

Opinions (selection)

Opinion

Liliana Popescu, Associate Professor, NSPSA, Bucharest

*BLACK BOOK team: "What is **Not** functioning in the field of equal opportunities between women and men in Romania?"*

Many things are not functioning. First of all, the minds of many women waste themselves in the search of becoming models, messing up men's minds in finding a husband that could sustain them. They can not see themselves in the role of independent persons, and probably the thought of remaining alone and having to survive in a world that promotes especially men scares them. And maybe they lack self-esteem in believing that they, through themselves represent something.

Secondly, there is so much sexism and "machoism" in Romania so that I could understand in some way why they adopt such accredited canons.

Thirdly, I believe that the state institutions with attributes in this domain are regarded by the state and society in general as being there just to be, to please the EU.

Fourthly, I believe that the European Union does not really care about what happens with the equal opportunities between women and men in Romania. The European leaders (the majority being men – it is enough to look at the European "family pictures" to realize this) are not interested in this problem, but instead they care about the economic efficiency and the viability of Romania's adhesion to the EU. Anyhow, the UE legislation regards equal opportunities at work as the priority – and we know very well what happens with the unwritten laws regarding unpaid work at home.

Opinion

Mihaela Baragan, Program Coordinator, NOPHR, Bucharest

*The Black Book team; "What is **Not** functioning in the equal opportunities domain between women and men in Romania today?"*

- The practice implementation of the laws;
- The detail apprehension of laws by the different social actors;
- Respecting the current legislation;
- The (insufficient) promotion of the equal opportunities concept in Romania (the explanation of the equal opportunities concept, because when a concept is not understood it is denied immediately);
- The process of changing the mentalities and stereotypes is particularly slow and difficult;

- The lack of political affirmative measures;
- The lack of short and long-term promotion and implementation strategies of equal opportunities between women and men in Romania;
- Complicated mechanisms to punish the discrimination situations;
- Romanian women have less access to information (especially legislation): women can not recognize a discrimination case, they do not know where to go if they have been victims of discrimination, they do not know to write a complaint;
- Weak representation of the institutions in the field that should promote equal opportunities in Romania;
- The absence of real specialists to work in these institutions;
- The Romanian society has a “tacit” tolerance towards cases of women discrimination;

Gender and Health

Adriana Băban, Professor, Faculty of Psychology, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj

Black Book team: “Regarding psychology in general and women’s health in particular, which are, in your opinion, the main problems in connection to the gender problematic approach inside them? “

- Psychology tends to focalize on the individual, on his deficits, ignoring the social-economical and cultural context. As a result of this fact, the solutions offered by psychology are for individuals, letting untouched and unquestioned the social order. Even more, this kind of approach tends to throw the culpability the individual (woman), assigning his/her deficiencies in reaction and adaptation to some personal causes and not at all to social ones.
- Gender is an overlooked variable of psychology (especially in the Romanian psychology). The simple change of name from sex to gender does not mean that we study gender as a social construct.
- It is the same concerning the research on woman’s health and pathology: pointing out the differences between sexes in health/disease does not reflect the way in which social, political and economic circumstances influence the morbidity and mortality.
- With few exceptions, the interest in women’s health is reduced to the reproductive health. In other words, the woman is healthy as long as she is fertile, procreates and gives birth to healthy children.
- The medicalization of some “feminine” experiences: pregnancy, birth, maternity, and menopause.

- The explanation of some emotional dispositions of women (for example depression, irritation) mainly through hormonal causality, minimizing the effect of possible outside deterring factors (social, economic, relational etc.)
- Explaining the greater morbidity among women than men in psychological terms. The woman, as a predominantly emotional being, self-assumes the tensions and psychical problems. Another argument to sustain this explanation is the higher rate of mortality at men, even though the morbidity is less (women complain to often that they are ill, exaggerating their corporal sensations, so their “problem” is emotional and not somatic, meanwhile men, even though they are really ill, they suffer in silence, stoic, and as a result die faster and in higher numbers than women).
- Concerning women, frequently their symptoms are interpreted as being psychosomatic and receive the label of hypochondria. This leads to major diagnostic errors (the media put in evidence such cases—for example one case, a 35 year old woman which died because of an acute otitis that was not given a diagnostic, was treated with “distonocalm” (a pill) for her acute headaches – this all happened in an important Hospital from Bucharest).
- A woman receives much more easily pharmacological treatment with tranquilizers, sedatives, anti depression pills.
- Strange paradox: “the true woman” and femininity are related to sensibility and affectivity, but, in the same time, femininity is seen as a risk condition for psychical pathology.
- The perpetuation of a distortional image concerning the maternal instinct and “the perfect mother”, that implies as natural the science of adequate action and reaction when it comes to your children, in opposition to the man, who, also naturally, is seen as “hopeless” in this domain. Women, who do not have this “sense/instinct” in a natural way, are often pathologically judged.
- The woman with physical disorder or special needs is absent from the public speech.
- The encouragement of certain risky behaviours (for both women and men) through gender stereotypes: for example, the thin woman (who will be socially pressured to go through drastic diets), the shy woman (which does not have the courage to be assertive); the “true” man (who smokes, drinks high quantities of alcohol and resists, does not show/express emotions, but is always open to any sexual experience, does not worry about his somatic or psychical problems).
- The difference between women and men regarding self-esteem is understood as a woman’s deficit and not at all as an over evaluation of the man’s self-esteem.

Opinion

Reghina Dascăl, Professor, West University, Timisoara

[...] The promotion of the “beautiful and stupid” stereotype, of the prejudices about the lack of discernment, the lack of suitability of women (besides a large number of counterexamples) for the public domain affairs. Little time ago, Realitatea TV channel was transmitting an important meeting about our process of integrating in the EU. The male reporter, “armed” with a trap question (presenting as the President of the European Parliament the multiple-champion athlete Sotomayor), interviewed exclusively women, having care in choosing the good looking, elegant etc. The Udrea case is again illustrative.

The violence against women is presented in a cheap sensational way, often as a minor offence, continuously suggesting the deep cultural roots of this kind of violence.

There is no mass communication way to constantly promote the ideal of partnership, which should try to educate the public in the spirit of couple partnership in which both partners are assuming equally the domestic responsibilities- raising and educating the children, with the aim of undermining the patriarchy from the level of private life.

Translations by Matei Lucaci

Opinion

*Isabela Mihalache, Project Manager, Roma Participation Program,
Open Society Institute, Budapest*

- Women’s organizations: Curriculum Development and Gender Studies Center: “Filia”, the Society for Feminist Analyses “AnA@, Partnership for Equality Center, Equal Opportunities for Women (Șanse Egale pentru Femei – ȘEF) etc. could easily bring in as staff, in the next period of time, young Roma women or men to work as interns or volunteers, to help them in developing projects for Roma women in collaboration with Roma women’s organizations; they could write about Roma women with their participation; the above mentioned organizations could lobby - a specific example: the presentation of the report on Romania at CEDAW in the summer of 2006; I am sure that Romanian NGOs, especially women’s NGOs, will send a *shadow report* to the Committee, but no one has contacted Roma women to ask them whether they had any concerns to send!)
- Round table discussions could be held between Roma women’s and non-Roma women’s NGOs, where they could address general but also specific issues and

where they could cooperate. Our program, Roma Participation Program – Open Society Institute is willing to supporting financially such a reunion this year.

- The Gender and European Integration Master's Program at the National School of Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA) could support Roma students' optional participation in Gender courses, (students from SNSPA and others), thus increasing the chances for future Roma feminists and for a feminist discourse that would include Roma women's voices.

(Translation by Theodora Elena Văcărescu)