

Classroom Politics: Gender Bias in Hungarian Higher Education

Jeannette A. Estruth

*Vassar College
124 Raymond Avenue
Poughkeepsie, NY 12604
www.vassar.edu
JeannetteEstruth@gmail.com*

*Károli Gáspár University
1088 Budapest
Reviczky utca 4/a
www.kre.hu/english/
Beretzky Agnes and Kállay Katalin*

Abstract

In my capacity as a Fulbright Teaching Assistant, I have taught Master of Arts classes at Karoli Gaspar University and worked at the Fulbright Academic Advising center in Budapest, Hungary. Upon encountering a different culture, and a different educational climate, I became very interested in and attuned to how gender informed the relationships and opportunities within Hungarian higher education. With this study, I aim only to open a discursive space for conversations about gender and Hungarian higher education. This study and these survey responses cannot be read as typical or emblematic of Hungary. I can provide examples, but they are in no way exemplary. Nevertheless, insofar as it is possible to draw conclusions, I have found that the world of Hungarian higher education, like most other higher education systems around the globe, is a gender-biased environment.

1. Introduction

This study is the result of research I undertook and surveys I collected in my efforts to better understand the role of gender in Hungarian higher education. My interest in the topic began early in the academic year. From the beginning of my time in Hungary, I observed that there existed a large discrepancy between the numbers of women in academia as a whole versus the numbers of women at high levels in academia. Most of the instructors I met in my department at Karoli were female, and at least 90% of my students are female. Conversely, it was immediately very clear that many Hungarian experts on academic topics were male, and many of the people interviewed for political and international topics in the press were male. Moreover, the vast majority of the Hungarians I encountered at United States Embassy academic and cultural functions, like lectures, were male. These discrepancies piqued my interest in exploring the role of gender in Hungarian higher education. I decided to seize the unique opportunity presented to me as an American university instructor living in Budapest to do research that relies not only on books and online resources, but also on the words of Hungarian students themselves.

2. Brief Background on Women and Hungary

At first glance, the country of Hungary stands out as a stellar women's educator. According to the CIA World Factbook, the adult female literacy rate as of 2003 was a near-universal 99.3%.¹ On average, females stay in school for about 14 years.² Upon closer inspection, however, the situation appears more complex.

This complexity seems to stem from Hungarian women's inequality outside the classroom. Technically, the Constitution of Hungary includes several provisions that "prohibit discrimination on the basis of gender."³ For example, "Article 66 guarantees equality between men and women, and Article 70(A) prohibits discrimination on a number of grounds, including gender."⁴ However, the legal mechanisms for enforcing these laws are ineffective and thus perpetuate the social inequality of females.⁵ Complaints based on these Articles can be taken to the Parliamentary Commissioner and the Deputy Commissioner for Civil Rights only after all other options have been exhausted. There are few other options, as there are no workplace sexual harassment

1 CIA World Factbook, Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2008, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/hu.html> [Accessed February 2 2008.]

2 Stop Violence Against Women, *Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights: Regional Laws and Standards*, http://www.stopvaw.org/Regional_Law_and_Standards5.html [Accessed February 2008.]

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

laws on the books in Hungary.⁶ Moreover, much subtle yet significant gender discrimination goes unnoticed, because often these discriminatory behaviors "reflect taken-for-granted patterns of communication in a gendered society."⁷

Based on a few informal interviews and private discussions, I am under the impression that the societal perception of feminism is overwhelmingly negative and widely unsupported. Despite these attitudes towards feminism as such, many women have cited that their historically recent freedom to move into full-time careers outside of the home grants them feelings of independence and fulfillment. At the same time, these same conversations have demonstrated that most Hungarian women not only work full-time jobs outside of the home, but are also usually the sole managers of household labor and child-rearing responsibilities. Gender diversity in the workplace, then, has not been matched by a re-distribution of the physical and emotional labor in the home. Far from equal, most women now work a double day.

In addition to women's unequal domestic labor burden, the home is also an unsafe place for many women. Hungary is not immune from the global problem of

male violence against women. In its **2003 Country Report on Human Rights and Practices**, the U.S. Department of State reported that men committing violence against women in Hungarian homes is common.⁸

The cumulative effect of larger social discrimination, workplace discrimination, and the prevalence of male violence against women combine to make Hungarian women less-than-equal citizens. However, with Hungary's admittance to the European Union in 2004, many hope to see changes in the social and legal attention paid to issues of women's equality, rights to safety, and gender discrimination.⁹

3. Gender Discrimination in Higher Education

3.1. Definition of Terms

A 2000 American College of Physicians article defines gender discrimination as "gender-based behaviors, policies, and actions that adversely affect work by leading to disparate treatment or creation of an intimidating environment."¹⁰

8 *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Hungary*, Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2003, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27841.htm>, [Accessed February 2008.]

9 *Hungary: Country Profile*. Europa: Gateway to the European Union's Online Publication. http://europa.eu/abc/european_countries/eu_members/hungary/index_en.htm [Accessed February 2008.]

10 Dr. Phyllis Carr, et. al. *Faculty Perception of Gender Discrimination*

Academic writing often uses the terms “gender discrimination” and “gender bias” to discuss educational environments that disadvantage females in any way.¹¹ My study, as do other academic articles, defines a biased classroom environment as “a psychological climate in which students of one sex are valued differently and therefore treated differently than are students of the opposite sex.”¹²

3.2. Why does Gender Bias in the Classroom Matter?

Examining gender bias in the classroom is supremely important because educational spaces can either reinforce wider societal sexism, or instead can be a tool of change. Furthermore, oftentimes neither instructors nor students intentionally foster gender bias, or even notice it in the classroom.¹³ Indeed, gender-biased behaviors are often difficult for instructors and students to identify because “many of the behaviors characteristic of ‘chilly climates’ reflect socially accepted patterns of communication.”¹⁴ At the same time, even though this tendency to “overvalue men and undervalue women” might be based in “nonconscious hypotheses about sex differences,” the way that

people in the classroom act on these nonconscious beliefs still creates a gender biased learning environment.¹⁵ Neither instructors nor students leave their preconceptions about gender at the door of the classroom. Rather, the relationship between the classroom and the world outside it is porous. Therefore, studying gender discrimination in education is very important because the classroom is one of the few social spaces devoted explicitly to learning. As such, the classroom provides an invaluable opportunity to break cycles of sexism through discussion, education, reform, and behavior modification.

4. Student Surveys

4.1. Survey Methodology

I began a conversation with my students by conducting a survey that asked them a variety of questions concerning gender and their experience in and outside the Hungarian university classroom. I carried out this survey carefully, but rather informally. After doing a great deal of research about similar surveys taken in the United States, I formulated a series of thirty-four questions that would potentially offer insight into classroom environments. As I do not speak Hungarian, my survey sample was limited to English-speakers, and my sample size was thus relatively small. The surveys were distributed to my students during a class period, and the students were allowed as much time as they needed to complete the survey. I carefully explained that this information

would be kept entirely private and confidential, and I disclosed that I would use this information to write a paper on Hungarian higher education. Most of the students completed the survey in about an hour, and upon reading the surveys, I was very impressed with their level of openness and earnestness. At the end of the survey process, I had 22 surveys with which to work.

4.2. Mediating Factors

Despite my efforts to present the surveys in as a controlled and comfortable an environment as possible, the very act of conducting a survey is fraught with complications. First, the conductor of the survey is always producing results simply by asking questions. So, while many of my survey respondents described discriminatory practices in Hungarian higher education, many of them also reported that the issue of gender inequities rarely crossed their mind. In short, the subjects otherwise would not have identified their classroom environments as sexist, but my survey, just by asking questions, created a topic of study.

In addition, the results of the survey could have been further mediated by my relationship to my students and by my “outsider” status. As an instructor, I am in a position of authority. In addition, students may have felt that they had to “defend” Hungary from the judgments of a foreign scholar. At the time I undertook this study, I had lived in Hungary for only

seven months and thus lacked a grasp on the nuances of Hungarian culture from an “insider’s” perspective. Also, my language limitations prevent me from accessing Hungarian scholarship on the topic. Moreover, because of the English language’s preeminence as the language of business and diplomacy, I have been offered an educational and professional opportunity that my students simply could not access. My students’ relationship to me, and to the language in which we interacted, could have influenced the survey results.

While the survey questions were very complete and exhaustive, my students answered them in their non-native language. As such, perhaps the respondents could not be as specific as they would have liked. I also feel that this language barrier very much highlighted my status as an outsider collecting information about a culture of which I am not a part.

The survey results also could have been shaped because, as a sample group, my students are far from typical. These respondents cannot be taken as representative of “Hungarians,” as they represent only one university in Hungary, and are disproportionately from Budapest and its environs. In addition, they attend a small, private, religiously affiliated university that is heavily focused on the humanities. Perhaps for this reason, far more females attend Karoli than do males. On these grounds and many more, it would be severely reductionist

and Sexual Harassment in Academic Medicine (Philadelphia, PA: Journal of American College of Physicians- American Society of Internal Medicine, 2000), 889. <http://www.annals.org/cgi/reprint/132/11/889.pdf>. [Accessed February 2008.]

11 Allan and Madden, *Chilly Classrooms for Female Undergraduate Students: A Question of Method?*, 2.

12 Ibid., 3.

13 Ibid., 2.

14 Ibid., 14.

15 Ibid., 2.

to take these surveys as characteristic of the entirety of the Hungarian higher education experience.

Despite these flaws in methodology, and the complications associated with producing knowledge about a foreign culture, assuredly some reflections may be shared from my teaching experience and from the surveys. “‘Focus groups,’” E. Madriz asserts, “‘can be an important element in the advancement of an agenda for social justice for women, because they can serve to expose and validate experiences of subjugation and their individual and collective survival and resistance strategies.’”¹⁶ I hope that my survey, although flawed, might in some way contribute to the validation of women’s experiences, and precipitate a conversation that pushes for greater social justice for Hungarian women.

5. Biased Classroom Environments: Survey Results

In this vein, I believe the best way to start a conversation that validates my students’ experiences is to present those experiences in their own words. Not only is my sample size too small to draw conclusions that do not essentialize their responses, but also my status as a scholar-outsider makes me uncomfortable with producing knowledge from and about this survey group. Writing about gender bias in a culture to which you do not belong is a delicate exercise on a sensitive topic. I believe I can better honor the students’

¹⁶ Ibid., 15.

answers by not mediating their responses. In view of this, I will present the survey respondents’ own words without any significant mediation on my part in confidence that they alone will reveal that Hungarian higher education takes place in a gender-biased environment.

Though I tried to keep my mediation to a minimum, I have selected specific responses and organized those answers thematically in order to make reading easier and more effective. Female students provided all responses, unless otherwise noted. Please note that many respondents left fields blank.

5.1. Student Behaviors

Have you ever been harassed, touched, or teased by male classmates?

“Yes, but after that be [*sic*] excused. I was angry, but he was a good friend, so there’s no further problems.”¹⁷

“Yes, but he was my boyfriend. Otherwise not.”¹⁸

“When I was at primary school and we became teenagers, the boys would tease us very often because of the changes that we underwent.”¹⁹

“Yes, in primary school there were a few [unreadable], bad experiences. Not today.”²⁰

“Yes, because I was fat.”²¹ (Male)

¹⁷ Jeannette Estruth, *Surveys: Gender Bias in Hungarian Higher Education* (Budapest, Hungary: Karoli Gaspar University, 2008), Survey #7.

¹⁸ Ibid., #9.

¹⁹ Ibid., #6.

²⁰ Ibid., #12.

²¹ Ibid., #22.

Have you ever heard male classmates make sexually suggestive jokes or remarks, or tell sexual stories in school?

“Of course! For me, these jokes are a matter of fun, they are made but don’t intend to offend me personally... a friend told me that ‘we cannot resist to talk about sex, if you leave us alone, in 2 minutes the main topic will be this.’ He was a boy.”²²

“Less intelligent people may talk about less intelligent people’s mistakes.”²³ (Male)

“Not at university but at high school definitely.”²⁴

“Of course yes. In a different way than men but they do more jokes in connection with sex.”²⁵

“Yes, they do it always but girls do this too. Maybe less harshly but still.”²⁶

“Yes, this is frequent, general.”²⁷

“Yes, several times. Boys like to do this.”²⁸ (Male.)

Have you observed that men interrupt women frequently?

“Yes, but not just in school! That’s quite common in the everyday life.”²⁹ (Male)

“It depends on one’s personality.”³⁰

“Sure. That’s correct.”³¹ (Male)

²² Ibid., #1.

²³ Ibid., #22.

²⁴ Ibid., #6.

²⁵ Ibid., #9.

²⁶ Ibid., #10.

²⁷ Ibid., #12.

²⁸ Ibid., #2.

²⁹ Ibid., #2.

³⁰ Ibid., #13.

³¹ Ibid., #22.

“Yes, usually this happens.”³²

“Yes, there are [unreadable] and boys/men, who do this.”³³

Are you more comfortable without male students in your class?

“Actually, yes. I guess it’s because I don’t have self-confidence and I’m afraid of the critical eyes of boys.”³⁴

“Today I do not really care any more. Earlier [in my life] I was more comfortable it there weren’t any boys in the class.”³⁵

“Males are joking more frequently, I’m sure that they made me feel uncomfortable several times. But these were not that serious.”³⁶ (Male)

5.2. Instructor Behaviors

Have you ever received unwanted sexual attention in class?

“I could not say it was 100% sexual attention, but I’ve got certain nicknames from male teachers (like eg: Primadonna, etc.). These are not real ‘sexual’ attention, but after a while they could become disturbing.”³⁷

“Once a teacher asked each girl about their weight in order to do some statistics and I found it pretty uncomfortable and disturbing.”³⁸

“Not really, sometimes my male teachers made comments in grammar school, it was not serious. In the

³² Ibid., #11.

³³ Ibid., #12.

³⁴ Ibid., #6.

³⁵ Ibid., #12.

³⁶ Ibid., #2.

³⁷ Ibid., #13.

³⁸ Ibid., #6.

university, especially here at the reformed university, I didn't have bad experiences."³⁹

"Once I was the only male in class and the teacher asked me whether it's true that girls are either clever or beautiful."⁴⁰ (Male)

"Yes. At high school. It wasn't serious, but luckily enough the teacher was fired in a year's time."⁴¹

"I don't remember but perhaps I have [received unwanted sexual attention in class.] Sorry for not being exact about this but to be honest I'm not really sensitive to this issue... This might be a problem of the balance of the sexes. When I gave English lessons at the Technical University, where 90% of students are men, almost everyone was watching me, which was quite strange, probably annoying."⁴²

Do you feel like your instructors view you on the basis of your appearance?

"I have a friend (a girl) who really feels this with one of our instructors and upsets her a little bit. Honestly, I really don't care what my teachers might think about my appearance. (Well, until I am evaluated according to my results!)"⁴³

"Some male teachers pay more attention to nice [pretty] girls."⁴⁴

Have your instructors ever made comments about your personal appearance?

39 Ibid., #7.

40 Ibid., #2.

41 Ibid., #9.

42 Ibid., #1.

43 Ibid., #1.

44 Ibid., #12.

"Only at primary school. My P.E. teacher- a women, would always tell us if we'd lost or gained weight which was pretty embarrassing sometimes."⁴⁵

"Never (here in the university), but sometimes I just feel that."⁴⁶

"There was a female instructor who made funny remarks on [*sic*] one of my female classmates [*sic*] clothes. It was really humiliating. I would say she ridiculed her!"⁴⁷

Have instructors ever made you feel uncomfortable in the classroom because of your sex?

"I neglect all remarks based on my appearance/sex by my instructors."⁴⁸

"Probably not willfully, but it happened, that they made hints."⁴⁹

"When a 'manly topic' was on due in class the instructor explained it to the male rather than to the females."⁵⁰

Do you feel that instructors pay more attention to male students when they speak than to female students?

"In certain situations."⁵¹

"Sometimes I feel that teachers, esp. [*sic*] men think that women are less smart than men."⁵²

Have your instructors ever made generalizations about women?

45 Ibid., #6.

46 Ibid., #7.

47 Ibid., #10.

48 Ibid., #1.

49 Ibid., #12.

50 Ibid., #3.

51 Ibid., #3.

52 Ibid., #7.

"Well, yes. Interestingly enough, one instructor, who is a female, had remarked on males and females of a 'special type.' I mean women who are concerned only with clothes and make-up and men who are concerned with cars and football."⁵³

"Not on women, but on blondes. But that was just a joke! Most of our teachers are female."⁵⁴

"Seriously not. Just because of a nice joke it may happen."⁵⁵

"Yes! They were both female and male instructors. But it was only a kind of fun they did not think it seriously! I had only one male instructor who believed women are inferior- he made serious overgeneralizations about women. He was the only one whose remarks made me angry!"⁵⁶

"An old teacher (over 60) of pedagogy has made some, but not very serious ones."⁵⁷ (Male)

"At my previous university male instructors often told jokes about women."⁵⁸

"Yes, there were lectures where I experienced this. But I did not take them very serious as I did know if the teacher was joking or not."⁵⁹

Do you feel that stereotypes about women are reinforced by the curriculum?

"In literature... we discussed a lot of female authors. However I feel that their 'femaleness' was regarded as

53 Ibid., #1.

54 Ibid., #2.

55 Ibid., #9.

56 Ibid., #10.

57 Ibid., #22.

58 Ibid., #13.

59 Ibid., #12.

more important that men's 'maleness.' In history courses we didn't deal with too many historic female figures. At my other major, communication, this issue doesn't raise, which is a bit unfortunate."⁶⁰

"Some instructors, 1 out of 10, happens to dislike women. Female instructors usually take female students less seriously."⁶¹ (Male)

"I think stereotypes are only used as jokes (blond women, etc.)"⁶² (Male)

"Very often we learn about positive women roles and positive stereotypes (more often than negative ones.) However in some cases women are praised for values that were defined by male critics and value systems."⁶³ (Male)

5.3. Representation of Females in the Curriculum

Do you feel that women's work and contributions are represented and reflected in the content of the courses you take?

"I was glad that we had plenty of female authors in literature courses. At history courses there aren't many."⁶⁴

"I think it depends on the teacher and his/her liking. In general, women teachers are more likely to teach women's work."⁶⁵

"In the case of literature courses male

60 Ibid., #1.

61 Ibid., #22.

62 Ibid., #2.

63 Ibid., #22.

64 Ibid., #1.

65 Ibid., #6.

writers are a bit overrepresented.”⁶⁶ (Male)

“Well yes, especially if the teacher is a female.”⁶⁷

“Yes. This semester I have a special course discussing only 3 female writers and two years ago I had one with Canadian women writers. And also in other classes on literature there are women writers included.”⁶⁸

“Yes. There are some courses where we discuss only female authors, but of course it is indicated in the title of the course. In each course we mention the male and female leaders as well. For example, we learn about Emiline [*sic*] Pankhurst and so on.”⁶⁹

“Yes, there are many topics related to women’s work! And there are some courses which concern feminist views, too.”⁷⁰

“No, I don’t think so.”⁷¹

“Yes, there are several topics/courses dealing with the topic of women.”⁷²

“In some of the cases.”⁷³

Do your instructors encourage discussion about women’s issues?

“Gender-specific discussion isn’t even taking place in class.”⁷⁴ (Male)

“No, and I’m not even interested for example in feminist topics. I think

my field of study is not really gender related there are no topics which could be girl or boy topics in it.”⁷⁵

“At some history seminars and if the discussion about women is relevant in a literature lesson. But in my view, teachers are more concerned with their subjects/topics etc so they don’t care much about this... they are not really willing to change the syllabus.”⁷⁶

“Sometimes”⁷⁷

“Some of then definitely. Mostly women.”⁷⁸

“Some yes, but most of them not.”⁷⁹

“There were only one or two occasions.”⁸⁰

“Sometimes yes. There are times when you have to discuss women’s issues. They appear in literature, history, biology.”⁸¹

“Yes, some of them.”⁸²

Have your ideas in class ever been attributed to your sex?

“Once, at an exam my teacher (man) ignored all of my ideas just because of my sex.”⁸³

“Yes, I usually think like a woman.”⁸⁴

“A couple of times, but I think it was not serious.”⁸⁵

⁷⁵ Ibid., #10.

⁷⁶ Ibid., #1.

⁷⁷ Ibid., #2.

⁷⁸ Ibid., #6.

⁷⁹ Ibid., #7.

⁸⁰ Ibid., #15.

⁸¹ Ibid., #9.

⁸² Ibid., #3.

⁸³ Ibid., #9.

⁸⁴ Ibid., #11.

⁸⁵ Ibid., #12.

⁶⁶ Ibid., #22.

⁶⁷ Ibid., #7.

⁶⁸ Ibid., #8.

⁶⁹ Ibid., #9.

⁷⁰ Ibid., #10.

⁷¹ Ibid., #13.

⁷² Ibid., #13.

⁷³ Ibid., #2.

⁷⁴ Ibid., #4.

“In literature lessons, when we were talking about female authors/feminism/problems of the situation of women in a certain area, [my responses] might have been [attributed to my sex.]”⁸⁶

“It could have happened.”⁸⁷

“Maybe, but not in a pejorative way.”⁸⁸

“They have not ignored my ideas but I’ve already met some guys who thought/think of themselves as ‘standing on a higher level of society’ than women. To be honest this made me very upset!”⁸⁹

6. Larger Societal Attitudes and Gendered Potentials: Survey Results

Have you ever felt encouraged to pursue certain areas of study because of your sex?

“First, my parents wanted me to be an engineer. However, this was not because of my sex. Being an engineer is fashionable and engineers earn a lot of money.”⁹⁰

“Yes, I usually like to attend classes more related to women, or more women-like. For example, I find history rather hard, I think it is for men.”⁹¹

“Sometimes it is said that a girl should do some presentation because of the feminine topic.”⁹² (Male)

⁸⁶ Ibid., #1.

⁸⁷ Ibid., #3.

⁸⁸ Ibid., #6.

⁸⁹ Ibid., #15.

⁹⁰ Ibid., #13.

⁹¹ Ibid., #11.

⁹² Ibid., #2.

“Yes. There are lots of stereotypes about women’s job or profession. Some might say that you have to be a beautician or a hairdresser, because you are a woman.”⁹³

“No. The opportunities are quite the same.”⁹⁴ (Male)

“Men usually have more interest in history and sciences. That alone led me.”⁹⁵ (Male)

Have you ever felt discouraged from pursuing certain areas of study because of your sex?

“Not by my teachers or professors, but by some of my fellow students (boys).”⁹⁶

“Well, maybe, I myself felt that mathematics, physics, chemistry is rather an area for men, not women. But nobody discouraged me.”⁹⁷

“Yes. Some teachers of mine advised me not to be a teacher because at first sight I seem to be a bit fragile. Of course, here, at the university it does not matter.”⁹⁸

“Yes, there are courses (mainly dealing with history- wars, war politics, etc.) where there are not many female students are present, [*sic*] so sometimes I had the feeling that it is for boys only.”⁹⁹

“I was never discouraged only because I’m a girl. But people tried to discourage me (especially my father). I think usually men think that girls are

⁹³ Ibid., #9.

⁹⁴ Ibid., #2.

⁹⁵ Ibid., #22.

⁹⁶ Ibid., #6.

⁹⁷ Ibid., #7.

⁹⁸ Ibid., #9.

⁹⁹ Ibid., #12.

not enough clever to be an engineer or something in connection with this. But I have not experienced anything like this at my university.”¹⁰⁰

“Not at all. I think I don’t want to be a nursery school teacher.”¹⁰¹ (Male)

Have you ever been left out of opportunities for academic advancement based on sex?

“No, but I read/heard stories about that.”¹⁰² (Male)

“No, nope, never.”¹⁰³ (Male)

“There may be differences in the opportunities, but not as many as decades ago, so I don’t really feel differences.”¹⁰⁴

7. Extra-Curricular Factors that Contribute to a Gender-Unequal Classroom

7.1. Post Graduation

Opportunities and Children

Many of the student surveys reported that women’s post-graduation opportunities were curtailed by the social expectation that they have children. There was consensus that a woman’s career was made significantly more complex and difficult if she had children. One student even voiced that women face blatant discrimination as job applicants. “Yes,” she shared, my

post-graduate opportunities are different from men, “because most women are likely to have babies later and this fact can be an obstacle in choosing them for certain positions.”¹⁰⁵ “Certainly,” post-graduate opportunities are made more difficult, stated another female student, “because companies, workplaces etc. don’t prefer family, growing up children, etc., it’s hard to go back to work after 2-3 years at home.”¹⁰⁶ Perhaps for this reason, most respondents upheld that it is “a woman’s choice” to have children or not. Survey 13 asserted, “there are certain social expectations towards women. (e.g.: have a baby) I think it is women’s right to decide.”¹⁰⁷ One woman agreed, “yes, because after a while I[‘m] supposed to have children and a family and there is no opportunity or no time to do both.”¹⁰⁸ Another female student remarked, “if a woman wants to study further she can. Of course having a baby might be an ‘obstacle,’ but you always have to decide what is the most important thing for you. Family or career.”¹⁰⁹

Despite this emphasis on a woman’s right to choose to have a family or a career, no other alternatives were volunteered. None of the surveys suggested that men take up more responsibility for child rearing, or that the government step in to help working mothers. Therefore, it is clear that ingrained social expectations about family are informing female students’ perceptions of their post-graduation careers. In and of

100 Ibid., #10.

101 Ibid., #22.

102 Ibid., #12.

103 Ibid., #2.

104 Ibid., #12.

105 Ibid., #3.

106 Ibid., #7.

107 Ibid., #13.

108 Ibid., #10.

109 Ibid., #2.

itself, these differing gender expectations shape the classroom climate.

7.2 Violence Against Women

While it usually does not occur directly inside the classroom, male violence establishes and maintains negative and pervasive social power dynamics that students bring to bear on the classroom climate. Most surveys reported that female students felt safe walking to and from school, but the majority of survey respondents also had either been hurt by a man, or knew someone who had been hurt.¹¹⁰ For example, Survey 1 expressed that a man had hurt her friend, but that she did not “know much about it. She didn’t want to talk about it. And there was another girl who had such an experience... She was terrified and feared to go anywhere alone.” Another respondent reported a vicious beating on the street. “It happened [to my sister] few months ago. She was walking home, about 4 AM, and a man hit her coming from her back, and just hit her and hit. In the end she escaped, because a lady woke up for the noise, and cried she would call the police.”¹¹¹ She was not the only survey respondent to face danger on the street. Another student detailed “it happened to me twice that a male tried to harass [sic] tease me in the streets but fortunately none of them turned out to be serious. It was rather scary, though.”¹¹² A male respondent stated that “Once a friend of

mine was grabbed on her arm by a man, but she kicked him and ran away. Actually, this was not real violence.”¹¹³ Clearly, however, the female friend felt threatened to the point where she had to physically defend herself, and the encounter was undeniably violence. Nonetheless, the male respondent interpreted this encounter by writing, “actually, this was not real violence.”¹¹⁴ The fact that this male respondent downplays a physical and intimidating act of violence as “not real violence” points to the lack of gravity with which this very harmful and very important subject is treated. Based on the survey answers, most of the survey respondents had been shaken by acts of male violence at one point or another.

Women who have been hurt, or know someone who has, bring the effects of that violence to their classroom experiences. For example, students may miss class to care for their physical or emotional pain, or because they are embarrassed by bruises or scars. They may also be too tired from this abuse to attend class or to do their reading and homework. Moreover, men who physically abuse also often emotionally abuse, and they may limit female students from coming to class. For those female students who do not directly experience abuse, they may have friends or family members who are abused. These students might spend study time or class time instead emotionally or physically caring for their hurting loved ones.

Equally as important, the prevalence of

110 Ibid., #1 and #10. Many students left the question blank.

111 Ibid., #7.

112 Ibid., #6.

113 Ibid., #2.

114 Ibid., #2.

male violence also serves as a constant reminder to women of their physical vulnerability to men. A study on the classroom effects of male violence toward women states “the presence of sexual violence can circumscribe women’s lives by creating a climate in which they are regularly reminded of the potential to experience such violence directly and adjust their daily lives accordingly.”¹¹⁵ This violent form of social intimidation may cause female students to subconsciously socially withdraw or curtail their physical movement or verbal engagement.

8. Do these Responses Reflect a Feminist Consciousness?

Despite all of these very real problems, many female students in my sample group either denied that there was gender bias in higher education, or did not place an importance on the gender bias they had witnessed. This throws into question whether there is a lack of a conscious, articulated feminism among the survey respondents. Indeed, not a single respondent mentioned activism or identified themselves as feminists. Conversely, many declared themselves uninterested in, or even opposed to, feminism. “I’m not really interested in [women’s issues],” Survey 10 stated, “I think it is difficult to find a balance between a normal topics on women’s rights and some kind of exaggerated feminist world view.” Another remarked “I’m not really a feminist,” and Survey 8 reported “I would

hardly ever make a feminist argument.”¹¹⁶ One student expressed “[my] ideas are not feminist.”¹¹⁷ Although I cannot go so far as to assert that they lack a feminist consciousness, not one of the respondents defined themselves as feminists in a way that I would recognize.

Instead, it appears that these students believe in what has been dubbed the cultural “myth of meritocracy.”¹¹⁸ This belief in meritocracy holds that “individuals are firmly rooted in seeing social life as fair and equitable, with one’s station in life primarily a measure of the individual’s work ethic rather than of race, class, gender/sex (and other types of) privilege, and discrimination in society.”¹¹⁹ The survey respondents repeatedly hoped that they were judged on their results or their talent, and implied that women could attain the same advantages as men through hard work. When asked “have you ever been left out of opportunities for academic advancement based on sex,” Survey 1 responded “I think I’m mostly judged by my results ...” To the question “do you feel that your post graduate opportunities for study differ from the opportunities of the opposite sex?,” she replied “Actually, I don’t know. Hopefully my future opportunities will depend on my results.”¹²⁰

This mind-set that discards structural and systematic discrimination in favor of an individualistic approach to success

116 Ibid., #1 and #10.

117 Ibid., #6.

118 Allan and Madden, *Chilly Classrooms for Female Undergraduate Students: A Question of Method?*, 13-14.

119 Ibid., 14.

120 Ibid., #1.

115 Allan and Madden, *Chilly Classrooms for Female Undergraduate Students: A Question of Method?*, 13-14.

is defined as a “substantial impediment to acknowledging a wide range of discriminatory practices.”¹²¹ This mindset might be an obstacle to the cultivation of a feminist or activist consciousness, without which the gender inequality within Hungarian higher education cannot be addressed.

9. Positive Aspects of Female Academic Life in Hungarian Higher Education

While much remains to be done to make the Hungarian higher education classroom more gender equal, there is a great deal to be said about the positive nature of classroom life for many female students. While the classroom environment might be gendered, the vast majority of respondents did report that their instructors appreciated their contributions in class.¹²² Furthermore, about 50% of the surveys answered that they could turn to people at school when facing conflict in their lives outside the classroom.¹²³ Many students said that they could turn to their professors or classmates. One affirmed “We have several teachers who are there for us in each and every situations. [*sic*]”¹²⁴ Another commented, “I think there are many people who I can talk to. I have very good teachers and classmates. My teachers are not only good instructors but also

good people as far as I knew [*sic*] them. So I think I could find support in them, too.”¹²⁵ One student even likened Karoli to a “family environment.” She wrote, “I think all my instructors would be there to help me. We have a very family-like environment, I usually feel as if I were going home. We are a big family with really nice and helping [*sic*] people. (I refer to the instructors and students as well.)”¹²⁶

Ultimately, obtaining a university education is a highly empowering action by and for young women. Education offers them opportunities for greater financial, social, and occupational freedom in the future, and thus more agency in their lives. This significance is not lost on the students I was honored to have taught; despite the larger gender inequities in Hungarian higher education and society as a whole, as one of the respondents said so eloquently “there are lots of stereotypes about women’s job or profession... but I decided to do something more interesting. That’s why I am here.”¹²⁷

10. Conclusion:

Women as talented and ambitious as this student have the right to not have to face gender bias in their education. To return to the definition of a biased classroom environment once again, “a psychological climate in which students of one sex are valued differently and therefore treated differently than are students of the

121 Allan and Madden, *Chilly Classrooms for Female Undergraduate Students: A Question of Method?*, 14.

122 Ibid., #1-#22.

123 Ibid., #3, #2, #7, #9, #10, #13, and #12.

124 Ibid., #9.

125 Ibid., #10.

126 Ibid., #11.

127 Ibid., #9.

opposite sex.”¹²⁸ Clearly, in the case of my university, students widely reported that both males and female students were valued differently and treated differently from each other based on their sex.¹²⁹ I hope that in some small way, the very presence of my survey provoked thoughts in and conversations among my students. Awareness, indeed, often catalyzes greater change.

Still, changing gender bias in Hungarian higher education will ultimately be most effective if and when taken up by scholars and activists who study these problems in the Hungarian language. Perhaps future scholarship in Magyar will not only validate these equality issues and gendered experiences, but will start a wider public conversation about the need for greater gender equality both inside and outside the Hungarian classroom. Truly, “acknowledging the reality of sexism can be deeply troubling, as it requires reframing one’s worldview.”¹³⁰ In Hungary, as in every country around the globe, wide re-negotiation and re-framing of sexist worldviews is required to realize a more gender-equal society. Perhaps with further scholarship, public conversation, and time, my students, the future leaders of Hungary, can help re-shape those worldviews.

Bibliography

128 Allan and Madden, *Chilly Classrooms for Female Undergraduate Students: A Question of Method?*, 3.
129 Ibid., #1-#22.
130 Allan and Madden, *Chilly Classrooms for Female Undergraduate Students: A Question of Method?*, 14.

- Allan, Elizabeth J. and Mary Madden. *Chilly Classrooms for Female Undergraduate Students: A Question of Method?* Columbus, OH: Journal of Higher Education, 2006. http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-17330974_ITM [Accessed February 2008.]
- Carr, Dr. Phyllis, et. al. *Faculty Perception of Gender Discrimination and Sexual Harassment in Academic Medicine*. Philadelphia, PA: Journal of American College of Physicians- American Society of Internal Medicine, 2000. <http://www.annals.org/cgi/reprint/132/11/889.pdf>. [Accessed February 2008.]
- CLA *World Factbook*. Washington, D.C.: Central Intelligence Agency, 2008. <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/hu.html> [Accessed February 2008.]
- Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Hungary*. Washington, D.C.: Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, 2003. <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27841.htm>, [Accessed February 2008.]
- Estruth, Jeannette. *Surveys: Gender Bias in Hungarian Higher Education*. Budapest, Hungary: Karoli Gaspar University. (Administered 20 February 2008): Surveys #1-22.
- Hungary: Country Profile*. Europa: Gateway to the European Union’s Online Publication. http://europa.eu/abc/european_countries/eu_members/hungary/index_en.htm [Accessed February 2008.]
- Sexual Harassment In Central And Eastern Europe*. New York, NY: The New York Times, 9 January 2000. http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2872/is_2_26/ai_62140815/pg_1 [Accessed February 2008.]
- Stop Violence Against Women. *Minnesota Advocates for Human Rights: Regional Laws and Standards*. http://www.stopvaw.org/Regional_Law_and_Standards5.html [Accessed February 2008.]

Marcell Jankovics and Ferenc Rofusz: The Grand Master and the Enfant Terrible of Hungarian Animation

Paul Morton

Columbia University
2960 Broadway New York, NY 10027-6902
www.columbia.edu
pwmorton1980@yahoo.com

Eötvös Loránd University
H-1088 Budapest Rákóczi út. 5
www.elte.hu
Advisor: Tibor Frank

This paper draws biographical sketches of two major figures of Hungarian animation. Marcell Jankovics began working at Pannonia Studio in Budapest in the early 1960s and established himself as a multi-faceted talent. He has been a naïve slapstick artist (in his Gustav shorts), an eerie interpreter of Hungarian myths (in his adaptations of Johnny Corncob and Son of the White Mare) and an angry anti-communist jester (in “Inauguration.”) Ferenc Rofusz had a comparatively unprolific career, making only three major shorts at Pannonia in the early 1980s: “The Fly,” “Gravity,” and “Deadlock.” The three short films are, in their way, the work of a dissident. Each tells the story of a doomed bid for freedom and individuality within three very different Kafkaesque landscapes. This paper examines both artists’ changing concerns through the communist and post-communist eras up to their most recent projects. Jankovics’ The Tragedy of Man is an indictment of Hungary’s current political troubles. Rofusz’s “Ticket” is his first major non-political art film.