

Factors Promoting Stereotyping of Gender Roles: A Sociological Study on the Families in Kerala

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Abstract

This study deals with the factors promoting the stereotyped gender roles in contemporary society. The study identifies family and religion as the important factors which promote gender roles that are stereotype. The study analyses the role of family especially parents in influencing pre-set gender roles and the reaction of people towards diversions from stereotyped gender roles. It is based on the reactions of 80 families in Calicut city in Kerala, India. The reaction and attitude of parents towards gender stereotyping is accounted. The study confirms the interesting idea that most of the parents are reluctant to any type of diversion from gender stereotyping. The present paper attempts to implicitly draw on both individual experiences and sociological insights of people towards pre-set gender molding. The study also highlights the religious reasons that promote stereotyping of gender. The idea is to throw light on various barriers which are to be unraveled to facilitate gender equilibrium in society.

Keywords: Gender, gender stereotyping, Gender role stereotypes

Introduction

Gender roles are socially and culturally defined directions and attitudes about the behavior and emotions of men and women. The term gender role is used to signify all those things that a person say or does to disclose himself/herself as having the status of boy or man, girl or woman respectively. It is a term that better captures society's influence on the biologically based categories of male and female in gender roles rather than gender.

Sociologists define 'gender' as the totality of meanings that are attached to the sexes within a particular social system. The starting point of analysis for many writers is the distinction between sex and gender. The first person to make this distinction was the American psychoanalyst Dr. Robert Stoller (1986).

The sex related behavior implies the behavior corresponds to sex but it does not say anything about the causes or the etiologies of the difference, sociologists explore the meaning of maleness and femaleness in social context. Social definitions of gender contribute to the social stratification of society and smaller groups within it. It is the culture of a society that determines the behavior of the sexes within it.

Gender Roles

Gender roles are the 'social definitions' of men and women. They vary among different societies and cultures, classes, ages and during different periods in history. Gender specific roles and responsibilities are often conditioned by household structure, access to resources, specific impacts of the global economy and other locally relevant factors such as ecological condition.

Sociology of gender

Sociology of gender is a prominent subfield of sociology. Since 1950, an increasing part of the academic literature and of the public discourse uses gender for the perceived or projected (self- identified) masculinity or femininity of a person. The term was introduced by Money (1955).The sociology of gender is an significant abet to developing an precise depiction of the vibrant gender system, its control on the lives of individuals and groups and the kinds of human efforts that have led to a reduction of its impact.

IDENTIFICATION OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

Defining a research problem is the fuel which drives the scientific process, and is the foundation of any research method. The research problem here is the study on the factors promoting the stereotypification of gender roles, in present day society by using social survey method among parents of 80 families in Calicut City of Kerala, India.

SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze the role of Family in promoting stereotyped gender roles.
2. To analyze the function of religion in contouring stereotyped gender roles.

METHODOLOGY

The study seeks to understand the factors influencing the gender attitudes. Quantitative research strategy and descriptive research design is used for the study. Kozhikode (Calicut) district in Kerala is the research area. Social survey method was used to collect data. Therefore a well modified questionnaire was used as the research tool. The questions were prepared on the basis of the objectives. The quantitative information gathered through questionnaire from 80 families were tabulated and interpreted. On the basis of it, finalizations were made. Here, the procedure used in the study was carefully planned since the aim is to obtain complete and accurate information.

CONCEPTS USED IN THIS STUDY

Gender: is the wide set of characteristics that are seen to distinguish between male and female entities, extending from ones biological sex to human's, one's social role or gender identity.

Stereotype: is a commonly held public belief about specific social groups or types of individuals. Stereotypes are standardized and simplified conception of groups, based on some prior assumptions.

Gender role stereotypes: Is the socially determined model which contains the cultural beliefs about what the gender role should be.

Social Stratification: is the differentiation among people (on be basis of their membership in categories socially different as significant) and the accompanying differences in their access to scarce resources and in the obligations they bear.

Socialization: is the process of learning the rules of the social group or culture to which we belong or hope to belong a learning to define ourselves and their within that setting.

Culture: The complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

DEPENDENT VARIABLES USED IN THIS STUDY ARE:-

Type of toys opted for girl child, type of toys opted for boy child, the response to the initiation of boy child's household tasks, the next preference given to do household tasks if the boy child is not allowed to do it himself, the even division of house work, parents' consciousness to shape stereotyped gender roles of children, adults' influence on children's gender roles, opinion that conformation to religious practices parallels stereotyped gender roles, opinion that weakened loyalty to religious organization

cause variations in stereotyped gender roles, projection of the belief settings of gender roles in school curriculum etc.

FINDINGS

THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND RELIGION IN PROMOTING STEREOTYPED GENDER ROLES.

Family remains central to social life in general and the gender system in particular. Gender is only implicit in the way of looking at families through taken-for-granted notions of how biology and socialization influence personality development and personal performances. As unique as the personalities of individual family members may be, their family arrangements are rarely unique because of the influences of various socially learned expectations, attitudes and behaviors.

Religions influence reflects cultural beliefs and practices. The formerly powerful doctrine of separate spheres had its roots in religious teachings. The new versions of religious texts and songs thoroughly incorporate gender-neutral language. Religion has cultural, economic and political power. Every individual is influenced by religion and trained to struggle, in order to retain or to change the beliefs about the social world that are manifested as religion's doctrine and hierarchy.

47.5% of parents opt kitchen play-set and dolls for the girl child. 42.5% opt all types of toys. But those who opt racing cars and guns for girl child is just 10%. Parents between the age group of 50-60 are more conscious in toy selection (55.56%). That means older generations of parents are so careful to shape the stereotyped gender roles of children.

The toys children play with; influence sex differences. Girls play with toys different from that of boys like domestic dolls, dress up clothes, play kitchen set etc. The selection of toys is the basic step of stereotypification of the girl gender role. The toys, children play with extend influence to cognition and behavior too. Sex of the parents notably influences the selection of toys for the girl child. 87.5% of female parents opt kitchen set and dolls for their girl child. Just 20.83% of male parents opted dolls, kitchen play set etc for their girl child. Only 3.75% of the total respondents opt all types of toys for the girl child.

Male parents are more liberal in the toy selection of the girl child. They opt racing cars and guns, which are considered as 'male child-toys' as per the stereotypic notions while the females, as good followers of pre-set norms, are interested in guidance of the girl child by moulding their character and gender roles by selecting them 'female child-toys.'. A strong

majority of house wives (80%) and respondents with teaching profession (81.81%) opt play kitchen set and dolls for their girl child. Business people (58.33%) and respondents with clerical job (57.14%) also opt these play items for their girl kid. About 75% of the manual laborers are interested in opting the female-play items which are included in the stereotyped norms of feminine nature. None of the house wives opted racing cars and guns as play items for their girl child. Occupation influences the selection of toys for the girl child. It can be seen that occupational status is inversely proportional to the following of stereotypic gender role practices. 75%, a good majority of parents with higher education opted all types of toys for their girl child. 61.11% of respondent with secondary education opted only kitchen set and dolls for the girl child. 85% of primary educated respondent also opted the same for the girl child.

This shows that as education increases there is a diversion from the stereotypic selection of toys. This further influences in the formation of gender roles too. A majority of primary educated respondents (70%) select racing cars and guns for the boy child. 62.51% of respondent with higher education are forward-thinking and opt all types of toys for the boy child. Just 7% of respondents with higher education selected stereotypic toys for boys.

Thus it reveals that education plays a vital role in the conformation to stereotypic gender role behaviors. Conformation to gender stereotypes is inversely proportional to educational status. 83.34% of male parents and 78.13% of female parents select racing cars and guns as toys for their boy child. A very low percentage (3.75%) of parents opt all types of toys for the boy child. Toy may directly influence and reinforce sex differences in cognitive abilities. Boys overwhelmingly play with vehicles, racing cars, machines and construction sets etc. Toys are also marketed to a specific sex today.

Thus the parents start the initial preparations to make an 'acceptable male' for the society, from childhood itself. Both males and females restrict their boy child from doing household tasks. 84.37% of female parents scold their boy child for performing house work. Just 10% of the total respondents encourage the boy child to do the works at home.

The unequal division of labor in the family, right from the childhood reflects later in the personal lives of the children. Here, the mother initiates to do house work, and prevents the boy child from doing it. This parallels the stereotypic version of labor law.

These boy children are carriers of the pre-set concept of labor division at home. They too will follow the same attitudes towards their male off-springs and thus the stereotypic

moulds of gender roles remain unchanged. Only 6.66% of the Muslim parents encourage the boy child to do household tasks. 57.16% of Christian respondents said that they would encourage the house hold tasks of their boy child, where as there is only slight variation in the Hindu respondents, who encourage their boy child (39.65%) and those who scolds the child not to do it (34.48%).

This clearly indicates the role of religion in moulding the stereotyped gender role of boy child. Muslims show a greater tendency to stick on to traditional division of labor of men and women. Compared to the Muslims and Christians Hindus show willingness to detach from the pre-determined gender roles. Hence the impact of religion in determining the nature of gender role is crucial. 70.83% of respondents with higher education opined that they would definitely encourage the initiation of the boy child to do household tasks. Secondary educated respondents (66.67%) says that they would also do the same. 35% of the primary educated people expressed their view that they would scold the boy and restrict him from doing it.

Education plays an important role in the shaping of attitudes about gender roles. Education enables a detachment from the stereotypic roles of gender. 61 respondents do not allow their boy child to do household tasks. Their preference to do the work at home is analyzed. 75.75% of males prefer the boy child's mother to do the household tasks instead of the boy child. 92.85% of females prefer themselves to do it. Women are its main promoters by expressing their willingness to be obliged to the service of family members, by doing all household tasks. 91.67% of the respondents in the 50-60 age group responded that they prefer the boy child's mother to do the household tasks. The next age group which prefers the same opinion is the age group above 60. Just 50% of the respondents below the age of 40, agree with this view.

It is clear that the older generation expresses reluctance to divert from the traditional roles of gender. The younger generation parents do not hold the stereotyped view of the mother doing all the household tasks. 46.87% of females opined that their housework is not divided evenly. Just 25% of the total respondents said that their housework is divided evenly. This indicates a woman's stereotyped role as a house maker.

Family, as the basic institution of society, practices the pattern of stereotyped division of work, set for both male and female. This promotes stereotyped gender roles too. 45.83% of the respondents with higher education divided their housework evenly. The even division of housework is preferred by 75% of respondents with secondary education. This opinion is

least preferred by the primary educated respondents. The same respondents (50%) do not prefer to do housework evenly. Thus, education can definitely influence the practices in everyday life. Respondents with lower educational status stay away from the non-stereotypical gender roles. It is to be noted that a majority of respondents with average educational status prefer the even division of housework which challenges the stereotypical notion.

Occupation and even-division of housework are inter-related. 75% of the business people in the respondents and 75% of respondents in the teaching profession opined that their housework is not divided evenly. No body among the housewives responded that their housework division is even. 75% of the respondents with manual labor as occupation also share the same opinion. Occupational status increases the willingness to share the housework also increases. Occupational status can influence the pre-assumptions on gender roles. 61.25% if parents are conscious in shaping the gender roles of children. Just 32.5% are not conscious in this side. A very low percentage (6.25%) of them is not bothering about it, at all. The years from about 2 to 6 are crucial years in the development of gender roles. It is during these years that children become aware of their genders, where play styles, and behaviors begin to crystallize around that core identity of 'I am a girl' or 'I am a boy'. Most parents expect stereotyped gender behaviors from children and rewards and punishments are given accordingly. Thus consciousness in shaping the gender roles of children by parents results in stereotyping of it. A majority of 78.75% of respondents opined, there exist a patriarchal nature of religious beliefs, practices etc. the present patriarchal system practically supports pre-set gender roles. Just 11.25% opined that the present belief practices are not patriarchal.

The person who believes the customary religious practices and customs is naturally obliged to be a part of the patriarchal system. This compels one to be a follower of the stereotyped gender nature, expected by society. 85% of the respondents are religious. Just 12.5% of them are not religious. Only 2.5% of them shares that they do not have any opinion to this question. 47.91% of males agree that a weakened loyalty to religious organization causes variations in stereotyped gender roles. Only 21.25% of total respondents opined that it is not. Patriarchal nature of religious beliefs, customs, practices etc exist. Thus religious organization also nourishes the patriarchal ideology and function. The members of such a religious organization are expected to be obedient to it. If a weakened loyalty exists, chances to present variations in stereotyped gender roles also exist. As long as the obligations and

beliefs holds people close to religious organization, scope for diversions from stereotyped behavior is very rare. 47.91% of the male respondents and 46.87% of female respondents agree that conformation to religious practices parallel stereotyped gender roles. 28.75% opined that religious practices more or less replicate stereotyped gender roles. It is sure that religious practices and stereotypification of gender roles are influential to each others. Conformation to religious practices and stereotypification of gender roles are inversely proportional. 83.33% of higher educated respondents, 88.88% of secondary educated respondents and 80% of the primary educated respondents share the view that conformation to religious practices parallel stereotyped gender roles. Just 5.56% of respondents of secondary education opined that it is not. 85% of the respondents are religious. Thus it can be revealed that religious factor definitely influences the stereotyped gender role performances and both are directly proportional to each other.

87.5% of males responded that adult's behavior definitely influence children's gender roles. The same percentage of females also holds the similar view. A very least of 2.55% opined that children's behavior is not touched by adult's behavior.

Theoretically it is already proved that children's behavior is based upon the daily life behavior patterns of parents and adults. The boys learn how to behave as 'boys' from observing and imitating masculine behaviors, especially from fathers and girls learn from imitating females, especially from their mothers. Thus, the stereotyped mannerisms and life patterns of adults build up stereotyped versions of younger generation. An equal percentage (83.33%) of respondents with higher education and secondary education opined that adult's behavior influences children's gender roles. Just 25% of primary educated people says that it do not. Increase in education influence the consciousness about the gender role modifications. Primary educated respondents are unconscious about the stereotypic processes carried from themselves to the younger generation and they do not realize the necessity to erase it. They don't even identify the significance of it for maintaining gender equality. Therefore it is clear that higher education of parents enables the diversions from pre-set gender roles, because children are not influenced by the stereotypic versions, if their parents are aware about their own behavior. The child's burgeoning sense of self or self concept is a result of the multitude of ideas, attitudes, behaviors and beliefs to which he or she is exposed.

The information that surrounds the child and which is internalized comes to the child within the family, arena through parent-child interactions, role modeling, reinforcement for desired

behaviors and parental approval or disapproval. Children's gender perceptions play a stronger role in shaping their interpretations of gender issues.

As children move into the larger world of friends and school, many of their ideas and beliefs are reinforced by those around them. A further reinforcement of acceptable and appropriate behavior is shown to children through socialization. Thus the social context of family, religion, school, the peer group and the media exert potent messages in stereotyped ways in children.

Concluding Views

Gender role stereotypes are socially constructed through myriad activities, opportunities, encouragements, discouragements, overt behaviors, covert suggestions and various forms of guidance etc. All these train individuals to perform stereotyped roles of gender. Socialization and other social institutions make it firm entrenched beliefs and thus a part of self concept.

Relations between religious orientation and gender-related attitudes and behaviors are analysed in detail to obtain the results as that, a weakened loyalty to religious and religious organizations can make visible diversions from stereotyped gender roles. Thus religious devoutness is an important variable among the predictable factors which can create changes in gender role attitudes. It gradually influences sex differences and very naturally affects the nature of the tasks performed by men and women. Informal education at home trains children with character, role assignments and expressive nature. Sex differences in self confidence seem to be limited to masculine tasks, it is here that women tend to underestimate their performance and lack self-confidence. Parents call on boys more often than girls, ask boys higher level questions and expand on boys' more than girls' comments. They interact more with boys than girls and give boys better feedback. Women are less self-confident than men in situations where the feed back is ambiguous or in situations of uncertainty. This suggests men are more likely than women to confront a novel task with a higher expectation to succeed. The answer is nuclear whether women's self-confidence then leads to a higher rate of success. Women are less self-confident than men when these are social clues that inspire women to be concerned with the effect of their achievements on others' self esteem. Women are more likely than men to believe that their public expression of achievement affects other people's self-esteem. Majority of the respondents, especially women expressed their reluctance to divert from gender stereotyped roles. Women believed the peer felt better

and liked them more when they made a modest compared to an immodest disclosure. And also, women expect that their achievements will affect other's feelings because their beliefs about their own abilities are affected by others' achievements. Being female has been linked to and proved in this study as sensitivity about being the target of a threatening upward comparison which means that women worry more about how others react to their superior performance.

The study points out that education is not always a promoter but also a factor which accelerates sense of equality and diversions from gender stereotypes. But, when the personal responses of the respondents are taken into consideration, the liberal opinions expressed by the highly educated respondents is symbolized as fake and superficial.

The study tends to focus more or less on the inequality associated with sex alone. This is also an emphasis of feminists who study gender issues as a part of the problem of domination. They recognize that the stereotype threat affects women's performance. Cultural ideas, symbols, norms and values play significant role in the creation of stereotyped women images and differentiation of gender roles. The basic models of cultural images of women like pativrata unconditional devotional to husband, glorified motherhood etc are distinctly shaped and conditioned by female stereotypes. Girls usually grow up with deep rooted sense of fear and insecurity which not only restricts their social mobility in the day-to-day life but also often psychologically cripples them to face the hardships of life in general and resist the hardships of life based on discrimination in particular.

The analysis about the factors promoting the stereotyped roles of gender is relevant because of its contemporary and significant interconnections with gender issues, inequality and feminist perspectives. Sexual violence is common in all culture, that women are victims of rape, battering and sexual harassment each day despite legislation prohibiting such violence, common policing, work place policies, counseling and training programmes exist. This is mainly because of underestimated women character and esteem, by a patriarchal society. Discrimination against individuals based on their sex, sexual orientations or health status exist in institutions and societies. The inequality between men and women acts as a boosting force in gender role stereotypification. It is not something new and so long it exists, till then stereotyped gender roles also exist.

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