereby affecting their cognitive function later in life [5].

Gender-role stereotypes influence people’s choices in several different ways [6]. The first way refers to the division of labor. Traditional gender roles dictate that women are responsible for housework and caregiving, while men are responsible for providing income and financial support for the family. This can lead to gender-based inequality, such as women working unpaid more often than men, which can affect their career prospects and financial independence. Evidence for this influence was provided by Gershuny and Robinson [7], who studied the division of labor in households. They found that women

were more likely to engage in household tasks and childcare, while men were more likely to engage in paid work. Contemporary research shows that women still do more housework and childcare than men, but the gap has narrowed over the past few decades [8]. Nevertheless, a boundary remains, and high traditional role values lead to lower family satisfaction.

Second, gender-role stereotypes can influence the development of gender identity. Children learn gender roles by observing and imitating the behavior of their parents and other adults. This can lead to internalizing stereotypes about what it means to be male or female, which can limit their choices in terms of activities, careers, and relationships. Martin and Ruble [9] found that children as young as two years can recognize gender stereotypes and show a preference for gender-typical toys and activities. This study provided evidence that gender-role stereotypes can influence children's gender identity development.

Third, gender-role stereotypes can affect the way parents interact with their children. For example, parents may praise and encourage their daughters to be polite and empathetic, while encouraging their sons to be aggressive and assertive. This can reinforce gender stereotypes and limit children's personal growth and development. A study conducted by Endendijk et al. [10] found that parents' gender-role attitudes were related to their interactions with their children. Specifically, mothers with more traditional gender-role attitudes were less likely to allow their sons to engage in feminine activities, while fathers with more traditional gender-role attitudes were less likely to allow their daughters to participate in male activities. This study provided evidence that gender-role stereotypes can influence parent-child interactions.

Apart from their fundamental influence on the individuals in the family and on the family as a social system, gender-role stereotypes have a significant impact on some negative phenomena. One such example is domestic violence. Several studies found that men who adhere to traditional gender roles are more likely to be perpetrators of domestic violence than men whose stereotypes are beyond patriarchal and traditional. Furthermore, men who hold these stereotypes are more likely to be perpetrators of mental and emotional abuse [11].

In some of his studies, Todor Panov [12] drew attention to the fact that in Bulgaria, until the Liberation (1878), there was a peculiar system of family education, which was passed down from generation to generation as part of the family tradition and preservation. It is called patriarchal family; it is part of the traditional morality of Bulgarians, as it usually includes simple and clear principles and rules that refer to hierarchy and order in the family. These unconditional principles regulate both the obligations of the family members according to their age and the place of gender in the family power order. During the cultural and historical transitions in Bulgaria within the last 150 years, the relationships in the family, i.e., the roles, expectations, goals, and interactions, have become more and more unclear and confused. Influences have been exerted by the different types of government—tyranny, monarchy, capitalism, authoritarianism, democracy, liberalism—and the culture of the interacting generations. In all circumstances, Bulgaria has shown not to give enough importance to education for gender equality, emotional intelligence, and relevant family values.

These studies directed our scientific interest in domestic violence to a broad examination of gender-role stereotypes and attitudes in the Bulgarian family. The main aim of this study was to find significant differences between different Bulgarian generations in gender-role stereotypes. The study was driven by the hypothesis that older generations hold more pronounced stereotypes, which would be related to patriarchal values. As a secondary hypothesis, this research assumed that there is a generational transmission that allocates patriarchal stereotypes in people over 50 years old to the 29–40-years-old generation. On the other hand, the younger groups (40–50 years old and those up to 28 years) would be less stereotyped, which could be both a transmission and a feature of the time. For formulating these hypotheses, we took into account that patriarchal gender-role stereotypes in the modern situation of reinforce conflict and crisis behaviors in today's Bulgarian family, including various types of domestic violence.

2. Materials and Methods

This research on gender-role stereotypes and attitudes was carried out in the period of April–June 2022 on the territory of Bulgaria. In total, 2800 respondents took part in it, comprising 100 people from each administrative area. The distribution of the respondents by category of religion and ethnicity was random. The participation of the respondents was voluntary and in connection with previously announced information about the conducted research. They were randomly distributed, living in district towns, small towns, and villages. For the purposes of the study, commonly used scales were employed, from which corresponding evidence for the phenomena was obtained. A questionnaire was constructed for the study of gender-role stereotypes (Appendix A).

In parallel with a quantitative study, in the same period (April–June 2022), focus groups were also conducted in pre-determined regions of the country, which covered several administrative areas determined based on folklore and culture. Different regions of Bulgaria have their unique folkloric traditions, which can also influence family beliefs. For example, families in the Rhodope Mountains may have different beliefs compared to those in the Danube River Valley. Koleva-Mineva, K., Tasevska, D., and Chavdarova, V. [13] built a “map” of different folkloric beliefs related to the family in different regions of Bulgaria. We used this map to form the focus groups¹. The Bulgarian country is small but is divided into 7 folkloric regions, each of which has its own authentic traditions. There are local holidays, preserved pagan rituals, and historical features that are characteristic only of certain regions. All this also applies to beliefs about the family. For example, in the Rhodope region, women perform hard physical work in the same way as men and also take care of the family and the children, as the population there comprises Turks, Christians, and Bulgarian Mohammedans. They also have religious–ethnic characteristics that are related to family behavior. Anton Strashimirov is an author who described the characteristics of Bulgarians by region. Currently, as is evident, regions with a more diverse ethnic population, demographic crisis, and poverty also show marked traditional beliefs. This description would be extremely complex if everything related to the more than 1300-year history of Bulgaria were covered. The areas selected for conducting the focus groups were based on these features.

The focus groups consisted of 10 people who met a certain age and/or territorial principle. Five focus groups were held in each specific area—one with persons over 55 years of age, one with students in upper secondary school (up to 18 years of age), one with residents of a regional town, one with residents of a small town, one mixed (by age and territory). The purpose of the focus groups was to concentrate and develop attitudes based on principled discussion. In this sense, the focus groups themselves represented the subject variable. A total of 700 persons participated in the focus groups. The sample was representative of Bulgaria.

The focus groups were conducted by a team of 8 researchers working in pairs. The research was conducted in the field in Sofia city, Pernik, Blagoevgrad, Smolyan, Montana, Sliven, Burgas, Silistra, Veliko Tarnovo, Shumen, Varna, Lovech, Pazardjik, Varna. The topics for discussion in the groups were previously organized by the researchers in the form of a semi-structured questionnaire to identify attitudes towards gender-role relationships in the family and their relationship with power in it (Appendix B). The focus groups were conducted in villages, small towns, and large cities. In addition to regional differences, the participants differed also by age. Two focus groups were conducted with persons over 50 years of age and with persons under 20 years of age. The other 3 were mixed. So, all regions included 5 focus groups (people from a village, people from a small town, people from a big city, people under 20 years old, and people over 50 years old) and an additional mixed group.

This article describes the dominant stereotypes related to gender-role relationships in the Bulgarian family in 2022. We performed a quantitative and qualitative comparative analysis between the generation of adolescents (16–28 years), young people (29–40 years), mature participants (41–50 years), and elderly (over 50 years) individuals.

The research used both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The quantitative approach used a questionnaire based on previous global research (Appendix A). The qualitative approach used focus groups from the indicated regions of Bulgaria. The study did not use an independent variable. The subject variable was the age category, and the dependent variable was the levels of gender-role stereotypes. The statistical analysis used descriptive statistics, ANOVA, cluster analysis, and decision trees analysis. The focus groups used semi-structured interviews.

3. Results

3.1. Quantitative Analysis

3.1.1. Descriptive Statistics

To describe the sample, descriptive statistics were used, whose results, reported in Table 1, were derived using frequency analysis. The sample was equally distributed in all 28 administrative regions of Bulgaria, consisting of 100 people from each. The mean age of the sample was 34.75 years. As for gender distribution it included 33.4% of males, 65.1% of females, and 1.4% of people who did not specify their gender.

Table 1. Distribution of the sample by age.

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Age	Up to 28	1071	38.9
	29–40	835	30.3
	40–50	544	19.8
	Over 50	302	11.0
	Total	2752	100.0

They were divided into the following four categories, which were defined depending on the peculiarities of their psychosocial development:

Adolescent and Youth Group:

- up to 28 years of age—this age category was set for two reasons. The first was that this age marks the beginning of a normative crisis. At approximately about 28 years of age, priorities and choices that have been made are being rethought. Personal and professional fulfillment is evaluated. The second reason was that this is the age associated with the first steps towards establishing a family.

Group of adults of different ages:

- 29–40 years is the age at which a family becomes established, and a couple moves from the role of partners to the role of parents.
- 41–50 years is the age that marks a new normative crisis, the growing up of the child(ren), the confirmation of the relationship between the partners.
- Over 50 years is the age that may mark an upcoming separation, the confirmation of the past experience.

Table 2 shows that the highest percentage of the sample, 38.9%, consisted of persons up to 28 years of age. It was followed by people up to 40 years old (30.3%), then by people 40–50 years old (19.8%), and finally by persons over 50 years of age (11% of the sample). The gender distribution was 33.4% male, 65.1% female, 1.4% unwilling to specify.

Table 2. Distribution of the sample by gender.

	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Gender	Male	936	33.4
	Female	1826	65.2
	Without	39	1.4
	Total	2801	100.0

3.1.2. Factor Analysis

Factor analysis was applied to the scale that examined gender-role stereotypes in our Bulgarian sample. Two reliable factors were obtained. This appeared to be the best decision regarding the scale. Both factors had high reliability, i.e., $r = 0.719$ and $r = 0.728$, respectively. Results are in Table 3.

Table 3. Factors ranked by weight.

	1	2
I believe that a woman's main role is to take care of the home and family.	0.817	
I think that the care of babies and the upbringing of children are the responsibility of the mother.	0.720	
It is a woman's responsibility to protect herself from unwanted pregnancy.	0.671	
I think the man should have the final say in decision making.	0.669	
I think spousal violence is a personal matter, and others should not interfere.	0.610	
I think there are times when a woman deserves to be spanked.		0.804
A woman must endure even violence to keep her family.		0.749
A man needs more than one sexual partner.		0.732
I find it shameful that a man should take care of the children and housework.		0.623
A woman has no right to challenge her husband's opinion and decisions.		0.578

FACTOR ONE—role and expected behavior of the woman in the family. Below are the items from the questionnaire related to the first factor regarding perceptions about the role and the expected behavior of women in the family.

2. I believe that a woman's main role is to take care of the home and family
9. I think that the care of babies and the upbringing of children are the responsibility of the mother
7. It is a woman's responsibility to protect herself from unwanted pregnancy
1. I think the man should have the final say in decision making
8. I think spousal violence is a personal matter and others should not interfere.

FACTOR TWO—role and expected behavior of the man in the family.

Below are the items related to the second factor. They mostly regarded perceptions about the role and expected behavior of men in the family. They tend to represent characteristics that describe patriarchal characteristics.

4. I think there are times when a woman deserves to be spanked
3. A woman must endure even violence to keep her family
5. A man needs more than one sexual partner
6. I find it shameful that a man should take care of the children and housework
10. A woman has no right to challenge her husband's opinion and decisions.

3.1.3. Analysis of Variance

To determine the levels of the mean in relation to gender-role stereotypes depending on the age of the persons in the sample, a dispersion analysis was used.

Statistically significant values indicated the following: persons up to 28 years of age reported the lowest result in relation to gender-role stereotypes regarding both roles. Far lower were the values regarding the expected patriarchal behavior of the man. Persons over 50 years of age reported the highest values regarding patriarchal perceptions. The result regarding the role of men recorded by persons up to 28 is particularly significant. Persons between 29 and 40 years of age reported higher values compared to those up to 28 years of age and compared to those between 40 and 50 years of age.

The probable explanation may be related to the fact that between 29 and 40 years of age of the partners, the Bulgarian family stabilizes, and the couple is in close communication with the older members of the extended family, who are 50+ years old, which represents a kind of transmission of values, giving the necessary support. In this sense, the confirmation of the stereotype and the moment when the transmission becomes active—when the

family becomes real and when the extended family joins the system—become obvious. Persons between the ages of 40 and 50 years are expected to be in stable relationships and to have developed communication approaches, which would weaken the power of stereotypes weaker.

The observations mentioned above, related to transmission, found some confirmation in the average ages by category and are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA analysis. Differences between average values by age.

Dependent Variable			Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig.
Stereotypes related to the role of the woman	Up to 28	29–40	−0.18161	0.04680	0.000
		Over 50	−0.28899	0.06605	0.000
	29–40	40–50	0.17618	0.05586	0.002
	Over 50	40–50	0.28356	0.07275	0.000
Stereotypes related to the role of the man	to 28	29–40	−0.25724	0.04106	0.000
		Over 50	−0.27606	0.05795	0.000
	29–40	40–50	0.19159	0.04901	0.000
	Over 50	40–50	0.21041	0.06383	0.001

From the results, shown in Table 5 there was a difference of 24 years between the mean age of the participants who were 29–40 years old and that of those who were over 50 years old.

Table 5. Mean analysis with the age categories as the age factor.

Age Category	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Up to 28	23.0747	1071	3.31691
29–40	34.3952	835	3.59649
40–50	45.0404	544	2.83529
Over 50	58.6258	302	7.20020
Total	34.7529	2752	12.33231

3.1.4. Territorial Principle of Gender-Role Stereotypes

A cluster analysis was performed to determine whether the territory was relevant to the results. Two stable clusters were distinguished.

Table 6 shows that the poorer and isolated areas (on an ethnic, religious, and culture basis) were more likely to emphasize gender-role stereotypes.

Table 6. Distribution by region (cluster analysis).

	1	2	Combined
Haskovo	0	100	100
Vratsa	0	102	102
Plovdiv	0	100	100
Pazardjik	0	100	100
Veliko Tarnovo	0	101	101
Sofia-Region	0	100	100
Gabrovo	0	103	103
Stara Zagora	0	100	100
Montana	0	99	99
Targovishte	0	100	100
Ruse	1	99	100
Varna	1	99	100
Razgrad	4	96	100
Lovetch	8	92	100
Smolian	10	90	100

Table 6. *Cont.*

	1	2	Combined
Shumen	16	84	100
Vidin	21	79	100
Sofia	44	56	100
Pleven	51	49	100
Sliven	52	48	100
Silistra	72	28	100
Jambol	80	20	100
Dobrich	99	1	100
Bourgas	100	0	100
Blagoevgrad	100	0	100
Kardzhali	100	0	100
Pernik	100	0	100
Shumen	100	0	100

The relationships between the district and the clusters in terms of levels of attitudes and gender-role stereotypes were examined.

A two-step cluster analysis was used with region as the categorical variable and the two scales of the questionnaire as the quantitative variable.

There was almost a whole unit difference in stereotypes between the two groups, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7. Results of the *t*-test. Evidence of the differences from a *t*-test of the samples from the two clusters.

	Two-Step Cluster Number	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Stereotypes related to the role of the woman	1	959	3.1114	1.09519	0.03537
	2	1846	2.0040	0.72416	0.01685
Stereotypes related to the role of the man	1	959	2.4804	1.05003	0.03391
	2	1846	1.4135	0.49951	0.01163

A decision trees analysis with multiple regressions was also performed to determine the pattern of the influence on prejudice formation. It included all other researched areas of the study. The results are shown in Figure 1.

Regarding gender-role stereotypes and expected patterns of behavior in men, gender was registered as a determining factor. The distribution of the other influencing factors was more interesting here. For women, education appeared to affect the conservative gender beliefs in a positive way when they lived in administrative areas where the scores were lower. Women living in the second cluster cities were influenced by the type of violence they had experienced. Accordingly, those who did not wish to indicate whether they experienced physical, economic, or more than one type of violence were more strongly stereotyped. Survivors of emotional and mental abuse appeared less stereotyped. Interestingly, for men, ethnicity was a more significant trait, with a high influencing value. Education was also an important construct.

Logically, gender explains to the greatest extent the stereotypes present. For women, the next influencing factor is the level of education. The results showed that the higher it was, the lower the stereotypes. For men, it is interesting that the area of residence was the most important factor—whether it was an area with pronounced stereotypes or not—followed by education.

become more active socially and economically, but this does not negate her commitments within the family. “The woman now has more freedom and power, but this actually leads to greater responsibilities for her, which is advantageous to the man”. Participants claim that for the first time, there is now a registered child in Bulgaria with two mothers, i.e., “anyone can do whatever they want and have sex with whomever they want, no matter what gender they are”. No one can decide that there are only two genders, it is how one feels that is important. “The ‘third gender’ is a right of self-determination, but for a person over 18; children don’t have the maturity to do that. People have one life and have the right to live it how they want”. The “Third gender” relates to when there is a discrepancy between biological givenness and how a person feels socially. “The term “third gender” is very generalizing, because this condition has many different variations”. However, the group said this distinction should not be paraded in public, every individual has the right to choose, but the issue is that this is now fashionable and creates wrong social patterns.

According to the participants of the mixed-age group from Montana city, patriarchy is a bygone topic; the issue is to find an adjustment between two people. “Our generation (born in the 1980s) grew up in a more patriarchal family, but now there is a push towards more open living, and that is a problem”. It is argued that there are now more freedom and opportunities for choice and action, “now everything changes in a very short time, and everything becomes totally different in just a few years”. According to the group, today there should be no male and female work, and partners should be interchangeable and multifunctional, but on the other hand, everything is strictly individual and depends on the family itself. According to the group participants, gender is important, but there should be complementarity: “with two parents of the same gender, there are still two roles, one leads, the other follows”, “biological sex matters less and less for social gender, beyond breastfeeding”. It is argued that it is a personal choice how one feels about gender, and that everyone has the right to choose, though abroad people are not judged, while in Bulgaria there is a risk of being judged. “And here in Bulgaria children are raised by same-sex couples—mother and grandmother”. The opposite thesis is also developed, i.e., that it would be difficult to raise a child who does not recognize a man and a woman as parents. On the other hand, a boy raised primarily by a controlling mother will also face difficulties and will become a “neutered” male.

According to the respondents from the group in Plovdiv, “men are no longer men”, and this is the statement around which the group united, which in the discussion was “softened” by the fact that gender no longer matters, though the emphasis as regards expectations was that the man should still be a support in the family—physical and economic. Either way, in terms of gender equality, selfishness and poor distribution of household tasks were highlighted.

According to the group from Silistra, the current role stereotypes and relationships in the family now in Bulgaria are defined as chaotic and inconsistent. Children do not have a role model in the family, do not know boundaries and patience. It is said that the most significant problem today is aggression, “people separate en masse because they do not compromise. Everyone is angry at the world”, the claim being that children today rule the parents, and there is a role reversal.

According to the group in Blagoevgrad, men are burdened with certain expectations embedded in the traditional society, but the lack of opportunity to meet these expectations leads to huge disappointments in others in the family. “Women and men are not supposed to fit into traditional role stereotypes, but those who fail to live up to their voted rights and responsibilities are kicked out”. There is a sense of inequality in terms of duties and care towards the children, and the lack of meaningful communication provokes suppressed anger.

For the focus group participants from Pernik, the current role stereotypes and the relationships within the family in Bulgaria are inconsistent, fluid, and with a changed hierarchy. “There is equality in terms of income, even sometimes, women work much more than men, but unfortunately this is another prerequisite for scandals and problems

with the partner". The parents are not an authority for the children; unfortunately, the children imitate certain behaviors imposed either by social networks or by the television. The children need to be educated about their own boundaries from an early age, which is the aim of the family organization. The role of the parents is sometimes taken over by people they know or who are more authoritative among their peers, and so they show symptoms or enter the vicious circle of addiction.

3.2.2. Adolescent and Youth Group (16–18 Years)

The participants in the group of students from the city of Sofia argued that the economy is changing the male–female relations, with women progressing faster in terms of power and rights. It was argued that now "there is an interchangeability of roles, but the man and the woman have to be the same in the family". The opinion of young people is that fashion influences the young, and they can become 'backwards'²; a participant in the group said: "I am embarrassed to see 'backwards', they are like contagious, it's a shame".

According to the Montana students, the roles of men and women are reversing because women are more economically active and educated, which leads to changes in roles and power within the family. The man can become more involved in raising the children. It has been argued that, from a purely biological perspective, there is no possibility of the sexes becoming equal, but socially they may converge. "You can have an indeterminate gender, more like gender-neutral", everyone has the right to choose, and others should not judge them. The understanding is that it is not possible to determine one's own gender before the age of 16; this can be possible after 18, when one has sufficient educational and social experience, "it has to be—gender (English)—male, female, and neutral, while sex (English) can be boy and girl". Young people believe that social gender is a feeling (psycho-social perception) that is more important than biological givenness. (A contrary view was shared that this is propaganda that overcomes the traditional values). According to the group, women's empowerment has led to changes such as "I can be a man from the waist down and have a feminine mindset; it can be the other way around. It's all in the mind". A group participant argued that a child raised by a same-sex couple would have a more liberated mindset, be able to understand difference more easily, and have a more liberated consciousness.

Students from Plovdiv considered that a remnant of the past is that, despite efforts to eliminate prejudices linked to gender, "it still influences because there are outdated notions of 'male' and 'female' left". All appeared firmly against the polarization of male and female work and believed that free choice should come first.

Regarding gender, the students from Pazardzhik said they believe that women can now grasp their whole lives on their own, while in the past they relied on being married, on a man to take care of them, on being looked after. This angers men now, as they "want the woman to be dependent, which feeds the ego of men". They like to have power on women, but women are powerful now, they have more rights. And it is very important that now women can say: "you've put up with this one enough".

4. Discussion

4.1. Interpretation of the Quantitative Results

There is a stark contrast between the stereotypes associated with men and women. Research has consistently shown that men are more commonly stereotyped as regards adhering to traditional patriarchal family roles. This trend appeared to be even more pronounced among men aged from 29 to 40 years. Gender-role stereotypes appeared also to be prevalent among women, with these beliefs being formed in early youth and influenced by family upbringing. Prejudice towards gender differentiation was found to be more prevalent among older generations, indicating that the generation plays a significant role in shaping one's perceptions of gender. Men tend to solidify their gender-role stereotypes later in life once they have established family relations, while women tend to develop these beliefs at a younger age, influenced by traditional values. It is

possible that this is why women in the 40–50 age range tend to be more flexible and open to changing their stereotypes based on societal and economic changes [14–16]. The attitudes of the parents can impact the attitudes of their children even when they reach adulthood. For example, a study in the journal *Social Forces* found that parents' attitudes about gender roles can impact their children's views on the same topic [17]. Numerous studies found a strong correlation between parents' attitudes towards gender roles and their children's attitudes. Parents who endorse traditional gender roles are more likely to have children who hold similar beliefs (e.g., "Gender-Role Attitudes in University Students in the United States, Ukraine, and Ghana" in *Psychological Reports*, 2000). According to the study "The Intergenerational Transmission of Attitudes on Marriage and Cohabitation", adult children's attitudes toward marriage and cohabitation were influenced by their parents' attitudes and their own perceptions of their parents' marital quality [17]. Research found that parents' attitudes and behaviors around work–family balance can shape their children's expectations for balancing work and family in their own lives. For example, daughters of working mothers were found to have more positive attitudes towards balancing work and family [18].

4.2. Interpretation of the Qualitative Results

Adolescents were found to believe that the ability to choose one's partner is a fundamental right, leading to a blurring of traditional gender roles. Young generation exhibited minimal stereotypical views on gender roles, with many perceiving women to progress faster in terms of their rights and socio-economic freedoms, making them more flexible in performing gender-differentiated social roles. Biological sexes may differ, but there is more overlap in social roles than in traditional family structures, allowing for interchangeability in family and parental roles. This has led to the introduction of the concept of a "neutral" social gender, distinct from the biological concepts of male and female gender. Adults generally agree with young people that women have more freedom today, resulting in a stronger shift in gender role stereotypes for women compared to men, who tend to have more stable stereotypes. Adults also recognize the diminishing importance of biological sex differentiation in relation to self-perception of gender and social roles, leading to the introduction of the concept of a "third" gender. However, unlike young adults, many adults view this shift as chaotic, inconsistent, and confusing, causing a crisis in family relations and parental authority over the children. Some of these observations are related to the results of our research. We can define them in categories. Many adolescents today are growing up in households where both parents work and share household chores, regardless of their gender. This has led to a more equal distribution of tasks and responsibilities, setting an example for the younger generation [19]. Adolescents are increasingly pursuing careers based on their interests and skills, rather than adhering to traditional gender expectations. For example, more girls are pursuing careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields, and more boys are entering fields such as nursing and education [20]. Adolescents are increasingly embracing gender-neutral clothing and fashion, moving away from traditional expectations of what boys and girls "should" wear. This trend is supported by the growing availability of gender-neutral clothing lines and an overall acceptance of personal expression [21]. Schools and communities are increasingly offering sports and extracurricular activities that are inclusive of all genders, encouraging participation without regard to traditional gender roles. This can be seen in the rise of co-ed sports teams and the increasing number of girls participating in traditionally male-dominated sports [20]. The 21st century is emphasizing the topic of gender equality. Adolescents are increasingly engaging in conversations around gender equality and challenging traditional gender norms. Through social media, activism, and open discussions, they are raising awareness and promoting a more inclusive and equitable society [22]. LGBTQ+ awareness and acceptance has become part of our life. Greater visibility and acceptance of LGBTQ+ individuals have led to a broader understanding of gender identities and expressions. This has contributed

to a blurring of traditional gender roles, as adolescents become more comfortable exploring and expressing their gender identity without fear of judgement [23,24].

4.3. Comparative Analysis by the Age Factor

Upon analyzing both the quantitative and the qualitative data, it became evident that generation plays a significant role in shaping gender-role stereotypes. Individuals under 18 exhibited a lower level of gender-role stereotypes, with a preference for freedom of choice and opposition to traditional roles. This was attributed to their upbringing and role socialization. In the 19–28-year-old generation group, there was a relatively low level of gender-role stereotypes, with a focus on gender equality and role interchangeability. This was mainly due to experimentation and testing out partner roles. However, the 29–40-year-old generation group tended to affirm the traditional gender roles, particularly for men, and appeared to experience a crisis related to task distribution and acceptance of socio-economic changes. The main motive was overcoming the crisis and finding meaning in their roles, with competition and role clashes as the primary mechanism. In the 41–50-year-old generation group, there was a strengthening and reduction of gender-role stereotypes, with a focus on accepting roles and passing on experiences to future generations. The primary mechanism was matching roles. Finally, those over 50 exhibited a persistent pattern of gender-role stereotyping, which was attributed to their lived experience. The main motive was settling down and imparting experiences to future generations, with socialization of the next generation as the primary mechanism.

5. Conclusions

The generation of the respondents appeared to be statistically significant in determining gender-role stereotypes in the Bulgarian family. This was proven by both quantitative and qualitative studies. The traditional attitudes towards gender-role stereotypes are undergoing intense changes, which are treated differently by different generations, and this is true for both men and women. People who are between 40 and 50 were children when democracy became part of Bulgaria, which speaks of the positive influence of democratic processes.

From the quantitative research, it appeared that the examined persons in the 29–40-year-old and over-50-year-old generations had the strongest stereotypes in relation to the traditional role of men and women. These are also the age periods in which, most likely, conflict and crises can be expected within a couple. These two periods somewhat coincide with the couple's entry into and exit from the role of parents.

The age period up to 18 years, which coincides with adolescence and with the adolescent's exit from the primary family, showed the lowest degree of gender-role stereotypes. Especially in the qualitative study, it stood out that the feeling of freedom and independence among adolescents is transformed into a more liberal and stronger attitude towards freedom of choice of the partners in a relationship about their social roles.

The attitude of the respondents in the generation aged 18–28 years was similar. On the one hand, these young people are equipped with the more liberal attitudes of their adolescence towards gender-role stereotypes; on the other hand, they are making their first attempts to try partner relations and settle down. This is a period of experimentation with gender-role relationships, which, depending on the outcome, can lead the individual to experiment with roles seamlessly or reproduce traditional stereotypes.

Adults from the generation over 50 years of age had an already established model of gender-role stereotypes, which, depending on the parental–partner relations, could calm the individual or create a sense of failure and hopelessness.

In conclusion, it appeared from our results that the biological and social role of gender is a dynamic quantity that can be related both to the calendar age of individuals (and corresponding normative/age crises) and to dominant attitudes towards issues of power and socialization in the family. In this sense, it is relevant to consider both the age of

potential beneficiaries and the risks of intergenerational relationships when planning policies in the field of the upbringing and education of adolescents.

6. Limitations of the Study

The limitations of the present study are related to the impossibility of obtaining a representative sample and the difficulties of examining persons in their family relationships. Further work could confirm some of the conclusions drawn and the way intergenerational transmission occurs. A limitation is also the lack of research on the behavior of bullies or victims. These are challenges for further research.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to ethical principles.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Appendix A—Questions for the Quantitative Analysis of Gender-Role Stereotypes

Below are several statements; please indicate how much you agree with them according to the following scale: 1—Strongly Disagree, 2—Disagree, 3—Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4—Agree, 5—Strongly Agree.

1.	I think the man should take the final decisions	1	2	3	4	5
2.	I believe that a woman's main role is to take care of the home and family	1	2	3	4	5
3.	A woman has to endure even violence in order to keep her family	1	2	3	4	5
4.	I think there are times when a woman deserves to be spanked	1	2	3	4	5
5.	A man needs more than one sexual partner	1	2	3	4	5
6.	I find it shameful that the man deals with the children and housework	1	2	3	4	5
7.	It is a woman's responsibility to protect herself from unwanted pregnancy	1	2	3	4	5
8.	I think spousal abuse is a personal matter and others should not interfere	1	2	3	4	5
9.	I think baby care and child rearing is a mother's concern	1	2	3	4	5
10.	A woman has no right to challenge her husband's opinion and decisions	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B—Qualitative Research Questions (Focus Group):

1. How would you describe the Bulgarian family today from the point of view of roles, functions, and relationships (at the process level, we examine attitudes, behaviors, feelings). What are the main differences compared to "before".

2. Do you think that the roles of men, women, and children are changing today and in what direction? Provide positive or negative examples.

3. Do you think gender affects family roles and behavior? If so, how and how does this change over time?

Notes:

1. An interesting fact about Bulgaria is that regardless of the type of religion, pagan rituals and regional features are still a fact.
2. In the sense of the artificial maintenance of traditional and insufficiently understood concepts in the family, which are widely proclaimed in Bulgaria.

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