

**GENDER AT THE WHEEL: THE CASE OF ROMANIAN WOMEN TAXI
DRIVERS**

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Abstract

Various scholars argued that gender is socially constructed at the workplace by organization members through gendering practices situated within a specific, local system of gender relations. The workplace is a site where women and men are constantly producing 'femininity' and 'masculinity'. Furthermore gender is shaping the development, structure, culture and dynamics of organization.

Relating to these approaches on gender theories, the study inquires about women's experience in the male dominated profession of taxi driving in Romania, by revealing the process of engendering the occupation and the women employees. The author focuses on the implication that the gender stereotyping process has for women, on their chances in succeeding in this occupation as well as in overcoming the difficulties they encounter. Thus based on the findings, the author argues that in order to succeed in a male traditional profession women negotiate gender beliefs in relation with themselves and with the clients. Moreover performing gender is a professional skill, which these women used to defeat the discriminatory actions against them and to keep themselves safe, to raise their status in relation to male colleagues, and seek for legitimization. By changing the gender dynamic inside the occupation women produce changes in its development and in the gendered culture of the workplace.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Driving an automobile in Romania is still considered a specific male activity. All the occupation based on driving are male designed and male dominated as labor-market itself is very much defined by patriarchal patterns. My study inquires about how women experience the traditionally male job of taxi driver and in particular looks upon women taxi drivers in Sibiu, an ordinary Romanian town.

For depicting the image of women taxi driver I focus primarily on the way women are performing gender at the workplace. Therefore my attention is directed towards the gendered aspects of the workplace, towards women's regular activities and on their relations with customers and with their colleagues.

The scholars (Moss Kanter, 1993; Kondo, 1990; Staudt, 1994; Pierce, 1995; Acker, 1991) who describes women in the male-dominated professions sets the framework of what token women experience in these occupations. The gendered workplace and the gendered interaction between female and male colleagues make women have a special status within the occupation, to perform it differently compared to men and moreover to perform their gender in special ways so as to accomplish the job task or to seek recognition inside the workplace and among their colleagues.

My findings confirm most of the characteristics employed by the above mentioned scholars when they referred to token women. Still, the peculiarities of the Romanian women which are 'token' in their taxi driving profession are related with the fact that for most of these women the profession is a necessity and for succeeding in it they actually depend on the manner they manage to change people's negative stereotypes about them. They are constantly negotiating gender stereotypes using both 'feminine' and 'masculine' features for positively describing and promoting themselves.

Furthermore they also negotiate the performance of gender; they do masculinity and femininity as strategies to overcome difficult situations, discriminatory attitudes and to manage permanently to keep themselves safe during the work time.

My first chapter ‘Women in taxi driving occupation’ offers the background information on the socio-economic aspects of Romanian women taxi drivers in Sibiu. Based on the interviews and on the participant observation of the present study, this chapter presents women taxi drivers’ personal stories about to how they enter in this occupation, and how they feel about this job or how this profession fits into their life, and so on.

With the second chapter ‘Gendering taxi driving’ begins the analytical part of my thesis dedicated largely to examining how the structure of the workplace, the woman’s identity as an employee and her daily activities and social interactions are gendered and what implication it has for female taxi drivers and their work. I start with analyzing how women use the dominant versus alternative sex stereotypes in constructing their self and their relation with the others. Thus, I am primarily concerned with the categories of sex stereotypes that women rely on in describing themselves and their work, their customers or male colleagues. In examining women’s relation with their clients I look at the gendered beliefs that either favor or discriminate against them.

Chapter six, in the order of the table of contents, ‘Token women, working women’ which is the third analytical part of the thesis deals with women’s ways of adapting to the male constructed workplace and presents the explanations, justification and strategies that women use for overcoming gender-based discrimination against them and for protecting themselves in all the contexts. In this chapter I analyze the most important aspect, of how women perform their gender in a normative and other times in a resistant manner trying to see what circumstances constrained them in reproducing ‘femininity’ or ‘masculinity’ and what are their feelings towards reproducing ‘female specific features’ or ‘male traditional’ ones.

2. Review of the scholarship.

One major body of literature upon which I intend to draw on my research concerns women in male dominated jobs, token women in nontraditional occupations for which I will use the writings of scholars such as Moss Kanter (1993), Staudt (1994), Reskin (1986), Acker (1991).

Moss Kanter's (1993) study have examined how gender composition of jobs and work units affects relation between men and women and the rewards that derive from it. He talks about 'token women', who are the few employees, not members of the dominant group, which shared a 'special status' and several common experiences which differs them from men. These include increased visibility, performance pressures, social isolation, and assimilation into social stereotypes.

Because of their visibility, their actions can never be hidden. The irony is that, they must work twice as hard just to be seen as competent (Staudt, 1994). As a consequence of these common experiences, token women are more likely to have their mistakes amplified; be isolated as a social out-group; and be caught into roles that undermined their status. My study is looking at the manner Romanian woman taxi drivers perform their work; experience performance pressure to accomplish 'male standards' in doing this specific occupation; how their visibility makes them being discriminated against based on their gender.

Their visibility is determined by the fact that taxi driving like all other occupations is gendered. Scott (1986) talks about constructing the gendered workplace through five interactive processes, which further Acker (1991) develops. One of them is represented by the interaction between men and women at the workplace. These also refer to patterns of behavior which determine dominance and submission among workers. The workplace is also gendered through elements of gendered identity, by which we can understand choice of appropriate work activity, ways of achieving job task, and the presentation of self as a gendered member of the

organization (Reskin and Roos, 1987). According to Kondo (1990) gender identity is open, negotiable, shifting and ambiguous. She views selves as multiple and fluid. One of my main focuses concerns the ways female taxi drivers engender their identity and their relations with the others persons, which are customers or male colleagues, persons with whom they constantly work. I focus here especially on the gender stereotypes women use when they construct their self, describe their work activities, different circumstances they have to face during work, their interaction with clients or other drivers. For this I use the writings of scholars such as Best and Williams (1990), Ridgeway and Correll (2004) who argue that cultural beliefs about gender are the main pillars of the gender system and that they are “the blueprint for doing gender in most settings where people consider themselves relative to others” (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004: 514).

Using gender as an organizing principle, a group of studies explores how employers use gender to organize and assign jobs (Leider 1993). These studies show that the perception of women’s or men’s concordance for particular job is socially constructed (Hall 1993). Closed related to these cultural beliefs about gender Acker (1991) explains that even though, jobs are presented to have gender-neutral characteristics of an abstract individual; the only person who is appropriate to accomplish them is a man. The job’s disembodied characteristics are delimiting the boundary between work and sexuality, a dichotomy that proves to be similar to the duality of ‘ration’ and ‘emotion’, thus of man and woman. According to Hochschild (1983) men are the actors and women are the emotional support. Women are associated with sexuality, procreation, and emotion, and thus are not the proper worker (Acker, 1991), which men are by definition. If Romanian women taxi drivers are seen by their clients only as ‘women’ and thus discriminated against as drivers or as potentials mothers and therefore preferred as taxi drivers my concern would be how women taxi drivers relate to their jobs in these circumstances, how do they behave accordingly to gender expectations which are in contradiction.

Because of these gender stereotypes or ‘feminine characteristics’ with which they are associated with: (more relationship centered, nurturing, and sensitive, hard workers) due to different gendered expectation towards them, women are usually considered to have a different style of working compared with men, which values relationships, coordination, and the well-being of the collective. Similarly, I presume that overall women taxi drivers are performing their work at their best, with much dedication, by accomplishing both ‘female standards’ through their interaction with the clients and ‘male standards’, established inside the male gendered workplace as job requirements. I also presume that they totally involve themselves in their activity in response to the performance pressure inside the job as to overcome their status of token women and also do much psychological effort as a strategy to continuously adapt to various job tasks and in difficult circumstances. But for sure some of these expectations can prove to be invalid throughout my study.

Another major body of literature upon which my thesis will focus, concerns gender as an active ‘phenomenon’, how it defines the interaction between people and also people themselves. Gender is done as a “routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction” (West and Zimmerman, 1987) between male and female taxi drivers and between female taxi drivers and their clients. In some of the situations doing gender means doing difference (Fenstermaker, 2002) but I expect that this isn’t defining totally the way women drivers do their gender at work and/or how gender itself shapes the work of women. Because overall my study analyze how women produce, reproduce or change gender at the workplace my concerns goes to the factors that determine the traits woman choose to perform it. Many studies about gender as a discourse, practice and identity in organization have focused on practices of gender as something people ‘do’ at work (Barrett, 1996; Pierce, 1995; Kondo, 1990).

Formerly, gender was portrayed as a trait of individuals, as sex role which they enacted in concordance with their biological tendency. A more current view is that gender is socially

constructed at work by organization members though gender practices situated within a specific local system of gender relation (Acker, 1990; Martin, 2001). Organizations are sites where men and women routinely 'do masculinity' and 'do femininity'. Kondo (1990) argues that women construct femininity in the workplace. He describes how Japanese women factory workers assert their gender identities as surrogate mothers to young men workers. Similarly, I wonder if women are doing 'femininity' or 'masculinity' at the workplace and how would they justify their choice.

My study thus contributes to these bodies of literature by pointing how Romanian women experience the male dominated job of taxi driver and how they perform gender at workplace. Through my study I will examine the some social and economical aspects of the taxi driver occupation in the context of a post-socialist transition time in Sibiu, Romania. I will pay attention on the development of the job, the ways in which it is gendered and how different gender stereotypes related to it are changing over time. My focus would be on the way women perform 'femininity' or/and 'masculinity' in succeeding as taxi drivers.

3. Methodology of Research.

This chapter represents an overall view of the process of designing and conducting the qualitative research project, which offers the empirical data of this thesis. The thesis aims broadly to add information on the theories of gender, gendering the person, doing/performing gender at the workplace by investigating their application in a particular case of Romanian woman taxi drivers. The research method that I will use is ethnography. I am interested in people's beliefs and practices of the job and their ways of performing gender during these activities inside a certain culture and a definite collectivity of the Romanian town, Sibiu.

Driving an automobile in Romania is still considered to be a specifically masculine activity. All the occupations based on driving are male designed and male dominated because the labor market itself is very much defined by patriarchal patterns and structures. For this reason it is interesting to analyze women's experience in male dominated jobs such as taxi driving and relate its characteristics with how men are performing gender during the same type of activity.

The research is answering the question of *how women experience the male dominated job of taxi driver*. In particular, I am interested in how women are performing their gender at the wheel, in relation with their job requirements, their clients, and male colleagues.

This study is based on a preliminary research on women taxi drivers which, I conducted in November 2006, in Sibiu, and which offers me a broad view of the gendered aspects of this job. Furthermore this previous research on the topic helped me selecting one research strategy over another, define my sample and choose the way to combine the qualitative methods for illuminating certain aspects of reality more easily. Knowing the theoretical approaches on the topic combined with the appropriate framework for the study based on the prior research my ability to pick up subtle clues and latch onto and follow different leads was increased.

The sample of my research consisted of three major target groups of people for which I employed different research tools: female and male taxi drivers and their clients. I tried to have a sample as diverse as possible; people had different backgrounds, professions before becoming taxi drivers, levels of education, class status, ethnicity and age. My intention of having a big diversity within the sample was in order to get into the complexities of the phenomena of performing gender at the workplace in relation with different socio-cultural aspects, age, level of education, ethnicity if possible. Even though my thesis focuses more on the status of token women in this profession and how gender affects their work and how work affects the ways gender is enacted, the study also took into account other independent variables. Within the sample I had one or two married couples, where both the woman and the man are taxi drivers for a better approach to the gendered aspect of the job and for more consistent information about these women and their life in relation with the job.

Most of the time different perspective implies different methods and gaining a more holistic view of the issues involves means that are combining more than one research method. Therefore I used three qualitative methods: *interviews, participant observation and field notes based on documents and records*. I conducted nine interviews with women, six short interviews with men and four with clients. I manage to participate and observe two or three times to women and men's taxi driving during the day. Still it was impossible to travel together there be a client in the car. The women considered me as the customers in few occasions before I started to introduce myself and my planed research.

Since the major body of literature (Staudt, K., 1994 & Moss Kanter, 1993) upon which I intend to draw on my research concerns women in male dominated jobs and token women in nontraditional occupations the most important themes upon which I designed my guide interview include women's increased visibility, their performance pressures in this job, social isolation, and assimilation into social stereotypes. In the beginning I conducted only

unstructured interviews with women, which were based on a clear plan in order to have a minimum of control over the informant's responses. In most of the cases women were able to open up and express themselves in their own terms related to their profession: the way they spend a regular day, their professional satisfactions and concerns, how did they enter the job; how do they feel about it; how fit are themselves to perform a traditional male job; how does the client and male colleagues treat them; and so on.

Women are associated with sexuality, procreation, and emotion, as Hochschild (1994) argues, and thus they are not regarded as a proper worker, which men are by definition. According to my previous study Romanian female taxi drivers are seen by their clients only as 'women' and are thus discriminated against as drivers or alternatively are seen as potential mothers and therefore preferred as taxi drivers. My concern was also about how women taxi drivers relate to their jobs these circumstances and how they behave according to gender expectations which are in contradiction.

Because I was limited by time did not manage to have as many second meetings with all of the women interviewed, but only with the ones who were the most open, talkative and willing to develop more their ideas. These second interviews were semi-structured, based on a clear interview-guide, which covered a list of topics such as the ones mention above: significance of women's career, their future desires, the strategies they use against gender based discriminations, their dissatisfaction and so on. Much of the first meetings determined the guiding questions of the follow-up interviews.

Participant observation of women driving focused on women's relations with their clients (even though I was the client and thus much of her attitude was influenced by this after revealing my research intentions), more precisely on the importance they give to their physical appearance; the ways they perform a certain type of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' at work if they can argue for that; the ways of driving the automobile and especially if they encounter

performance pressure to drive similar to men; and their relation with the other women and men drivers.

Interviews with men taxi drivers were semi-structured and addressed their relation with women drivers and female taxi drivers and the gender stereotypes they use towards drivers and female drivers especially. Similarly, I approached the male and female clients by investigating their gendered preferences and gendered expectations of taxi drivers. I also observed their attitude towards them and the way they interact and participate in conversation during traveling.

Moreover, through my study I examined some social and economic aspects of the taxi driver occupation in the context of a post-socialist transition time in Sibiu. I collected information from the City Hall, statistical departments and taxi companies about the development of the job and the manner in which it has been gendered over time. In addition, I collected data about taxi driver occupation, law requirements from the companies which conduct driving training.

The content analysis of my gathered data from both the interviews and filed notes of participant observation were developed after defining a set of concepts and categories that were related to my research questions. Here it should be mentioned that I paid attention to the existence and frequency of definite themes, their presentation or level of generalization and the importance given to them. But I also let myself open to new and unexpected themes. Finally, I analyzed their relation to each other by constructing a mental model, a map of concepts and their relationships to each other.

My assumptions were from the beginning that Romanian woman, taxi drivers experience performance pressure to accomplish ‘male standards’ of driving. Their visibility made the younger ones, with less experience of driving to be discriminated against based on their gender. Similarly, I assumed that, overall, women taxi drivers involve themselves more in

their activity than men, and that they are doing more emotional work, interact better with their clients, and so on. But for sure some of these gender expectations can be proved to be invalid throughout my study. Other presumptions were related to the ways gender is done as a “routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction” (West and Zimmerman, 1984) between male and female taxi drivers and between female taxi drivers and their clients. In some of the situations doing gender means doing difference (Fenstermaker, 2002) but I expected that this isn’t totally defining the way women drivers do their gender at work and/or how gender itself shapes the work of women.

Taking into consideration all my presumptions, which probably affected the development of my qualitative project, the study can be considered biased. A strategy to overcome these limits consisted in being constantly aware of these presumptions and keeping myself as objective as possible. Further more the fact that I conducted follow up interviews, which were based on guiding questions determined or lead by the results of the first meetings also contributed to overcoming the limits of my study. The study can also be considered limited because of the small dimension of my sample and limited number of people that I interviewed. Further I took into consideration my own ‘gendered subjectivity’ in interpreting the data especially because my study dealt much with analyzing sex stereotypes.

The ethical issues raised by this study were overcome by receiving a total consent of the informers from the beginning of their participation in the research. Their anonymity was respected by changing their names, avoiding the discovery of their identity through quotations or demographic data, etc. Those participants, including institutions and companies, which request the result of my project, can receive a summary or the complete study.

This chapter described the ways of designing and conducting the project of a qualitative research of my MA thesis. To sum up, the research was based upon face to face interviews of Romanian women and men taxi drivers, participant observation of their work and interviews of

their female and male clients. It focused on women's work, their emotional and physical involvement, their problems and difficulties and the significance of this job for them, their relations with clients and male colleagues and especially how these relations shapes the particular ways Romanian women taxi drivers perform their gender.

4. Women in taxi driving occupation.

4.1. The Socio-economical and Legal Context of the taxi driving in Sibiu.

Taxi driving services in Sibiu have developed considerably in the Post-Communist period, not because of a real need for public transportation, but because people needed jobs. This was also the case of women, which were women over thirty-five, unemployed or in need of a better job. Presently, in Sibiu there are around 1600-1700 persons working as taxi drivers, from a total population of 184,598¹ persons. Taxi driving is very much male-dominated; there are only 22 female taxi drivers. Before 1989, there were less one hundred taxi cars in town and it was considered somehow a luxury to use a taxi for public transportation. The end of the socialist period has brought many changes in the labor market and in the following years many of the big state-owned companies were closed down.

Taxi driving began to be a job available for many unemployed people, for those who had lost their jobs during the transition time of post-socialist Romania and didn't find any other suitable work. Because this job was not regulated until 2003, it was accessible for anyone who owned a car or could borrow one to use it for this purpose. It has always been accessible for many people to travel by a taxi in Sibiu. Taxi services are rather cheap because the town is not too large and usually a one-way travel from peripheries of the town to the central part costs around three or four bus tickets. So, a job that began from a work necessity soon began to be a good business and the number of taxi cars has grown significantly.

Today to become a taxi driver is much more complicated. No only that you depend on the limited number of taxi cars established by the city council of Sibiu, which is 1100 cars and which is already over fulfilled² but one also need to invest a lot of money into the legal documents, tests, and licenses required by law. So, it is not as easy as it was in beginning, just

¹ Statistics since 2004 offered by the National Institute of Statistics-Sibiu

to own a car and to start working. Nowadays one has to have a proper car, some money to invest and probably a strong ‘social capital’ would be also ‘recommended’ in order to enter this occupation.

The taxi driving occupation is regulated by the Law no. 38/2003³, which stipulates the list of requirements and legal documents one need to fulfill in order to perform de job and the various public institutions with attributes in supervising the occupation. According to the law some of the taxi driver’s duties are “to insure the client and all his/hers belonging”⁴ and also to offer him or her “protection during the travel”⁵. Thus the taxi driver seem very much responsible not only for driving the client safely to the destination, but also responsible of his or her well being inside the car. Further more, stipulated as obligatory duty in the law, the taxi driver must refuse to transport drunk customers or persons who would engage in a conflict during the transportation. Well, it can be rather difficult for the taxi drivers to reject a drunk client entering the car, not to mention that sometime it can be impossible them to know from the beginning which client can lose the temper or behave aggressively. So, the law offers a lot of protection to the client, but it does not seem that efficient in promoting also the safety of the taxi driver. Still, one of the obligations of taxi customers is to offer support to the taxi drivers in cases when they are physically abused or attack⁶. But the law does not mention the persons who could attack them, and actually, in most of the cases the ones who can put them in danger are the clients.

² The fact that there are more taxi automobiles than the initial number establish by the city council is not known by everybody. This came out through my interviews with one representative of the associations that promotes taxi drivers rights. This fact can be a possible a sign corruption inside the system.

³ Legea Nr. 38/2003 din 20/01/2003 privind transportul in regim de taxi. [Law no. 38/2003 from 20/01/2003 about the taxi driving as public transportation.]

⁴Idem 3, lit. e

⁵Idem3, lit. h

⁶ Idem 5, B, lit.e.

4.2. The token women narrating about themselves.

In this section aims to introduce for the reader the Romanian women working as taxi drivers, their stories about the job and how they fit the job into their daily life. The stories are based on the information collected through my participant observation and interviews. Most of the offered data about these women taxi drivers from Sibiu focus on the particularities these women shared, either as employees, or simply as women in their life as wives, mothers, etc.

Sabina is a nice looking, forty six year old blonde lady. She is married, and she has two teenager children she was very proud of. She has got her driving license for twenty years. It was a real pleasure to travel with her. She was an excellent driver; she was driving so gentle that I didn't feel the pitted road of one of the construction area of the town. Her car was faultlessly clean and well maintained.

She confessed that she has been working as a taxi driver since 2000. At the beginning, she was rather skeptical about doing this job, let aside liking it. She wasn't sure about being able to do it. She started it because she did not have much option at the time. Some of her friends which were working as taxi drivers encouraged her because of the flexible schedule and the good earning. It was a difficult job for her at the beginning, but her husband, who was a driving instructor, withstood her very much. After learning the city map and getting used with all the streets names, she even started to enjoy her job.

Before becoming a taxi driver, she has been working as a shop assistant, a job which she feels that has helped her much in taxi driving because she was accustomed to the difficult part of the work, with interacting with different people. She was really open, intelligent and a pleasurable company. At the end of the interview she offered me chocolate candies, which

were there for the other clients, too. It was obvious that she liked people, and enjoyed interacting with them. Still, she considered that they can also be the ‘hard’ part of the job.

She owned her car, a fact that gave her more freedom than she used to have in the beginning, when working with the company’s car. Overall, she felt pleased with her job; she was satisfied to be her ‘own master,’ to have more control over her schedule and her earnings. She was willing to do this job further, not only because she liked it, but also because she believed that at her age there were not many other possibilities to start a new carrier.

Gica is a fifty-three year old very determined and brave woman. She has been living in a mountain village until 1992, when she moved to Sibiu. During that year she became a taxi driver. Gica was a great partner of discussion, she liked to talk openly about her job; even if she was not very well educated, so her vocabulary was rather reduced; she didn’t always understand my questions, so I had to rephrase them, and sometimes she expressed her fear to not ‘mistake’ the answer.

She was a professional driver, which means that she also had the driver license for trucks and heavy trailers. She has always liked driving, meeting different people, traveling. She confessed that, since she was a little girl, she dreamed about having what she calls ‘adventurous’ jobs, such as police officer or a taxi driver.

One might say that she ‘lacked femininity’ not only in physical appearance, but also in all her ways and manners. She was either hanging her arms on the wheel or gesticulated in a ‘manly way,’ while talking to me. When she arrived to pick me up she was eating salami with her bare hands. She stopped the car beside me and threw the salami inside the edge without knowing that I have noticed her ‘meal’.

She seemed rather unsatisfied with her personal life, as she had mentioned several times during the interview that she was unmarried and that she lived alone. Even though she

didn't have any children she said was financially supporting many of her nephews (from her sisters).

Camelia, another example of female bravery, is a fifty-four year old Ex-English teacher, a rather elegant and good-looking woman. She had been working as a taxi driver for just two weeks when I met and interviewed her. She was a really intelligent and communicative person.

Recently she had got divorced and moved from Bucharest back to Sibiu, her natal town, in order to live with her sick mother and her seventeen-year-old daughter. Even though she had much professional experience and various practices, she confessed it was quite difficult for her to find a job with a 'decent' earning, especially because of her age. Considering that she has been driving for thirty years now, she decided to take advantage of this situation and ended up doing taxi driving. Overall, it was a really difficult time of her life, so she was a little worried about how she and her daughter would adapt to the town and their new life here, she was afraid of feeling lonely or even afraid of not being capable of doing a good job. She desperately needed money, she did not want to let down her daughter and mother, and especially wanted to prove to her relatives, who have not encouraged her at all in taking this job, that she has been able to do it.

She did not own her car, so she had to work a lot; she needed to 'catch' as many clients as possible in order to be able to pay the owner of the car a daily amount of money (around 23 Euros, out of 30-35 Euros that she could have earned per day). It seemed a stressful job because she was at the beginning, and she did not manage to remember perfectly all of the names of the streets. In addition, the daily work schedule consisting in ten to twelve hours was much longer than she has been used to before. Still she said that she might fit in this job because she liked driving and of course she had all the abilities that one needs in order to have a satisfactory

interaction with people. Further more, Camelia has been working before in other fields dominated by men, like military, and she confessed that she was accustomed with doing the job in a manner that proved she is ‘one of them’, she eventually liked working with men and thus she did not feel any fear for gender based discrimination. She explained that the reasons for which she was not preoccupied for being gender based discriminated are not only that she was accustomed with a male environment but also because she herself was rather mannish by nature. Moreover she described herself as managing really easy to be either feminine or masculine according to her desires or aims.

Marioara, a fifty-four year old woman, was a very dynamic and talkative person. She started her work as taxi driver fourteen years ago, because she was unemployed at that time. She had been economically abused during her previous job as a seller, so she had to resign. Luckily, she had her driving license, and at that time she found that taxi driving was the one of the very few jobs available and financially convenient for her, so she has decided to go for it.

She and her husband were both taxi drivers and they were sharing the ‘family car’ for the business, in two shifts. She used to work during daytime, ten to twelve hours, or sometimes even fourteen hours per day, from Monday to Saturday. I interviewed her at their home because she did not want to be ‘kept’ from her work time. She lived with her husband in a regular bloc apartment, which I could notice that was maintained extremely clean. Both of their children were married.

She talked in a really nice mood about her job, even though she admitted that it can be tiresome and complained for not having enough time for doing her housework duties as she used to do before having this occupation.

Marioara’s attitude toward me during the interview was very kind and familiar. She behaved like most of the Romanian women, accustomed to serve their guests with coffee and

cookerries. This may not seem so unusual, but at the end she offered me a pack of apples and I felt like being her own child. We have got so closed talking to each other that when I was leaving I felt like kissing her for goodbye, and so I did.

Nicoleta offered me the most inspiring interview I ever had. She is a, fifty six year old, very ambitions and courageous woman who was been raising alone her five children for nine years, when her husband left her. She did not seem the type of person who would pay much attention to her physical appearance. Her short hair, the simple clothes, her lack of make-up revealed a rather ‘mannish appearance’, a lack of preoccupation for countenance and maybe also her belonging to the low middle class society.

Nicoleta has been driving for twenty eight years now and she has been working as a taxi driver since 1998. She talked about her as being really hard-worker as she is working all days and she spending only one Sunday on month with her family. She has been usually sleeping five-six hours during a night and worked for the rest of the day. She takes a two hours break at noon when she eats, sleeps a little, but she also cooks and does other domestic work. Nothing seemed impossible to her, and she was totally arguing for this optimistic idea.

Despite her life as a single mother, which seemed to be very difficult, her devotion and positive attitudes towards life, family and her occupation itself were amazing. She talked about life as continuous practice to overcome one’s problems and never to give up. Still she argued that life wasn’t a burden but rather she believed that one must enjoy it with its bad and good parts because life is beautiful with its ups and downs. And as long as you want something and do something with pleasure nothing can stand in your way of succeeding. This was also the manner she was encouraging her children.

Dorina is a young thirty five woman, who has been a taxi driver for the last two years. Married, with two children, Dorina started the work as taxi driver altogether with her husband, as a family business. In the beginning, they have hired a few people as taxi drivers (which is simply by renting their cars to people who would want to work as drivers), but in time she also become a taxi driver. She did not intend to work for a long time as taxi driver, but only until another kind of family businesses would develop enough.

Dorina is not necessarily a beautiful women, but she was really dressed up, had her hair done, wearing many jewelries, and her nails were very long. She was working about eight hours per day and she afforded to have a very flexible schedule, but compared with the other women that I had interviewed she had much younger children to raise.

She was not the most pleasurable company I had among the female taxi drivers. In comparison with the other women that I have interviewed, she did not speak with much enthusiasm about her job and her answers were always short and sometimes irresolute.

Ana was a fifty five-year-old woman, who had been working as taxi driver for the last eight years. After twenty-nine years of working in the food market, she has found herself unemployed. Because of her considerable age, for a few years she could not find a suitable occupation on the labour market, so she decided to go for the occupation of taxi driving. She presented herself as a single and divorced woman with two teen-ager children, whom she had to raise by her own.

Ana has started her work on her own car, but after three years it broke down and because she could not afford a new one she started working on one of the taxi companies' automobile. She is one of the only women who said that she didn't always like to drive. She needed one job so badly that she had to do it. She has confessed that she was really scared and insecure in the beginning, and she felt it as a really difficult job. For her liking the job was a real

duty, it seemed as the most important requirement. So, she confessed that because she had no other opportunities in the job market but to enter this occupation ‘she had to like it!’ As she explained me, convincing herself that she enjoy what she does it was also the only chance to succeed in it. She said she did not have many problems adapting to work with clients because she was used to interact with people during her former job. In time she got used with it and it felt much easier, so she started to enjoy driving

Ana was extremely calm, and she was answering slowly to my questions, taking her time. She explained how she learned to like her job. Her patience, self-control and ability to interact with people have helped her in overcoming all the difficulties of the job. She said that she played much importance to respecting the people around her, including her own children.

Georgeta is another very likeable and full of life woman in her forty eight. She has been employed as taxi driver since 1994. After her last maternal leave period of time has finished, she went back to her previous work which at that time has become financially inconvenient. Georgeta chose to enter this occupation because driving a taxi seemed to be a good new business and also for a personal reason: her husband is a taxi driver too.

Because she loves her job and considers driving as something she become addicted to, she would change it only in case that she would have the opportunity for a job for which she is professionally trained and which should also offer her an even better payment. Still she realizes that her age would always be a problem in finding some other work.

As almost all the women that I had interviewed, she is a hard worker; her working schedule is fifteen to sixteen hours per day. Georgeta starts her activity at six o’clock in the morning, then she takes a two hours pause at noon, when she rests and eats, and then she gets back ‘on the road’ until midnight or even longer if there are many customers or long-distance destinations. The long schedule affects a lot her personal life. She would love to be able to

spend more time with her family (her husband and her two young sons), her friends and relatives, to enjoy the weekends at home and generally having more free time.

4.3. General aspects on taxi driving as a job for women.

This section reveals the major aspects of what it means for women to be taxi driver based on the information already mention in the ways women narrate about themselves and also on data collected from Romanian public institutions referring to the development of the taxi driving occupation in Sibiu.

Many of the female taxi drivers started their work in the years after the ‘revolution’ when most of those that I interviewed were working in the trade market as seller, or they were unemployed as a consequence of being discriminated against for their age. As men have always had more opportunities in the labor market, to become taxi drivers seemed at the time for the few women who had a driving license a very good, if not one of the very few job opportunities. Today, at their fifties they all confessed me that they that this occupation is the only one available for them.

Some of those that I have talked to are single mothers in their fifties, who described themselves as mothers fighting for maintenance of the family. They used ‘masculine’ stereotypes: courageous, potent, and able to do any king of activity or job, being mother and father at the same time. Some described their life as being a continuous battle, which only give them “one option to be strong and succeed in everything”.

All of them expressed pride in doing a male dominated job, and they are doing it with a lot of pleasure, involvement, or even passion. They talked about it as being a “true art” or “a virus which makes you addicted on doing the job once that it gets into your blood”. They talked about themselves as being really hard workers and dedicated to the job. They are working

around ten to twelve hours or even in some cases fifteen hours per day in order to remain with the amount of money enough for their needs. Most of them are pleased with the earning but still, in few cases women confessed feeling unsatisfied with the income, arguing that it should be much higher for the long hours of work and the large effort that put in it. Their earnings are 300 to 400 Euros per month, which is around double of the mean salary⁷ in Romania. Because of the long schedule, many women also complained of not having enough time to do their housework, spend holidays in the family or enjoy more free time with friends.

What almost all said that they enjoyed the most in this job is both driving and talking with customers. Still, they admit that it is a difficult, risky, and tiresome job because of the high traffic, the long schedule, and dangerous or difficult customers. All of them know that they have the right (not obligation as it is in the law) to refuse drunk clients but usually they mention the male customers, either drunk and aggressive or insulting them in a sexist manner as the one who frequently create them problems. As we saw the law does not offer them much protection. Actually they argue that they are constantly aware of being in risky situations of being attack during their working hours. Still, they are said that they got used to manage in unsafely situations where their own safety is put in danger as being a part of accomplishing their job.

Concluding on women personal stories as taxi drivers, I would argue that most of the cases described above show that taxi driving means for these women a necessity with the sole exception of Dorina, they started their work as taxi driver because the job market did not offer them other better alternative in the years after the end of socialist time. Today they are also aware that after the age of thirty-five or forty women have very few chances in finding a decent job. Further more for those single mothers, this job means surviving. Even though they like their job, they also admit of not having other opportunities of doing something for which they

⁷ The mean salary is around 230 Euro and the minimum salary is 120 Euro.

may also have their professional education in. So, that seems do be why women accept a difficult and hard working job, which sometime also puts their life at risk.

5. Gendering taxi driving.

Feminist theorists and researchers have shown that workplaces are infused with gender. The structure of the labor market, the organizational culture (Staudt, 1994), the workplace, the job itself (Aker, 1991) and the social interactions within the workplace are gendered. The gender composition of jobs affects the relation between women and men as employees, their material rewards or psychological satisfactions (Martin and Harkreader, 1993, Collinson, 1997). As Martin argues gender is practiced in workplaces “conflated with working dynamics through social interaction” (2001: 343).

The overall aim of my thesis is picturing the various ways women are experiencing their job as taxi drivers. In the previous chapter my general argument referred to the importance the taxi driver profession has into these women’s life. This chapter analyzes the feeling they have for this occupation and what significance it has accomplishing it though the divergent ways of experiencing their interaction with clients, and with male colleagues.

As Moss Kanter (1993) notes that token women managers share several common experiences which differs them from men. These include increased visibility, performance pressures, social isolation, and assimilation into social stereotypes. What this chapter also wants to reveal is the manner women adapt to different circumstances, shaped either by positive or negative attitude towards them as women taxi drivers.

5.1. Gendered identities.

In this male socially constructed workplace, women as workers are strongly visible. Joan Acker (1991) argues that jobs are constructed to have abstract dimensions, but their disembodied characteristics delimit the boundary between work and sexuality, a dichotomy that proves to be similar to the duality of men and women. Even though such characteristics

seem to be gender-neutral, the only person who is appropriate to accomplish them is a man. Women are associated many times with sexuality, procreation and emotion, as Arlie Russel Hochschild (1994) also says, and thus are not the ideal worker, which men are by definition.

Sex stereotypes are strongly represented in the self-description of what it means to be a woman taxi driver. Asked about how do they feel about their job and whether they are fit for it or not women are usually arguing that they are the right person for this type of occupation. But the reasons they use to justify and support their argument are gender based. They believe they are the most suitable for accomplishing what are supposed to be the job's requirements first of all because of their specific 'feminine qualities'. Thus they argue that they are much valuable as taxi drivers for their 'native capacities' shared by women than for their individual gained skills. Thinking about the way she performs her job, Sabina, the forty six year old taxi driver, argued⁸ that:

Well, [...] I consider that women are actually better drivers than men. That is because we are calmer, more tranquil, more malleable, and more communicative. I guess this is my nature. I [for example], as soon as the client gets inside the car [I] say something. I'm never tired of talking and listening to other people's problems.[...] Men drive different compared to women. Many men drive much more brutishly, aggressive sometimes. Because they are like this by nature! Women are much more calm and patience.

Similarly, Marioara, the fifty-four-year old woman whose husband is also a taxi driver, was explaining what abilities someone needs in order to be good in this profession. But what she actually does is implying that performing well in this job means much physiological effort, emotional work, something for which women have all the necessary 'skills'.

One needs to have many qualities, but all of us [women] have them. First of all it is important the way we [women] behave, pay attention to physical appearance and to cleanness,[...] to be always in a expressive and in a good mood, not angry, not to be brutish with the clients, to speak nice to clients. We [women] have a lot of patience with clients not matter what is their level of education or job, their character and so on, we must speak with everyone

⁸ All translations to English are mine.

even if we don't really like them. This is how one needs to behave when she/he works with people. One should be able to deal with angry customers, needs to be kind and speak polite no matter at what [educational] level.

On the other hand, in surprisingly many cases women believe that they were suited for this job because they have some 'masculine feature' which are according to them courage, ambition, perseverance, and so on. Most of them talked about their fearlessness and brave nature, but in several cases they clearly 'explained' this by saying that 'they should have been borne a man'. This is either something their mother told them when they were little or something they say now.

Sabina and Camelia, the women with the most kind and warm personality, with 'feminine' and gentle manners were arguing about their ways of being and behaving while they were answering to my question of whether they fear something during their job's activities.

Sabina. [...] I believe I have a brave and manly nature. I remember that this was what my mother used to tell me: "you should have been born a boy and not a girl!"⁹

Camelia. I'm not afraid. You just need to be cautious [...] in rest I'm a very courageous. My mother was all the time telling me that I should have been a boy because I used to play with boys in school and not with girls.

It is very typical for the cases when a child, either a boy or a girl doesn't 'behave' according to gender expectations. They aren't told that they should behave differently, but rather that they have the wrong sex; they have been mistakenly born with the opposite sex. This seems interesting for the manner in which gender dictates sex and not vice versa (if we can afford to make such a simplistic distinction between the two terms).

Still, it can be argued that this can be a clear method used by the parents to enforce the child's 'proper performance' of gender, to make him/her aware of the existence of the gender

expectation towards him/her in society. As it is expressed (“you should have been born”..) it is expressed as the child’s fault of being born ‘wrong’ and nobody else’s (the parent doesn’t ever say: “I should have given birth to you..”). Making the child to feel guilty can be a way for the parents to encourage his ‘readjustment’ to the ‘gender print’.

Camelia, the ex-English teacher, who had been working in taxi driving only for two weeks, but who had been working for a long period of time as an interpreter in a military institution, believed that the constant interaction with men made her behave more typically manly. Camelia is not the only person who explains her considered masculine features or personality through her preference for social interaction with men or with boys in childhood.

I had always many male friends; my [women] friends are very rare. I have only two or three [women friends]. I have always got along very well with men both at the workplace and in the social life. I am manlier myself.

Moreover she admitted that the male dominated workplace, such as the military institution had put ‘a mark’ on her, made her more masculine, thus more ‘courageous, punctual, tidy, organized and efficient in moments of crises’. So, it can be argued that it is both the preference for interacting with the opposite gender social category and also the pressure inside that gendered group to behave similarly that influence the ways token women ‘choose’ to perform their gender.

Being somehow aware about the existence of the gendered requirements imposed by the job, and the pressure inside the workplace to perform the activities according to them, Nicoleta says that the woman needs to be at least a little masculine in order to enter this male occupation and thus to be able to do it.

In general I don’t believe that a woman with weak and feeble temperament enters this type of job. I don’t know one who does it. I haven’t met any delicate, fastidious or high-life women. The woman needs to be a little mannish.

She uses negative feminine stereotypes to argue that they are inappropriate for performing this occupation. Thus, in her conception women 'like this' wouldn't be able to do the work properly. The fact that she doesn't know one woman like that means for her that either this 'extremely feminine' women wouldn't opt for this male profession or that they couldn't make it and would eventually give up on it. What Nicoleta is also implying, and maybe she is not even aware of, is the fact that the taxi driving work makes you perform gender in a specific manner, which can be argued to be more 'male' appropriate. But if we think back to Marioara and Sabina we see that women taxi drivers when they refer to themselves use also positive feminine stereotypes in order to put themselves in advantage. So, for proving themselves also good in this occupation, women use both female and male stereotypical positive features to portray themselves.

5.2. Gendered social interactions.

In this section I will continue to analyze how and why taxi driving is a gendered job by arguing that taxi driving is a gendered occupation not only because driving is considered a traditional male activity or because it is overwhelmingly male dominated but also because it implies gendered social interactions which have the characteristics of a masculine organizational culture.

As Scott (1986) argues one of the interactive dimensions of the gendering process inside the workplace is the brought about by the patterns of social interactions between women and men. Thus I'm analyzing the gendering practices through the gender stereotyping process revealed by the most important dimensions of women's work as taxi drivers which are their relation with the clients and with male colleagues. The aim of this analysis is not only to offer

an overview of the patterns through which taxi driving is a gendered occupation but also to reveal the implication it has on women as employees.

5.2.1. Favorable attitudes.

Clients talking about women taxi drivers.

Some of the clients said that they would prefer to travel with a taxi driven by a woman because they argue that women have proven that they do a better quality job as taxi drivers compared to men. Further they emphasize that experience has demonstrated that women are generally cleaner, are more cautious and less aggressive while driving. One of the men I spoke to, who regularly used a taxi to travel inside the town affirmed:

I have my own car now, but for many years I traveled only with the taxi and I remember that I was looking all the time for women taxi drivers. At the beginning I was afraid to travel with a woman. I know that many of my female colleagues preferred women drivers too. Women taxi drivers are always more clean, neat, [...] they smell nice. If you use a taxi often enough you would meet for sure dirty taxi drivers, men taxi drivers who would smell ugly like old cheese or sweat. Men are also talking too much. I've met two really intelligent women taxi drivers. I remember one very well. It was a real pleasure to talk to them. [...] Women are also driving more carefully, [...] they are more calm which can be felt by the passenger too. It always makes me feel more confident and safe.

This particular example illustrates how experience can overcome negative gender stereotypes about women as drivers and thus the social impact in the case of social isolation. Women were preferred as taxi drivers, as it was obvious for positive qualities considered as being specifically feminine.

Even though women's skills of driving professionally can be valued more because of their association with typical 'women's qualities' like carefulness, responsibility, calmness, confidence, security, stability this creates a major opportunity for women to enlarge the number of their clients. This means having succeeded in their occupation. Moreover, in time the general opinion about taxi driving as being only a male occupation might change.

Male colleagues talking about women taxi drivers

Two out of six male taxi drivers that I have talked to argue that women are not better and not worst drivers compared to men. Men believe it all depends on the person, her/his abilities, and his / her courage and not on whether the driver is a woman or a man. They usually talked about experiences when either men or women proved better drivers. They do not seem to use gender stereotypes while explaining their opinion, rather they emphasize on valuable, positive qualities which can belong to both men and women. Being courageous, attentive, sociable, patient, etc. are neither masculine nor feminine implied sex trait stereotypes but rather high status adjectives of what it means to be a good taxi driver. I was traveling in a taxi driven by a forty-five year old man taxi driver, who had been a driver instructor in his youth. As soon as I entered the car he started to talk, just for the sake of it. He complained about doing this job because he hadn't studied enough at school like his sister. I asked him about his opinion on how women drive and he told me:

Very well, it depends on her experience and her courage. And this goes the same for men. Between women or men there is no difference. There are bad drivers and good drivers on both sides. It is not like men are better. For example I was a driver instructor to a couple years ago. The man was driving like a coward, he was fearful but his wife had more confidence in herself. So, I told him that he won't get his driving license at least in the beginning at his first driving exam and I knew that she would. So it was; it did happen the way I had predicted.

Still there is also a tendency for male drivers to say that women are better taxi drivers as they prove to drive more carefully. They believe that compared to male drivers women are more prudent as they 'adventure' less in traffic and don't assume risky positions. This is how it is explained the fact that women have fewer car accidents overall than men. These opinions show how positive gender beliefs about women, such as being generally more prudent than men, are better praised compared to possible negative attributions.

In only one particular case a fifty-year-old man taxi driver said that overall women are better in everything they do. He was confessing to me as if this opinion was a big secret that definitely needed to be preserved from his wife. Here is his ‘nice confession’:

..we [men] don’t want to admit because we are vain but it is true that women are much better than us in all fields. It is nonsense to call them the ‘weaker sex’ because they [women] prove that they can manage in all occupations, they can do everything. We are the weak sex. We are ‘strong’ only when doing something [he is referring to intercourse] and even there is always an ‘if’.

He further affirms that he would feel lost, like a “dead man” without his wife. But he would never admit this to her because he fears he wouldn’t be able to dominate her otherwise.

No..[...] I will never say this in front of my wife she would trust herself too much then and she would become authoritative and try to dominate me.

This reveals in a nice manner how it is possible for men to be aware of the power they hold in the family, at the workplace or in society in general just because of their gender privileged status. This can be also understood to mean that men think that they are by nature more powerful, thus they should preserve their status supported by their physical differences. But this man’s tendency for hiding his opinion shows the fear of losing this power or dominance over his wife.

So, experience can change the negative and discriminative attitudes towards women drivers into positive ones, even if stereotypes continue to persist in a different form. If male colleagues opinion on women would have only positive connotations than female taxi drivers would have a ‘more’ egalitarian position towards men, and they would not face so much difficulties in doing the job.

Women taxi drivers ...about clients and male colleagues.

The attitude of clients and male colleagues towards women taxi drivers is usually contradictory. Women feel preferred by some and avoided by others for different or even similar reasons. Nicoleta, who has been driving for many years describe her experience as taxi driver and her position caught between being included and being excluded.

There are people [clients] who won't feel safe about being driven by a 'woman' so they avoid us, but there are others who would intentionally pick us for being women. They (the last ones) believe women are much calmer, drive more cautious. [..]

Almost all admit that they had at least some bad experiences when people avoided their car because they were women. Still, there is a clear difference between different age generations. Gica, one of the women who has been working for fifteen years as a taxi driver describes very well how clients and male colleagues have changed/ improved their behavior towards them over time.

When I started to work as a taxi driver there were only five women drivers. And back then if you (as a woman) wouldn't know a street or your car would brake down and you would have needed help, all our colleagues were shouting and insulting you: 'do back to your kitchen!' This was happening back in 1992. If you didn't know someone to help you with the car no one did really help you. Now, things have changed. They (men) see that we don't do so many car accidents as they do. Women are more cautious, they drive more prudently compared with men [..]. If the woman likes driving and does her occupation with pleasure than she is a better taxi driver than most of the men are.

Dorina, the youngest woman, (at thirty-five years old) whom I interviewed talked less about sexual discrimination inside the work structure and in their relation with the clients than the older ones. Asked about how clients behave towards her as a woman, Dorina, who has been working only for two years told me:

Well, the clients appreciate us [the women] much more than the men drivers. Even our [male] colleagues tell us this about customers. And we see it too. If we enter in a taxi station we are the first ones to leave.

This proves not only that the attitude towards women taxi drivers has changed during the post-communist time and that the negative stereotypes associated with women drivers have become less 'powerful' among people and have been replaced by other alternative cultural beliefs about gender. Additionally we can also argue; as Moss Kanter (1993) does; that in a male dominated job the presence of women can favor or at least make more accessible in time the entrance of others.

When they are preferred as taxi drivers, women argue that they are valued for the positive stereotypes that were associated with women in general. As already seen in the cases of the clients which prefer women taxi drivers women feel that they are appreciated for cleanness, gently way of driving, non smoking, pleasurable company.

Women are describing cases when, after driving a man to his destination, they were congratulated at the end because of the good job they are doing. Their experiences show how people act rather surprised and impressed in a good manner at the end of the journey. This gave them much confidence and satisfaction considering the large effort they put in their daily work. For example, Marioara, one of the women who is for a long time in this job and who talks very nicely about the pleasure she has in doing her work, told me what exactly makes her happy and satisfied about it:

[What make me satisfied are] clients who appreciate the way I drive. Someone told me that: 'I gave you lady, a ten [A, as a school mark] for the nice way of driving and another one for having good taste in music'. Many of the clients, the ones who are regularly using taxi for transportation are saying that we [women drivers] are good examples to be followed by many of the male drivers. And the truth is that I have experience, I have been driving for twenty-four years [...] I'm doing my work with a lot of pleasure, so automatically if you work with pleasure and dedication, and not for the money, you have satisfactions.

Interesting are the cases when customers prefer women taxi drivers for the same gender stereotypes which the others are avoiding them. As we saw some customers are avoiding women because they are associating them with mothers and everything that it is attributed to them. Thus, in their opinion a mother wouldn't be fit to occupy a male profession because of her natural inclinations for nurturing, protection, affection, which doesn't allow her to be a fast, good, courageous professional driver. But actually women for exactly the same reasons are preferred in some cases like parents sending their children daily to school.

All the women taxi drivers, whether mother or not, are seen as potential mothers, or at least having inherited their 'natural' or 'biological inclination' for which in the eyes of the parents, either a father or a mother they seem the fit driver. They are the taxi drivers who are embodying the exact features which parents want. Women are seen by nature are caring, protective, careful, and cautious and probably clean too. Many of them like Nicoleta, Gica, Ana, said that they have fixed clients whom they serve daily. They take children to school or kindergarten regularly and back home.

Similarly, there are cases when, especially for long distances, women opt to travel with female taxi drivers. Sabina talks about one of her experiences as follows:

Women, especially young ones who fear for their safety are choosing only women drivers to travel with. For example last week I had to come from the other part of the city because the client 'called' [taxi order through the phone] especially for a women driver. But this happens many times. So I came, and pick up this young girl who wanted to go outside the city somewhere and to come back. I don't know why she preferred women, probably she felt much safe to travel with me, it was a long distance and also late in the evening.

Here women are preferred again for their gendered attributes. But in this case is also because of gender affiliation. Additionally this means that men are discriminated against because they have been negatively sex stereotyped as being capable of putting a women client

in danger. Thus, in some of the female clients' opinion, traveling with men is a much bigger risk of being sexually harassed and this can only favors women drivers.

Summing up my analysis on the process of gendering the taxi driving profession, we can say that women feel that the negative attitude toward them has improved over time. Soon in the years after the socialist time they were much more discriminated against, thus their work was harder. Maybe because of a general change of the dominant gender beliefs about 'women' and 'men' in the Romanian culture or because of the clients' positive experiences in traveling with women drivers, today there are people who prefer a female taxi driver. Looking at the reasons, their way of justifying this option we see that the same qualities or skills women poses are the ones for which they are discriminated against by some people and favored by others. What is important for women's work and succeeding in it is having a group of regular clients no matter if that is because they positively stereotyped them from the beginning or they just learn through experience to appreciate women for their individual skills.

5.2.2. Discriminatory actions.

In Staudt's view male-dominated organizations functioning as 'old boy-networks' where men institutionalized archetypes of 'gender appropriate behavior' (1994: 132). This 'structural-group' defines through rigid ways the structure of opportunity inside the organization, thus who is praised is determined by gender identity. Further Staudt argues that the organizational practices and structures are socially constructed as male centered, on men's cultural values and beliefs that legitimize many forms of discrimination against women.

In this section I examine the discriminatory attitude towards female taxi drivers, how we can explain it in different circumstances and especially their effects on women's manner of performing work.

Clients' negative attitudes towards women taxi drivers

I will analyze two cases when some of the dominant gender attributes with negative connotations towards women cannot be overcome. One of the taxi clients that I interviewed, a thirty-one year old engineer argued that:

It is well known that women aren't good drivers [...] because they are more slow, they are meant to become mothers so therefore have different inclinations. They are more caring, protective with the clients, attentive while driving but that makes them very slow drivers and a person never takes a taxi unless he/she is in a hurry [...] so, why one should choose a taxi driven by a woman?

This opinion shows very clearly how the same gender stereotypes attributed to women that were positive earlier for the other clients are devalued now. What was earlier driving 'cautiously' is now driving 'slowly'. The carefulness and the calm much praised before seem rather unprofessional (specific and valuable only in mothering) now.

While talking with this man I felt he was trying to avoid talking badly about female drivers, as he was afraid to offend me. He was probably presuming that I had a good opinion of women taxi drivers as I was a woman myself or just that I shared 'the other sex' would directly set us on the opposite positions. He didn't feel totally free to express his idea so when I asked him whether he would prefer a male or a female taxi driver he came up with a compromise answer; which at the end shows that he obviously prefers men:

If I want to get somewhere on time I take a man. If I want to get safely to the destination I would choose a woman...but you know (he whispered) I never take a taxi unless I'm in a big hurry.

Among men there are 'very' essentialist attitudes of what it means to be a 'woman' or a 'man'. According to these beliefs in our true nature we are born with the pure 'female' and 'male' biological characteristics that are identical with 'feminine' and 'masculine' dominant stereotypes and which become traits for our ways of developing our personality. Here is how the man mentioned earlier follows:

We are genetically different too; we are born feminine and masculine. There are studies that shown this. Women and men are using different parts of the brain. Women have in their nature the mother thing. Look at a female dog and her little dogs, or look at the chicken and her chick and you'll see how al the mother behaves. We aren't different from animals.

Another examples illustrate how in some cases 'the power' of dominant stereotypes fails to be surmounted even when people are conscious of them and the gender dicourses'sits impact on influencing their attitudes and behavior, and thus act self-reflexively towards them. The engineer's wife, a twenty-seven year old English teacher confirmed that she feels uncomfortable traveling with a women driver even though she realizes that women can be as good drivers as men. She herself has a driving license and admits that skills are the most important for a driver and not 'its' gender, thus she is aware that her attitude is wrong.

Once I entered a taxi car, but as soon as I realized that it was a woman at the wheel I felt like choosing another car and instantly I tried to get out. As the woman noticed, I felt embarrassed and I didn't get out but traveled with her until my destination. It is not like I believe that women cannot drive or drive worse than men. I am sure that it is all about the skills and experience. But still I feel more secure with men because I'm used to the idea of them being real drivers. It is strange how I can believe something but don't feel according to my beliefs.

Further she tells me she never had bad experiences with women drivers but she will probably always choose to travel with men. Her own 'real beliefs' are in contradiction with the old dominant stereotypes about driving as a male- specific occupation but still they are enable to undermine them. Moreover her experience in traveling with women seems useless in changing her attitude.

Bosses and male colleagues' attitudes towards women taxi drivers

The two employers of the taxi companies that I have interviewed admit that they were afraid in the beginning to employ women because driving is not appropriate for them [women],

they won't be able to do it right, they would ruin the car, are more easily attacked, won't get enough clients and won't work as seriously as men do.

One of them seems to have changed his opinion but not totally. He appreciates more the work of women in his company and values their results but is still very much influenced by the dominant negative gender stereotypes associated with women drivers. Thus, even if he admits that his employed women are better taxi drivers than men, because experience has shown him that, this opinion is applied only to these women. He was still afraid to hire other women.

Some men have divergent opinions about women drivers. They consider that their women colleagues, particularly the older ones which have many years of experience in the job are good, true drivers; they 'really drive like a man' one men was telling me. Despite this they still disregard much the young female drivers, who lack experience, the ones, whom in their opinion are driving 'only on holidays'. I asked one very young male driver, who had been working for several months about his impression about his female colleagues, their ways of driving, if he considers then fit for this job. He answered:

Well, it depends on the person. The women taxi drivers are driving really well, they have guts. [...] I have ten female colleagues; they don't drive worse than men. They [women taxi drivers] have a strong character; otherwise they wouldn't be able to do this job. They have also a lot of patience.

At first sight it seems that this man doesn't gender based discriminate against women drivers even though he somehow implies that they are special women. The fact that they manage to survive in this occupation means that they have the 'strong character', and so on. One could say that he might believe that same thing about men who succeed in this job. But when I further asked him about the opinion of other men towards their female colleagues and whether theses women are treated different [marginalized] or not, he said:

Yes, there are a little marginalized. Usually, if you see that is a woman driving you know to expect the worst from her. If someone is driving really badly the

car in front of you, then you look to see if the driver is a woman. If she is than you have nothing to do about it, know how to low you expectations.

A more discriminatory attitude against women is illustrated by a thirty-four years old male taxi driver. When asked about his opinion on how women drive, he replied:

Like all women. This (taxi driving) is not a job for them. They shouldn't try to do it. Women are usually very angry and talk too much. They even dare to feel sexually discriminated [isolated]. I don't want to talk badly about them but they don't have courage at all and usually they drive really badly. If you see a mess or a bottle-neck of the traffic everybody knows it must be a woman driver's fault.

This case proves the fact that women as taxi drivers are isolated and caught into negative stereotypes that put them into disadvantaged positions and also offers some possible explanation for this. As a male-dominated job, with a male organizational culture it is not surprising that qualities considered specific to women are devalued. Further the man interviewed argued that women are not good drivers as they lack self-confidence, courage etc, which thus he implies, they lack male-specific abilities.

Women talking about discrimination.

Women talk about feeling excluded even though some are more aware of it then others. A good description of what a woman who is new in the job experiences is offered by Camelia. She is the ex-English teacher, recently moved back in Sibiu who had been employed as taxi driver for only two weeks. When I spoke with her she said:

I didn't have major problems with my colleagues or other people until now. Still each of them, whether they are aware or not, left me the impression, [intentionally or not] that they dominate [rule] the workplace and that we [women] have intrude [interlope] into their work. Nobody has told me jet to give up my work or that I should 'go back to kitchen'. Almost all the male colleagues that I have spoken to tried to discourage me, to convince me that it [taxi driving] is not a job for me; that it is not a job for women at all; that it is

really hard work; that I need to be strong to be able to physically and even psychologically resist.

In doing this job Camelia is also discouraged by her relatives and her friends. Not only does no one support her in what she wants to do but after only two weeks she already feels unwanted into this job. This particular example unveils clearly the fact that men are praised and they praise themselves in this occupation. In this 'old boy network' (Staudt, 1994) women aren't welcomed. They aren't able to measure or to live up to with 'male values' or set of standards such as those that Camelia describes psychological and physical strength, courage, ambition, and so on.

Let us not believe that this feeling of exclusion is something that only the new ones experience during their work hours. The old ones into this job also admit to having to face discrimination from some of their male colleagues or simply other male drivers still. Nicoleta is one of the oldest employees in taxi driving that I interviewed.

I know that there are still some men [drivers] who think that women should stay only in the kitchen. They believe that everything belongs only to them. But actually we are the hardest workers both in side the house and everywhere else. I think some of them [men] are envious on us because they see that women can their job too [...] they would probably want to have it all [to be the only winners] but everybody deserves to live [needs to survive].

Generally in Sibiu there is in a negative attitude of the regular drivers towards taxi drivers. It is not really an open conflict but rather a tension, which is caused by the high traffic, high number of taxi cars, the fact that a taxi car needs to stop wherever the client wants, which disturbs the circulation of other cars, etc. Both men and women taxi drivers need to do this maneuver in order to leave the client at his/her destination. This is why the other drivers tend to get really angry. The others then verbally attack men and women taxi drivers. Women talked about being offended by different drivers and gender based discriminated even though the men

taxi drivers drive like that too. Several women talked to me about this frequent event. Ana is relating her regular experience:

In general, the others [drivers] don't have patience with us taxi drivers. Sometime we have to stopped the car and leave the client to get off, even if we aren't allowed [by law] to do this everywhere. If there is a long line behind me than they start to honk at me, shout and insult me saying that I am a woman and I don't know how to drive.

So, the attitudes towards women taxi drivers reveal a 'special' treatment. Both men and women taxi drivers are experiencing the same verbal aggression. Still, what can be noticed is that women are attacked not for making a mistake while driving but because they are seen though the negative sex stereotype about them. So, the insult towards them is actually gender-based discrimination. They are verbally 'punished' for belonging to one sex category and not for unprofessionally driving.

Women are also gender-based discriminated against in relation with their clients. They talk about being avoided by the persons, men and women they least expected. In their opinion education and belonging to the high class would make people behave less discriminatory. Ana, a very calm taxi driver, who has much experience in working with people, explained to me:

It happens when I didn't expected and with people that I expected the least. Men wearing [elegant] suits who side step my car [...] and choose another [male] driver.

In many cases women succeed in changing the client's opinion about them as drivers. As we saw there are regular customers who manage in time to realize that being driven by a women taxi driver can also present some advantages and therefore that women aren't as bad drivers as it is believed. Georgeta, a woman who has been a taxi driver for thirteen years described one event of her long job experience where she manages to change someone's opinion about her as a woman driver by simply doing her work.

Yes there are still men who sexually discriminate against us. For example, one man entered the car and when he saw that I am a woman he told me that if he

had known before he wouldn't have gotten into the car. So, I replayed to him to get off. [...] He didn't so I took him to his destination [...] At the end of the trip he told me that he has changed his opinion and that he would like to travel with *me* again in the future because he gained trust in the way *I* drive. There are also women who avoid us. They look at the taxi car and when they see that I am a woman they go to a man's car.

This seems a 'happy case' when experience manages to change a discriminatory attitude, but as we see the man has changed his opinion only about Georgeta, the woman with whom he had traveled with and not about all the women drivers. He would still hesitate or feel uncomfortable to travel with other women taxi drivers.

Women also face a difficult time with clients who are making a pass at them or even try to involve them in a sexual relation. This doesn't happen too often. Still, many of women can recall moments when they were in danger. Marioara, one of the married taxi drivers remembers how she had to deal with a drunken client who wanted 'to have fun' with her.

Once I had a young and drunken client who asked me to drive him to Paltinis, the closest mountain spa. He told me that he recently had received his salary so he had lots of money to spend and he wanted 'to have fun' with me. So, I sent him home to his wife and children, and advised him not to spend money in thoughtless ways. I did not accept to take him anywhere. I didn't know about his intentions. I told him that I'm a serious woman, that I have a husband and grown up children and I do not mess around with other men. If he wants to have fun he should better find some else. [...] He was offended, but I didn't care.

What seems very interesting is not only her manner of keeping herself safe by refusing him from the beginning just because he was suspicious to her. She doesn't care to lose the money of a possible long distance travel. Moreover she puts herself in the position of his wife and tries to make him more aware about his responsibility towards his family. She even gives advice to him not to spend money in 'thoughtless ways'. She probably feels empathy with the wife of this man and she isn't interested at all in the money that should belong to one family and which the irresponsible man chooses to spend.

As we saw so far, women are still confronting with negative attitude towards them which undermine their status. Some of the clients, bosses or male colleagues cannot change their opinion about women taxi driver, even if many time experiences showed them different. Some of them, who seem to have a middle grown position, consider these female taxi drivers who perform their work well just exceptions of the rule. Women have to face not only marginalization from clients, colleagues, but also lack of support from their own families and friends. And most of is because, as Moss Kander argues they as token women are assimilated into social stereotypes.

Women taxi drivers experience both exclusion and inclusion in their daily interaction, based on opposite stereotyping attitudes towards them. Cultural beliefs about gender or gender stereotypes can be considered a blueprint for different gender expectations which people manifest towards women drivers.

Therefore, what women do is constantly negotiate with gender stereotypes in order to manage performing this job and its various and contradictory 'requirements'. They negotiate with their own stereotypes and with the others gendered expectations in order to prove that they can do this job too and thus to earn a living. In the beginning of their career the impact of the discriminatory attitudes against them had a greater impact. But in time they manage to 'gather' a group of regular clients on which they can always relay on for making a wage to support themselves. Therefore we can argue that women's work depends on their success in changing the clients and potential clients negative gender believes about them.

6. Token Women, Working Women.

In this chapter I will examine women's particular job status, their personal ways of adapting to this traditional male job, their strategies for self protection, their reaction towards gender based discrimination oriented against them, and eventually their ways of exploiting even the possible advantages which might come out of such apparently disadvantaged situations.

6.1. Token Women Protecting Themselves

Female taxi drivers can find themselves in risky or dangerous situations during their work. This is something all taxi drivers experience. Below I look at some of the methods female taxi drivers employ for protecting themselves during their everyday activity. Even though very few of the women I spoke with suffered major incidents like been physically attacked, most of them shared the concern that this might happen. Although all women denied being afraid of mean, hostile or aggressive customers, they seemed always prepared to face situations that might put them in danger. They talk about being constantly aware of what is happening inside and outside the car, being in control of their interaction with the client and also attentive to the way they drive.

For most of the women, being always in control over the work's situation means being in control of themselves, their emotions, being able to restrain their feelings of either fear or anger towards a difficult or dangerous client. This emotional work that women constantly perform in their relation with the clients means not only ignoring and constructing explanations, but often it means also being able to endure offensive behavior quietly. At this point useful to remember is what Sabina does when she had to deal with a difficult customer who can be either drunk or angry, or just a person who talks to her in a rude manner:

Many times with clients you need to yield, to be silent especially if he is drunk and talks meanly to me, or if he's aggressive. I don't provoke him. I let him speak [...] I have to tolerate him because I have no other choice. That is why there are more conflicts and fights between male taxi drivers and their male clients, because men are always responding in the same manner. But I, as a woman, what can I do? The cleverest person always steps back. We don't have even the strength to face them, so you don't have to even bother, because you would get angry and ruin your day.

Obviously Sabina did not have many choices about how to react. She argued that because of the physical differences between her as a woman, and her male client, thus a strong and potent person towards whom she felt strongly disadvantaged. Thus, in her opinion and actually for most of the women I have spoken to, the only thing that she could do when she has to manage with a difficult male customer is to tolerate him until the destination. Still she doesn't necessarily endure him out of fear. Because she also admits that it is the 'cleverest' solution one should adopt. She blamed the cases when men enter in conflict. So, to endure him without caring or without any emotional involvement, (with the indifference) looks like the only and also the best solution for protecting her psychological well being and herself from potential physical injuries.

Similarly, women taxi drivers talk about the importance of being calm in this occupation. When asked about the abilities required for being a good taxi driver, Georgeta emphasized that, first of all, the person should keep calm. Further in the interview she repeated:

If the person doesn't know how to be calm or is not able to be calm [choke back] then the job can be really difficult.

I think Georgeta is talking about something more than just being calm. As I have mentioned before, being calmer is what female taxi driver believe that would always make them dominate the situation in which they are, and have it under control. For them, being calm means not being emotional. But, as we know, women were always considered hypersensitive

and emotional. This is even one of the reasons and the stereotypes for which they are discriminated against by some clients.

Asked about why they are feeling fit for this profession or what abilities should someone have in order to be a good taxi driver, women drivers enumerated multiple things, such are: the quality of being calm, patient and knowing how to manage and master the car and the relation with the client. Both Ana and Nicoleta explain below what makes them to be well-prepared for this occupation.

Ana: I am calm by nature, I am never angry. I knew all the time how to control myself; I am never losing my temper.

Nicoleta: You need to be strong, [...] to dominate the car and the situation, and even the client. You have to dominate the client as long as you are providing him/her a service.

So, women are constantly trying to restrain their emotions, and to dominate all the circumstances they experience. They want to do their work professionally, which means to be able to master the car and the relation with the client. For overcoming moments of crises and managing to succeed in difficult situations they feel that sometimes they have to be silent and obedient. But even playing the submissive can be a way of manipulating the interaction with the client in the direction she wants, and make him calm down, and successfully overcome the situation.

Let us see what else women do in order to protect themselves. Regularly women talk about cases when the client was acting suspiciously or tried to hurt her in various ways. What women do depends on the situation, the manner in which the interaction with the client develops during the travel, the time of the day, whether they can or not ask for help. The law does not offer efficient protection of the taxi drivers, but rather to the clients and to his or her belongings. Therefore, according to the law which is regulating the taxi driving occupation, the taxi driver isn't allowed to refuse a customer. Practically, women don't have many options in

defending themselves. The single common thing all of them told me is that in case of attack they can call for help through the taxi dispatcher. This means calling for help from her colleagues and not necessarily the police. Dorina told me that in such an emergency situation the male taxi drivers of that company go to the indicated address and usually they end up in beating up the client; such solidarity gesture goes beyond saving a colleague, especially a female colleague, but it has the signs of revenge because of the offence brought to the whole branch of female taxi drivers.

Until she is attacked and some clients try to abuse her, the female taxi driver takes different less extreme measures to protect herself. As we discussed so far, women always try to have the situation under control, first of all by dominating their emotions. But being in total control over the client and his behavior means being all the time aware of the discussion during the travel; where the discussion goes; how and where to limit the conversation; what types of jokes she can make, etc. In several cases, women revealed me their fear of not being misunderstood by a male client, so they either prefer to not talk at all, or at least they were very concerned not to make jokes which would put them in the danger of being misinterpreted. From what Georgeta has confessed, it is clear that she is afraid of talking with men because of the possibility that, by being too kind and polite, she could be interpreted as being sexually available:

I don't talk much with [male] clients. If they ask me something I answer. You know how it is with men; if you give them a finger they take all your hand.

On the other hand, women describe situations when they believe they have to talk in order to get to know the client whom they felt distrustful. As we have seen already, there are cases when women feel forced to be silent. Yet, there are different cases when they are skeptical about the customer because of the way he may look, behave, talk and so on. Camelia, who has been working only for two weeks as taxi driver, said what she had to do in order to

overcome her doubts about some gypsy clients she transported. She described that they were rich Romany people, dressed traditionally. Because they were rather quiet in the beginning, she initiated a conversation and tried to make them speak as much as possible. This was her manner of convincing herself that they did not have bad intentions concerning her. By talking to them, she managed to overcome all her fears and to feel more relaxed. In the end, she felt very good about it, it was a nice experience. Not only that she was relieved, but she also felt satisfied with herself for being able to manage a situation which seemed inescapable in the beginning. The customers also paid her very well.

This seems a relevant example about how negative stereotypes about gender or about race alike can lead us to discriminatory actions. Camelia was afraid to be alone in the company of the unknown Romany people because of the dominant cultural beliefs about them in the Romanian society. Moreover, they were men which, in Camelia's opinion made then 'doubly distrustful' then before. If we act according to these stereotypical and racial attitudes, we may consider that one should avoid a Romany woman because she can rob you. Therefore we probably have to avoid Romany men even more, for men are regarded as being more violent and thus they can cause you much more harm than just robbing you.

Even if women know are not allowed by the law to refuse any clients, but only the drunk ones or the 'ones capable to be aggressive' they try from time to time to 'select them'. This means that if they can avoid a client whom they clearly do not trust, they do it. Camelia told me that she was prepared to come up with different lies or pretexts when she really felt in danger to take someone in the car:

I have told to myself that if I will be in the situation of taking some people about whom I feel suspicious about or they are drunken men, then I would ask them to take a different taxi car, saying that I am tired of driving and I am going home to rest, or just invent another excuse.

The most experienced women in this job have mentioned a few moments when they had to reject the client out of the car. In most of the cases, the client was a drunken man, unbearable, difficult to handle, who behaved in an aggressive manner. Marioara remembered how she had to transport once a drunken man, and because he started to behave rudely and violently, she stopped the car and asked him to get out. She had to get out herself, open the door for him and shout at him as loudly as possible, so that other people would hear her. She believes that this was the only method by which she could get rid of him and to maintain her safety.

Surprisingly or not, one out of nine women I talked too admitted that she has reacted violently when a client attacked her. This was the only case when women talked about physical aggression, beside the verbal abuse or ‘sexual invitations’. Nicoleta is a single woman, a mother of five, who was very kind and warm with me during the interview. When I asked her if she was ever attacked by one of her customers she said:

This can happen, too. Once I had a drunken client who wanted to slap me, so I took him out of the car. I beat him until the police and my colleagues came. At the police station he was ashamed to say that he was beaten by a woman.

Nicoleta did not say anything more about this event even though I showed myself surprised and interest. From what she told me about her difficult life experiences, aspects mentioned in the introducer chapter of the thesis, I assume that she is the type of person who had to learn how to take care of herself. Still if we look at the ways men deal with clients that physically attacked them is clear that Nicoleta did the same.

Concluding on my analysis of the women’s attitudes in different situations with in which they have to manage protecting themselves from the aggressors or potential aggressors, I argue that women use different strategies which reveal two patterns: submission and

dominance. On the one hand women talk about facing a difficult situation by restraining their emotions, enduring in silence discriminated behavior, sexist attitude which reveal patterns of subordination towards the male aggressor. On the other hand, repressing their emotion, by an extremely calm attitude is meant to help her rise her status in relation with the male client and dominate the situation, the conversation and the man himself. Being the master of the interaction is seen by them a masculine behavior which helps them frequently in escaping a fearful context. So, either using a specific feminine strategy or a masculine one, women manage to perform their job and to protect themselves.

6.2. Performing genders at the wheel.

Doing gender has become a well-known theory about how social interactions are gendered and how we continuously socially construct and reconstruct gender in the light or against the “normative conceptions” (Wets and Zimmerman, 1991) of what it is believed to be a woman and a man. Gender is not something we are, but is a dynamic process, a practice of what we say and do (West and Zimmerman, 1991; Martin, 2001). Inside formal organizations or different fields of work, scholars, about whom I will discuss below, have addressed the issues of practicing gender in different positions and professions. Additionally they approach the phenomena of gendering practices of the workplace, gendering the activity, the job occupation itself, the social interaction inside the organization, and not least, gendering the employee.

Lately scholars like M. Deutsch (2007) talk about the process of ‘undoing gender’, or about of ‘dengendering’ (Lorber, 2005) the social interaction, which places the process of performing gender into the light of social change.

In this chapter I analyze how woman are doing or undoing (their) genders in different circumstances, what set the traits women are doing their gender in various ways and how do

they feel or motivate their behavior in those specific cases. In one of the previous sections, the *Gendered Identities* I have already talked about women's gender identities and show that women taxi drivers claim that they are fit for the job by using reasons which are gender based. As we saw their ways of being, their skills and abilities make them the proper taxi driver either because they can represent positive female stereotypical feature or praised male ones.

In this chapter I analyze only those situations that make women feel pressure to perform gender differently, in opposition with what they believe to be either the proper displayed gender or their 'natural' (gendered) way of being and most of all what defines those situations. I also examine their specific ways to do genders differently. Along with Thorne (2002), I argue that gender is dynamic, which means that what women and men consider to be gender appropriate behavior changes over time (Deutsch, 2007). But I would add that gender (the ways in which it is performed) also changes in relation with different situations, which can lead us to reveal situations where gender is performed.

I argue that for women taxi drivers as for many token women in different male dominated jobs 'femininity' and 'masculinity'¹⁰ are gender projects which are done in response to different situations women have to face daily. As also Moss Kanter (1993) argues about women in organizations, surviving means performing gender in different ways, doing both 'femininity' and 'masculinity' in order for women to maximize their legitimacy and recognition. On this light one can wonder what can mean surviving for Romania female taxi drivers.

¹⁰ I use the concepts of 'femininity' and 'masculinity' by which I mean what is generally believed to be typical for either a woman or a man to be or behave, thus dominant sex stereotypes used especially in the context of Romanian women taxi drivers.

Doing ‘femininity’ undoing ‘masculinity’?

Women taxi drivers reproduce ‘feminine behavioral features’ through their social interaction with the client or male colleagues. In most of the cases, as we already saw, they are expected to act in a ‘feminine manner’ and, moreover, they believe that such a behavior is their natural way of being. Still, few of them talk about moments when they feel they should act more ‘feminine’ while doing their work, even though that is not how they feel, according to their testimony, but rather something that favors them. This would be the proper way of achieving a job’ task or achieve recognition inside the male gendered workplace or keeping themselves safe.

Nicoleta, one of the women whom one could describe as being and behaving in a masculine manner talks about the ways she does her job:

There are situations when one needs to be more mannish in this job. Well I am by nature like that anyway [...] Still there are situations when I feel that even if I am mannish I do not have to show it. The client needs to be always pleased that I talked to him nicely. I don’t have to show myself as tough, but feminine, sweet, not angry or upset because the client can respond similarly [aggressively] by offending me, swearing at me. As much as possible these situations need to be avoided.

So, Nicoleta feels constraint to reproduce (stereotypical) feminine traits of behavior, which she argues that are against her way of being. Still, in some situations she has to respond to clients’ gendered expectations and thus manages to accomplish her job duties efficiently, but most of all to be safety at the workplace. Her experience brings up also some aspects of social control. Someone who doesn’t behave accordingly to typical gender traits of her sex category risks being either penalized or even verbally attacked.

If the client is a man, and usually they are the ones women mention as being difficult to manage, then there is another explanation why she would prefer to be more ‘feminine’ towards

them. In this case, her motivation would be related to the fact that men are socially expected to behave as ‘gentlemen’. In this sexualized relationship between a female person and a gentleman, the man should have a protective attitude towards the woman and should give her priority in some public contexts. Thus it can be argued that her employed femininity makes him act as a gentleman in front of a lady. As Martin (2001, p: 343) argues, women and men socially construct each other at work. This type of interaction between a man and a woman reflects well patriarchal patterns and not gender based equality because women are praised only in public spaces, where this politeness has a constructed meaning and does not have much to do with equilibrated relations of power inside the relationship. Still, even though the above mentioned behavior is as I said, constructed on socially praised politeness Nicoleta appeals to it as it is one of her few options. In some circumstances it is a manner of keeping herself safe; thus she performs it constantly.

She describes her performing the stereotypical role of a woman as an actor. She just has a different motivation. In a sense Nicoleta performs ‘forced’ by circumstances ‘a femininity’ towards which she feels that she alienates herself and which is constructed in opposition with a socially desirable typology of man. This reproduced femininity is also in opposition with what she described as her gendered self. Therefore we may also argue that what she feels and names as acted femininity is constructed not only in concordance with the dominant gender stereotypes but also in opposition with what Nicoleta feels as being her masculine nature. She is undoing ‘her’ masculinity in order to do the necessary femininity.

Doing ‘masculinity’, undoing ‘femininity’

Marioara described a similar case in which she is ‘shaping’ her ways of negotiating gender. When I asked her whether there are situations in her work where she needs to behave in a more manly way because her job is a traditional male job she answered:

Yes there were moments when I knew I should behave differently from what I felt like. Some clients put me [taxi driver] in a difficult position when I shouldn't show fear or weakness. I have to behave bravely and "mannishly" [..]

Further Marioara describe a recent event when she had to transport one man who had a strange way of behaving. She explains how she feared him so she tried to make him talk in order to get to know him and figure out whether he could be an evil person. It was a long trip and the client didn't want to engage in any conversation at all. So she remained tense up to the end. Even if she feared him, she believed that she shouldn't make it visible. Hiding her vulnerability, which she considers specific to women, gave her more confidence in managing the uncontrollable relation with the client. Her attempt to behave in such a manner can be understood as an imitation of what it is believed to be the typical behavior of men, generally speaking, and through her strategy she tried to raise her gender status to the level on which her client was. She acted seriously, showing herself to be fearless, dominant and in total control of the situation. She probably thought that she couldn't be discriminated against or sexually harassed as she 'wasn't' behaving in a feminine way at all, as if she was not the representative of the opposite gender. Behaving specifically in a more manly way was her strategy to overcome a difficult situation.

If we compare her case with Nicoleta's situation we can say that Marioara is not performing a type of masculinity because of the client's gendered expectations but mostly because of her own believed and imposed gendered standards for managing a difficult situation. In a rather simplistic way of looking at the case, Marioara being overwhelmed by fear, therefore she felt that she must gain control over her feelings and that she must dominate her temper and to act brave as it would be commonly expected from a man. This reveals, to my mind, her gender beliefs about men, the sex stereotypes behind her way of acting. What seemed interesting is that this employed attitude is constantly gendered performed behavior, which comes in response to women's need for protecting themselves from the strangers who are

behind them, so closely located during the travel. For Marioara it was necessary to read the client and because he was so silent she felt really afraid for him and his potential bad intentions.

Negotiating genders

Maybe ‘gender is many’!¹¹ Still, if I analyze women taxi drivers’ actions as I did so far by considering what one would call ‘feminine’ and ‘masculine’ as gender projects I can argue that women are performing them both in many cases. They manage to accomplish job tasks and to seek recognition as taxi drivers by following male specific traits or female specific traits. According to what dis/favors them in various occasions, or what difficulties and risks they encounter during their work, women choose to display dominant but especially positive, valuable features of ‘one gender’ category. Those features should function for upgrading the gender status in relation with the clients or colleagues; help them overcoming the effects of gender based inequalities at the workplace, thus everything which placed them in the ‘token position’. Cameia’s words are the most relevant for how women manage to behave in both ‘womanly’ and ‘manly’ ways in order to achieve their goals:

I can be even coquettish when I want to. .I can be a woman, I know how to dress myself up and to exploit the opportunity, but I also know how to be mannish and manage in difficult situations.

Ana is also sex trait stereotyping her behavior as both feminine and masculine according to her attitude adapted both to the context and to the development of the interaction with other persons. She told me how she deals in difficult moments:

¹¹ I express myself like this only for underlining that gender(s) can be done in various ways, and I would have not refer to them as ‘both’ if I would not debate in fact the gender stereotypes of femininity and masculinity.

Sometimes it is good to be mannish because there are moments where one needs to act firmly [in relation with a difficult client] and not hesitate or yield easily and after, one should solve the problem but still in a peaceful manner like women do.

Ana therefore feels that she should behave 'like a man' and have the discussion and the whole interaction with the client under control. To her, performing masculinity means dealing with the discussion more efficiently, not being in the situation (specific to woman) where she needs to 'surrender' in a debate because of her assumed lowest gender status. Still in the end, after taking control over of the situation, she would prefer to behave like a woman and solve the problem peacefully. This peacefully manner of solving the problem, regarded by her as being a behavior peculiar only to women, is set in contrast with 'male' aggressiveness. Ana doesn't want to move from the first assertive manner of dealing with the client to another one considered typical for males, which is the aggressive attitude.

Ana thus manages well to perform the both genders typical behavior continuously throughout her social interactions. In the same time, it can be argued that she is describing her actions using both masculine and feminine sex stereotypes, (largely acknowledged in society). It is probably her regular way of behaving, even if not all her acts seem natural to her. She explains all her manners as set up for a special purpose, set up under certain pressures of the job, of expectations, of interactions and of other possible events during her work.

Women use gender stereotypes when describing other experiences too. We are all using stereotypical concepts constantly in our daily life, in the way we think, construct the world around us, to relate to ourselves and others. Still, what I could observe about some women I interviewed is that they also think that only women can represent the 'missing' parent in their relation with the children.

This gender stereotype is illustrated by all the three divorced women I talked too (Ana, Nicoleta and Camelia) for they claimed that they managed very well to be both mother and

father to their children. Moreover they believe that only women are capable of being a father for their children, but men can never be mothers, as the following quotations clearly show:

Nicoleta: The stereotypes are really old. [...] I manage well in this occupation and I am proud of it. I am also coping very well in being mother. I knew how to be both a mother and a father for my children, something that a man can not do.

Ana: For us [women] it is much easier to be both a mother and father. One woman knows better than man how to handle some particular situations. Well, of course there are always exceptions.

One would wonder about women's motivation for believing themselves more fit as single parents than men are. If 'fathering' means also doing certain masculinity and engaging in male traditional roles in the family, then definitely women feel that this is simpler, easier for them to do than it is for men to engage in female traditional roles in the household and in the family. This can prove to a certain extent that in the family there are more women than men, which are performing activities that are rather considered specific for the opposite sex. These women talk from their own experience. They prove to be able to accomplish male traditional roles in the family. This aspect would testify to my mind that there are more women repairing all sorts of things in the house than are men who cook or iron.

One explanation can be that women would always perform activities considered male specific for seeking recognition in the relation with men, which have the higher status in society. In contrast, probably for many men doing a female traditional job or activity can be experienced as lowering their status. In line with the previous argument, it can be argued that it would be easier for a woman to become authoritative in the family than it is for a man to show more frequently affection in his relation with the children.

Another meaning for what women argued can be the fact that parenting can be seen as more specifically feminine. A mother is more valued as a parent compared to a father, but still remains an ominous sign to have no father. A woman embodies more characteristics seen as

required for a proper parent. Without taking the risk of generalizing too much, all the explanations mentioned above are describing well at least the experiences of women single mothers that I talked too.

To sum up, what I have tried to examine in this chapter are various circumstances in which women taxi drivers in Romania are performing gender in different ways in relation with a specific context. Women can perform gender following traits that are defined by the very women interviewed by me as being either feminine or masculine. They reproduce their feminine or masculine types of behavior while performing their profession in relation either with their male colleagues or their customers in various circumstances. I argue that they constantly negotiate their femininity and/ or masculinity as a particular strategy for their own protection and for seeking legitimization either inside the occupation or during their interaction with clients. For Romanian women taxi drivers performing gender is a professional skill which help them manage the job requirements and to get out of the car safe.

6.3. Strategies for Coping with Gender Discrimination.

Token Women Rationalizing and Reacting Against What Disadvantages Them.

Some of the women I had the chance to discuss this with admitted that they feel offended when some potential clients, in most of the cases male customs, obviously avoided their services or when they were treated differently in traffic by the other drivers. Usually they mentioned those situations when they were asked about their dissatisfactions related to the job. Most of them got used to being treated in a more or less explicitly disrespectful manner and when such attitudes are expressed, they first tend to ignore them as much as they can.

Ana is one of the subjects who argued that it can be difficult sometimes to face offensive (gender biased) treatment because you are a woman, disregarding the high-quality of your work:

Somehow, in the end I've got to the point where I don't pay attention to them [clients with discriminatory attitudes]. I simply ignore them, and do my work. I know how to drive; I know how to behave with them; I know the 'measure' of my speech; I know that if the man is drunk, he might have no good intentions with me; I know how to talk to him; I know how to silence him [without being able to reply]; I know how to leave him alone. Still, if I have to go through cases like this two or three times per day, my day is ruined and I feel dissatisfied. I know that I am a good driver and a good human being as well; I do my work well, and I do not deserve to be treated like this. I don't want someone to ruin my work. But well, generally I live them alone, both the clients and the men in the traffic. I try not to pay attention to them and their rude attitudes towards us [women].

The ways female subjects describe the experiences of rejection towards them from different males they are constantly working with (in spite of the fact that these women do their work at their best) displays the feelings of frustration which they encounter in their everyday activities. Ana's answer brings out clearly the effort she puts in their work, from facing discriminatory actions to the simpler situation of dealing with difficult clients. She felt the need to underline all of her professional skills and qualities, enumerating the activities she is capable of doing well in her work, which are set in contrast with the negative attitude towards her. This fact can also uncover her feelings of frustration due to such unfairness and the desire for being left alone, so she can do her work properly. Her reactions regarding the act of dealing with difficult situations reveal in the end a sense of resignation, and even of isolation: she says she leaves them alone, and she wants to be left alone to do her job.

Women's strategies of protecting their state of mind and maintaining psychological well-being, or at least their self esteem, their feelings of dignity and for overcoming their frustration can be brought out from the explanations they regularly employ. They come up with similar explanations such as Ana's for the reasons why people are marginalizing them as taxi

drivers, which show their daily ways of managing the situation. Usually they say they believe that it depends on the person (either the client's or the colleague's) level of education, on how he/she has been raised in the family and on his/her character. Consequently, their claim is that only uneducated persons or persons with a bad character would avoid the car of a female taxi driver and choose another one driven by a male; only uneducated men would verbally offend them, attack them, or treat them badly in traffic. This is why they are surprised when a well dressed person, considered as belonging to a high class would avoid their car. Furthermore, Nicoleta, who appeared to me as one of the bravest and most ambitious women that I had the chance to know and to speak with, argued the following:

When someone avoids my car I try not to get upset. Then I think that it is similar with someone who didn't choose to go shopping in the store you own, but into the next one.

This example shows how some of the women choose to avoid using a 'gendered argumentation' to justify the people's act of rejecting them as taxi drivers. Nicoleta responds to her bitter professional experience which generates frustrations by creating the justification quoted above. She has created a self-protective psychological consolation in order 'not to get herself upset.' She employs external reasons and motivations. Such motivations are situated outside herself and her embodied features, not being connected with either her gender, or her personally, attitudes or something else. Nicoleta claims that none of the reason people sometimes marginalize her relate to her as a person at all. In her opinion, there is no discrimination at all involved in how the client selects his taxi driver. Instead, she describes and motivates such selection by something as simple as the client's personal preference for another type of car and instead of hers.

I consider Nicoleta's answer as being brave for the following reason: she avoids self-victimization. I believe that she understood that if her own explanations would have had anything to do with her belonging to a gender/sex category for which she is discriminated, then

she would only victimized herself and allow the gender prejudice to be reinforced. Thus, in my opinion her constructed explanations ought to be degendered in order to have meaning and functionality. Gender is a component of her identity (maybe the strongest component), a part which she has chosen to protect by negating the existence of the negative attitude towards it.

But this is just one of the psychological strategies used by female taxi drivers. A similar strategy for dealing with negative attitudes towards them is the opposite of the one chosen by Nicoleta. Such alternative consists in rationalizing and verbalizing a situation which does not favor women at all. For some of my subjects, the explanations did not work as a consolatory factor anymore and in some situations they admitted that they really felt overwhelmed by a bad interaction with a client, or that they felt hurt, totally rejected, despised, or helpless in the case, the customer has left the taxi without paying. I suppose that these women are trying to make (a sort of) hypothetical justice to themselves, by believing in some favorable justice situated outside and beyond their power, in a providence that would support them, or even in a future resolution which will eventually avenge them. At this point I mention two testimonies which I find relevant for exemplifying the ways how they are creating an imaginary 'justice' in their mind when they are either robbed or offended.

Ana: I didn't have many incidents [with bad/aggressive/abusive clients] but if it would happen, I would rather leave him [the customer] the money and keep quiet instead of provoking him. You wouldn't know when he could attack you [...] 'Let him be, God will punish him for this!'.

Nicoleta: I am so satisfied when clients choose me to be their taxi driver, and when I am refused I try hard to not even notice, [...] because what is mine is put aside. You don't have to get angry in those situations; you just have to stay calm. Nobody can take your luck away.

The attitude of indifference and the strategy of ignoring seem to be considered the best way of managing in difficult moments. According to the subjects, it especially works as a method of overcoming gender based discrimination present in the form of verbal aggression,

psychological and/or economic abuse. Ignoring seems to be an infallible method, considering the relevant fact that all women I interviewed mentioned it; they all used it in order to protect their physical and mental health and to keep the balance. It can be also a strategy of undermining the ‘power’ their ‘enemies’ have over them by not showing themselves as being offended or affected by any of the other’s negative actions. They do not want to display weakness, subordination and thus femininity. Asked about how she feels when men are insulting her, by sending her ‘back, to kitchen,’ Ana explained:

I tried to accept everyone the way she/he is. Some people are more educated, some aren’t. I tried not to pay attention. There are people who simply don’t respect you, but you should let them be, doing the best to not get yourself upset. It is still happening now [to be verbally abused for being a woman doing taxi driving] but you cannot do anything, you just have to ignore them [...] well, there are many men doing this job, much more than us. But one shouldn’t care. You need to respect them and if they don’t treat you the same in response, then you just ignore them, you shouldn’t respond to their aggression [negative behavior] and their ways of provoking you. [...] So you won’t have even bigger problems with them. It is like in the case of taming an aggressive animal, if you pretend to be indifferent, it won’t attack you, like for instance in the case of a dog [...] In the end, he would be tired of barking [if you show indifference towards it].

The act of showing indifference seems to be a defensive strategy universally adopted by female taxi drivers in regard to the unfriendly male colleagues or male/female clients. Apparently, it is an inherent part of the emotional work women have to do in order to handle the ‘gendered specific difficulties’ of the job. It is their unwritten rule of adapting to the male-centered environment of this occupation and to all related patriarchal cultural beliefs about it. As I have already mentioned, some of the women use it to protect their health. For example, Sabina described what she finds annoying about the job. She starts by explaining that when a client makes her problems, when he proves to be a rude or an aggressive person, that she simply redirects her thoughts and starts to think about something completely different:

I simply ignore him. I am thinking that I just have to take him to the destination safely [...] and after he gets off, I just forget everything with the blink of an eye, as if it didn't even happened, otherwise I would get sick [mad].

For other interviewees, like Ana for example, ignoring a bad treatment is synonymous with a less emotional involvement, and thus as a result the feeling of being more in control of the situation and having the capacity to overcome it efficiently. In addition, the result of the ignoring technique ends in avoiding the situations that might end as being really dangerous.

Still, it is worth mentioning that, on the other hand, some of the women that I interviewed said that they are very combative and sometimes even ill-tempered, so that they simply cannot keep themselves from responding aggressively in case that some persons, especially their male colleagues, isolate them or insult them by the use of negative sex-stereotyping.

Sabina remembers that in the beginning of her career, she was really hurt each time some male driver insulted her by telling her to go 'back to the kitchen'. Now, she has managed to get used and adapt to this negative treatment, so whenever someone insults her she does not cry anymore on her husband shoulder as she acknowledges that she used to do before, but instead she responds with a similar attitude.

Similarly, Nicoleta, another courageous woman, explained to me in a very relaxed attitude the following:

What you can do? If they [men] swear at you because you are female driver, you swear back. Sometime it is good not even to notice [their behavior] because they sometime insult you, other times wink at you.

Nicoleta's attitude shows not only indifference because she is so used to men sex-stereotyping them but also resignation because as she said there isn't much she can do. None of the women really think how to change men's behavior, rather got used to live with it and sometime juts try to manage it by reacting in the same manner. As explained by Nicoleta,

women still have a special status in this occupation. Men either sexualize them or disregard their capacities as real drivers; or both. As a female driver she embodies the sexual features of what people believe to be the 'female prototype', thus men display sexual behavior towards her. Moreover, having a female body doesn't make you a proper taxi driver, which means a man. This essentialist way of seeing women and men as simply the equivalents of the stereotypical categories of 'female' and 'male' as they are (re-)presented in the dominant discourses, are determinant for the female taxi drivers. The stereotypes influence their work and the ways they perform 'gender' in different circumstances, especially at the workplace.

Marioara, another woman with a very brave nature, criticized men for their negative behavior and took all the opportunities they gave her to respond back. Her husband always told her to 'behave herself', to take it easy and to not respond back to all the persons who insults, in order not to put herself in danger. But one can wonder if this is really the whole reason he is not supporting her ways of defending herself in relation with others. In Marioara's words,

I consider that if people have the guts to insult me, I should respond the same. Why should I be ashamed? Why should I protect the others' feelings if they don't protect mine? If I respect them and I claim to be respected, and if it doesn't happen this way, I throw it to their face. I don't forgive them, even if I am a woman. This is how they treat me [in the traffic] 'Let her be, she is a woman!' ['what can you expect from her?!'] So, I use to tell them: 'Yes, I am a woman. So what? Do you have the impression that you can drive better than me? Are you so much different from me?'

One can easily notice that Marioara is a real fighter. She doesn't want to accept to be treated differently, simply because she has all the rights not to accept it. Most of these women have been doing this job for a long time, probably much longer comparing with many of the male taxi drivers. They know very well how to do their job; they are professionals in what they do, so it is only natural for them to go against any special discriminative and negative attitude.

Marioara refuses any humiliating behavior towards her just because she, being 'a woman,' is expected to be submissive and to behave according to the generalized patriarchal cultural belief about how should a woman be and behave. These beliefs are actually the reason

that sets her in the position of being offended from the very beginning. Therefore, in a sense, aware or not, she goes against this negative stereotype which constrains her, by dictating her how to behave as a woman.

There is an important point I need to make. Marioara did not reject the concept of 'woman' for its bad connotations or negative stereotypes as it is used by others who hurts her. She appropriated it without explicitly defending its possible positive connotations. In the end she succeeded to bring those positive sides into the light. She said it loud and clear 'yes, I am a woman!' She defended her identity. Furthermore, Marioara argued that her gender identity is not less valuable in comparison with the others (meaning men's). By arguing that she is a capable taxi driver as anybody else and as that she is a woman, she somehow succeeded in returning the attack to the patriarchal concept of 'woman,' reinforced its status, which has been disregarded before by others.

Women adapt in all the situations when they encounter gender based discrimination against them by using different methods. For succeeding in this occupation their physiological well being is very important. So depending on the person, but usually on the circumstances and the other with whom they relate, women employ various strategies ranging from resignation to re/action. In most of the cases enduring by repressing their emotion, anger, frustration means not only keeping themselves psychologically well but also psychically safe.

When they feel frustration for being marginalized women construct for themselves explanations or rationalizations in which the reasons employed have not connotations with them at all. In many cases, as we saw they simply display an attitude of indifference which helps them to calm down and also to dominate the relation with the difficult client. In few cases women confront their male aggressors by verbally attack them back. They seek equal treatment and recognition in the occupation dominated by men.

6.3. Token Women Doing Their Jobs Better (Than Men)

Another method that women employ for succeeding in this profession, in which they still are very much isolated, is by doing their work as well as possible. As Staudt (1994) argued about women managers in different male dominated occupations, token positions turn women into ‘pioneers’ of their fields. This happens because the few persons who are “not members of the dominant group faced extraordinary performance pressure” (Staudt, 1994: 130). The token women are the representatives of a social group, so they usually would perform their work impeccably in order to prove their capability. This can be, as also Staudt considers it to be a heavy burden for most of them.

The work of Romanian women taxi drivers has many of the characteristics of ‘token women’ in other occupations dominated by men. Even before entering the job some of them confessed of preparing a lot for the job. It may be inferred that men are doing the same, but, however, listening to women’s experiences the case seem to be different. Sabina, one of the women with a lot of experience in doing taxi driving and whose husband, a driving instructor, ‘supported’ her entering this occupation, remembered how it was in the beginning, when she had to work and study in order to become a taxi driver. She said that now she is satisfied with the manner in which she performs her profession. She does it properly, as it should be done and not just aimlessly, just for having something to do.

I know the city in great detail and I can lecture every one. For I have been studying for two months only the map... [thus] all my colleagues inquire me about directions, lanes. In fact, my husband ceaselessly made me learn the map of the city so as not to put him in shame, or to provoke someone to shout at me that I would better go back to the kitchen! For he was capable of wringing that person’s neck! I had to learn to tell the names of all the streets and for two months I did only this. My husband, holding the map in his hands, was looking and listening to me...and he was telling me that I do not know well such and such neighborhood, “You have to learn it better!”

Sabina had been preparing herself for the job by learning the city map for two months, which can be considered a very long time, considering that the city is not that large. Not only was she concerned about being able to do the job (as most of the women confess they were), but she also put much of her time, energy, and effort in it, even before starting. She succeeded; right now she is an expert in what she is doing. She even feels capable of lecturing the others how to do their work and she proudly told me that she actually offers much support to her male colleagues in giving information about where some of the streets of the city are located.

From a gender perspective, the most interesting part that comes out is the pressure that her husband put on her through the training for the future job. Furthermore, his mentioned reasons for supporting her and also for demanding that she be more than prepared for the job are not necessarily related with developing her abilities to start a career in which she could be satisfied. She seems to be his project, as if the wife would actually represent her husband in a public area such as the workplace, instead of representing just herself. According to her sayings her husband's concern is not directed towards her suffering in case of gender based discrimination for being not a good professional, rather on his image and reputation. His is not a taxi driver, but a driving instructor, she was his pupil, he was her teacher, and people will judge the teacher after the results of the pupil.

One could find problematic the husband's power and authority in teaching her how to drive and then in expecting her to represent him. The patriarchal hierarchy, which situates the male in the authoritative position, is actually doubled by the teacher/pupil hierarchy. In addition to these, the husband-teacher belongs to a certain sex category that is considered to be appropriated for the job. The unequal gendered relations of power become very clear when unveiling this couple's relations.

The husband's concerns for Sabina's manner of managing the job are not very much related with different aspects of her job (the prestige, her ability to avoid accidents and so on),

but rather with the question of whether she would have to face gender based discrimination if being a female driver and how could she overcome such situation. The only way possible to overcome it is by demonstrating to the others that she can do this job as well as men do it, if not even better. As long as you are doing your work similarly one would argue that no one could reproach you anything. This is also the case of Dorina, the only young taxi driver, who has been working as taxi driver for two years. She is the only one who told me that she didn't face any sexist insults or bad treatment from their male colleagues. Still, when asked if she feels sometimes discriminated against because being a woman, her words implied more than what she initially seemed to be aware of.

If you are a serious person and you do your work well you don't have problems with anyone, not even with the male colleagues... if you respect them you would not encounter any problems.

Dorina argues that one should do her best to perform a good quality work and in fact that she acts professionally, according to how a proper taxi driver would. She actually implies that she does a good job, and this way nobody has any reason to reproach her. Similarly, Georgeta told me:

One may still encounter men who lean out of the window of their car and verbally attack us. But we, women taxi drivers, by mastering accurately all the roads we do not give them any occasion to swear at us.

This quotation might lead to the interpretation that women who are discriminated actually deserve this negative treatment, and this is what they should get unless they are 'serious' or 'hardworking' enough, those qualifications being based on judgments done by men. In their male-designed environment, men have the power to judge who should be sexually discriminated against, based not on the 'hard working' criteria, as women tend to believe. Somehow it can be argued that because women cannot change their sex category they try to prove that they also can do the things men are capable of. By doing this, they do not want

to become ‘mannish,’ to be as men are, but rather to go against those negative stereotypes which devalue them.

The problem is that in the field of male traditional professions, the standards have been already established by men. Asked about whether they felt in different circumstance any pressure to do their work as men do, some women describe their experience. Here is what Nicoleta affirmed:

No, there was no pressure [for doing my work in a manly way]. I forced myself to drive like men, because otherwise one cannot resist, for they [men] are taking advantage of this given situation, and, therefore, I changed myself so that nobody would laugh at me, otherwise, what could I do? To isolate yourself... I couldn't, I had my own pride.

From what Nicoleta said, she didn't feel any pressure to constrain her, she felt the same thing as a occupational standard that needed to be accomplished and therefore she has managed to appropriate it very well. Driving like a man is thus a job requirement in a male dominated job. So, women not only didn't have any chances to do the job differently but they didn't even want to. They desire to accomplish male standards because that is the only way they would have access to power inside the work.

Moreover, women feel that they always have to prove to be better in order to succeed at all in a society where they have, right from the beginning, fewer opportunities compared with men. In a patriarchal post-communist society, for women to succeed means nothing else but doing better than men in everything they do. Here is how Ana feels about it:

Women seem to succeed better than men, because for women there is no such thing like I CANNOT! Because throughout time, women have been always in the position to CAN and MUST be able to do it. This is why she succeeds better than a man, [and this is the reason] for accomplishing everything that she had set for herself.

Nicoleta, another divorced woman, feels the same. Her ambition and perseverance was truly inspiring for me. The passion that she put into her difficult life and in every little thing she

engaged with was extraordinary. She is another woman for whom, ‘there isn’t anything impossible! as long as one desires something enough.’ Despite her difficult life of raising five children by her own with no financial support, being in the situation of working fifteen hours daily, etc., she never lost her optimism and confidence in her capacities.

Marioara and Gica also talked about knowing and being able to do anything one needs to. This is not only the case of divorced women who learned to take care of themselves and their children alone, but as Marioara explained, she has always felt that it is good to know how to do as many things as possible. Having as many abilities as you can gives her the financial independence and feelings of self-autonomy she desired:

I can do everything what a man does! I am fit for this profession [viz. taxi driving]... and, in fact, I am skilled in any job. Moreover I know how to do everything in the house. If something breaks down [in the house], I can repair it myself. I do not wait for my husband...I am indulging myself in doing everything and I do it! If he is not in the house I am managing alone and I am doing this with pleasure. I am skilled in handling everything that pertains to electricity; I know to fix [things]; to change a set at the tap; to repair a plug or an iron. [...] and I do not need a man in the house...well, all right... I am not saying that I do not let him do things in the house; he would feel bad...[for I am not desiring] to exclude him or to offend him.

Gica talked in the same manner about always struggling to be the best in all the fields in which she worked before. She described how her ambition has always made her distinctive from her brothers. She feels that because she was always a fighter and a hard worker she achieved everything she has.

Therefore, women do their best to be the best in all their activities. Even if she did not practically need to know how to maintain and repair the things in the house, Marioara learned how to do it. But as she also said she would not let her husband to feel bad by doing the work by her own. Why would he feel bad or useless if she fixes things in the house? I would argue that the fact that she can to everything, and thus does not really need ‘a man’ around her, a man to depend on is actually undermining her husband’s higher status in the house

In conclusion, for women to have access to different opportunities, resources and power generally in society and especially in the labor market implies a constant struggle to be as good

workers as they can. Achieving their goals always seems hard work, lot of effort and ambition. Woman taxi drivers have the special status as token in this occupation. In order not to be isolated and caught into the negative sex stereotypes by men they perform their work with a total dedication and maximum of effort and they also talk about it in this manner.

CONCLUSION

My study is a contribution to the body of literature written about token women in male dominated jobs. It analyzes the ways in which Romanian women are experiencing the taxi driving occupation and performing gender at the workplace in relation with their customers and colleagues.

I argued that the manner in which women experience the male traditional occupation of the taxi driving has many of the features about which scholars (Moss Kanter, 1993; Staudt, 1994; Acker, 1991) have talked about when they referred to token women. Considering the fact that taxi driving in Sibiu is very much male dominated, since women employed as taxi drivers are only twenty-two out of one-thousand-six-hundred male taxi drivers, their visibility is increased. They are facing performance pressure because of the established male standards in doing the job. For them recognition in this occupation entails and asks for maximum of effort and at the highest possible standards.

These women entered the taxi driving, a non-traditional occupation in the transition years after the end of socialist time, when they were either unemployed or in need of a better job. Nowadays, in their fifties they do not have an alternative in the job market because they are marginalized because of their age. Even though they like their job, they also admit of not having other opportunities of doing something in which they are trained. Thus, this seems to be the reason, for which women accept the difficult and hard working profession of taxi driving, which sometime even endangers their life.

Female taxi drivers experience both exclusion and inclusion at the workplace. As token women they are assimilated into social stereotypes, which either undermine their status and put them in danger or favor them for their positive connotations. The strategies women use to succeed in this occupation and to overcome the difficulties and gender based discrimination

against them are related with their ways of negotiating with gender stereotypes of the clients and of the male colleagues expressed towards them.

Thus, for proving themselves good in this occupation, women use positive female and/or male stereotypical features to portray themselves. As Kondo (1990) argues gender identity is open, negotiable, shifting, multiple and fluid created through the gender relations with the others.

One of my arguments is that women constantly negotiate with gender stereotypes in order to manage to perform this job and to handle its various and contradictory 'requirements'. They negotiate with their own stereotypes and with the others gendered expectations in order to prove that women are also capable in this profession, and thus to earn a living. In the beginning of their career the impact of the discriminatory attitudes against them had a greater impact. But in time they manage to 'gather' a group of regular clients on which they can always relay on for making a wage to support themselves. These are people who either gender stereotyped them positively from the beginning or who change their negative attitude against women drivers through experience. Therefore, we can argue that women's work is depending on their success in changing the clients' and potential clients' negative gender beliefs about them.

Women adapt to various situations when they encounter gender-based discrimination against them by using various strategies such as degendered explication, rationalizations, and attitudes of indifference but also re/action methods. For succeeding in this occupation their physiological well being is very important.

Because during work they have to cope with many difficult clients, which are all the time mentioned as being male, and circumstances when their safety is at risk, female taxi drivers are using various strategies to protect themselves. The psychological strategies they use reveal patterns of submission and dominance in relation with the clients or with the male colleagues.

Women talk about these strategies as being ‘feminine’ or ‘masculine’ typical approaches. In most of the cases repressing their emotion, anger, frustration signifies not only keeping themselves psychologically well but also psychically safe. They are either enduring in silence or behaving more ‘mannish’ constantly dominating the interaction with the client.

From the very beginning, when the ‘dubious clients’ get in the car most of them read the customer by making him to talk about himself. Getting to know the customer is the key to their employed attitude towards him, and the strategies used to interact with him and to keep themselves safe. Moreover their gendered behavior is set according the criteria of protecting themselves. Thus, another argument based on my findings is that ‘femininity’ and ‘masculinity’ are gender projects which Romanian female taxi drivers accomplish in relation with the clients’ gendered expectations and thus as strategies for self protection.

The taxi driving workplace is a site where men and women routinely ‘do masculinity’ and ‘do femininity’. This is in line with what Kondo (1990) argued about women constructed femininity in the workplace when she described Japanese women factory workers who asserted their gender identities as surrogate mothers to young men workers. In the Romanian taxi driving occupation women are doing ‘both’ genders, constantly and even fluidly. They manage to transgress their gender, to move from doing feminine traits to masculine ones in order to show no fear when they are vulnerable or to display ‘sweetness’ and femininity when they feel that are expected to. Performing ‘both’ genders is for Romanian women taxi drivers a professional skill, which helps them to survive and to succeed in this profession.

Overall by changing the gender dynamic inside the occupation women produce changes in its development and in the gendered culture of the workplace. Since the years they entered the profession, soon after the end of socialism much of the negative gender stereotyping and thus discrimination against them has changed. Thus, the occupation is setting the traits for the manner women are performing their gender, but also by entering the

profession, women changed the ‘face’ of the taxi driving by which I mean its’ dynamic, development, and the way people relate to it.

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