



GENDER CATEGORIZATION: A STUDY ON SCHOOL CHILDREN OF ALIGARH CITY

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ABSTRACT

Nowadays, modern societies depict more egalitarian attitudes regarding sexism and gender equality. There is still a significant gender gap everywhere (socialization, education, wages and professions, expectations surrounding male and female characteristics etc.). Many studies confirm that these types of gender categorization come from the closest environments i.e. family and schools. Not only this but media and cultural values also play an important role for creating these particular types of gender categorization. As children are socialized with these values and norms, they start to judge others with these categorization and to construct expectations of them. This study was done having an aim to examine the degree of gender bias internalization among school children particularly their personal attributes and professional roles. This study was descriptive in nature and the data for the present study was collected from school children of Aligarh City. The findings of this study revealed that children interiorized traditional gender roles from their childhood but there is a big increase in the strength of this gender bias as they grow older.

Keywords-: Environment, Gender, Personal attributes, professional roles, Socialization, and Categorization.

1. INTRODUCTION

In India, the term sex and gender are being used interchangeably due to human behavior which is created through socialization process. While these two words have own meaning. Sex refers to the biological differences between men and women, boys and girls. It is defined as a property by which organisms are classified as males or females based on reproductive organs and functions. Biological and physiological differences between males and females are represented by sex such as reproductive organs, chromosomes and hormones etc. while gender describes socially constructed differences between males and females. Gender is defined on the basis of social norms, behaviors, activities, relationship, responsibilities which are assigned by the society as appropriate for male and female. Understanding of gender varies in different races, nations, castes, ethnic groups, religions.

In present era, there have been substantial advances in terms of gender equality in the area of education, employment and economic. All These advances have ensued in several laws and regulations which seek to promote equal opportunities for both sexes throughout their life and it also reduce sexism in all its aspects. Still gender inequality exists in various areas like wages and positions of power (vertical segregation) (Cohen and Hilgeman: 2006), as well as it creates large differences in numerous areas of life. Ex. It is expected that girls tend to perceive themselves as less competent in science-related fields (OECD: 2020), and women tend to be underrepresented in traditionally male professions, which are usually the ones with greater social prestige (horizontal segregation) (Cohen and Hilgeman: 2006), This all happened owing to socialization process. Even gender roles affect the physical and mental health of both men and women (WHO: 2002) through gender violence (McCarthy et al.: 2018). Moreover, though life expectancy is high among women but they have a worse quality of life (Rollero et al.: 2014).

Socialization process starts when we born. It is a process by which individuals are taught how to socially behave in accordance with their assigned gender, which is assigned at birth based on their biological sex. Under these differences a continuity of traditional gender stereotypes exists among other social factors. According to these differences attributes, behaviors and expectations are colligated with men and women in a biased manner. Children, adults and also aged who do not conform to gender stereotypes are often ostracized by peers for being different. During early childhood, girls and boys spend much of their time at the home with their parents and siblings. That is why parents are the primary source of creating gender categorized through gender socialization process.

When a child starts to perceive two types of people in social life (men and women), he/she develops a gender scheme. This scheme guides the future processing of information from this particular categorization (Bem: 1981). When children begin to understand that which group they belong to and assume the stability of a situation; they start to associate behaviors and expectations with one or the others according to their experiences (Bem: 1983). Children apply gender schemes for developing their own identity (Ruble et al.: 2007) and expectations regarding people with whom they interact in the attitudinal, personality and occupational spheres (Levy and Sadovsky: 2000). However, children are not restricted to assume and copy the gender roles that the environment delivers or that biology imposes. Children are active agents that modify the schemes equally they interact with different contexts. Certain environmental experiences stimulate the restructuring of these schemes such as showing counter-stereotypical models. This information results in the roles gaining more personal content. The contributions of post-structural feminism could be framed as if gender identity was something immutable; we would limit ourselves for copying and reproducing roles as fixed schemes that would have prevented great social advances concerning the place that men and women take in society (Renold: 2004).

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study of how gender affects various aspects of life experience among adolescents has been the focus of a large body of research. It can be associated with a number of demographic traits like race, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and gender that how differently individuals experience everyday life. Gender is a very prevailing social construct within one's everyday reality (Kimmel, 2004). On a daily basis, every individual, regardless of his/her other differentiating characteristics, is perceived and evaluated by others as per his/her gender. Authors also persistently manage and are affected by our own gender, among other aspects of our self (Goffman, 1959). We manage our gender by frequently checking (whether consciously or subconsciously) that we are behaving in gender-appropriate ways, and by managing our appearance to coincide with our gender. Whether one is male or female has a great deal of meaning in Western culture. Because gender is so effective in shaping our experience, many researches have set out to investigate that how this social construct relates for varying aspects of psychological as well as social well-being and adjustment.

Gender plays a significant role in our society. It is important to question that why and how gender has been socially constructed and continually reinforced for generations. Gender socialization is the process of learning gender roles and gender-appropriate behaviors. This process begins at birth as children imbibe cues from their environment, particularly from their parents first, and later from teachers and other children, indicating society's expectations relative to gender (Kimmel, 2004). Even at the time birth parents dressed up their baby according to their gender and they are taught acceptable gender role behavior by others' (especially parents') teachings and reactions to them and their presenting behavior. A young child learns that boys do not play with dolls and girls do not play with guns. Research has also focused on gender socialization or the learning of gender roles within the family.

Many researches explore that the social learning aspect of gender roles and gender-appropriate behavior while other research explores the cognitive processes of gender development. Martin and Ruble (2004) discussed on how children learn gender roles through their cognitive developmental processes. In doing so, children are looking at gender development at least partially on a biological or genetic level. Authors discovered that six-month old infants start differentiates male and female voices, and nine-month old baby distinguishes between pictures of males and females.

Some research explores that how gender socialization can affect particular aspects of our life experience. Crouter, Manke, and McHale (1995) analyzed that how socialization, including gender socialization, affects "gender intensification" during adolescence. Authors also discussed gender intensification as the stricter adherence to gender roles that comes about during adolescence. Authors hypothesized that male and female adolescents would begin to experience stricter gender socialization, or treatment based on gender, by parents, and that this in turn would lead to gender intensification during that period of time.

3. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To examine the degree of gender bias internalization among school children particularly their personal attributes and professional roles.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Universe and Sample- All the children living in Aligarh City constituted the universe of this study. All the respondents for this study were selected by simple random sampling.

4.2 Research Design- The research design was descriptive.

4.3 Sources of Data- Both primary as well as secondary data were used for data collection.

4.4 Methods for Data Collection- Primary data was collected from face to face interview schedule with exercise while secondary data was collected from articles, journals, books, census handbook, newspapers, reports and magazines.

5. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is a fact that every gender plays an important role for creating our society. As gender stereotypical roles exist in every sphere of our lives. These stereotypical roles are assigned by ourselves and we internalized these stereotypical roles among our children by socialization. This study targeted only two aspects of their lives i.e. physical appearance and professional roles. Through the literature review, it was noticed that much of the research targeted young people in general, not much work has been done among school children as they are the future of our country and their socialization is very important in this age. The findings of the present study thus provided a new dimension to the existing literature in this area. Research of this nature is significant because it discusses the gender bias internalization among school children particularly their personal attributes and professional roles. It was observed that people pay less attention to socialize their children in terms of removing gender biasness. So, this study was done having an aim to bring in light the removing of gender stereotypical through socialization. This research places itself into the field of feminist studies, which provide space for multidisciplinary intellect to engage with each other. Here, gender stereotypical roles are studied from a feminist perspective, placing women/girls at the center of analysis, which enhance the significance of the present research.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Only two types of domains (personal and professional) were analyzed in this study. In the first domain regarding personal attributes, respondents were asked to choose a man or a woman as the admirer of the story without giving the option to answer that both genders could be intelligent or kind. Same as in the task two, when we assign professions there was no option to choose that both should carry out that particular profession.

7. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The results depict that the children between the age group of 4-15 years who took part in this study have generally internalized gender schemes. There is slight variations and different developmental trajectories between both the genders and in the relationship to masculinity and femininity.

7.1 Stereotyping of Personal Attributes

It was found in this study that boys tend to produce biased responses more frequently when we gave to assign male traits while girls of this study tend to issue stereotyped responses more frequently for female traits. This study indicates that both genders pay more attention to the traits associated with their own group. They internalize them earlier and incorporate them as more rigid schemes when it comes to creating expectations regarding

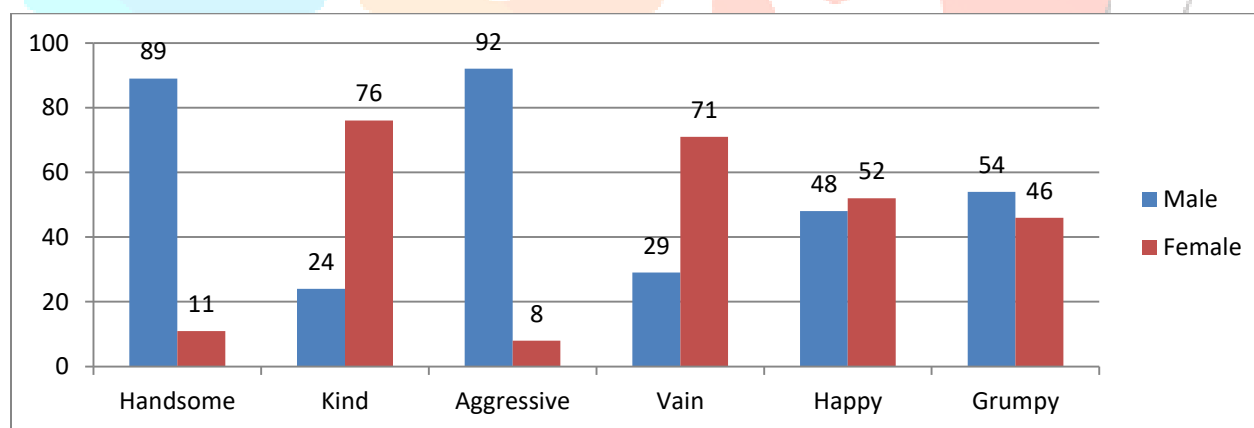
unknown people. The construction of this scheme occurs in parallel to gender identity development, it is more efficient for girls, from an adaptive point of view, to pay attention to what society expects of them because they are women. This acquisition allows them to incorporate these expectations into their own identity, in the same way that happens to boys.

TABLE-1: CATEGORIZATION OF PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES

CATEGORY	MALE IMAGE	FEMALE IMAGE
Handsome	89	11
Kind	24	76
Aggressive	92	08
Vain	29	71
Happy	48	52
Grumpy	54	46

Source: School Children of Aligarh City

FIGURE-1: CATEGORIZATION OF PERSONAL ATTRIBUTES



Above given table and figure describes that the majority of the school children set their minds that only men are handsome same as they associated the image of aggressive person with men. Only limited number of respondents of this study mentioned that female are also handsome and aggressive. While on the other side, this study shows that adjectives like kind and vain are mostly associated with the female image as compared to this less number of school children answered that men are also kind and vain. An important aspect to notice in this study is that some adjectives such as happy and grumpy are always used for both genders. This data shows that these school children responded that both genders where it is a male or female can be happy and grumpy.

Incorporating specific gender roles at such early ages, associating aggressiveness with masculinity and lower intelligence to women, in parallel to the development of gender identity, is something which can have obvious implications for children as it adds constraints to their development at such an early stage.

It was analyzed that gender roles are usually more rigid for men than for women. So it can be confirmed that this greater lack of flexibility connected with masculinity is already perceived and also internalized by our respondents in the first years. It is clear that children perceive that men tend to be more aggressive than women. This characteristic undoubtedly found at the root of phenomena like gender violence. Although in this study respondents have been asked to generate expectations about the presented targets (appropriation of culturally shared roles). They were not asked whether these types of behaviors are adequate or not. This data depicts that from an early age children identify this behavior as an attribute more associated with normative masculinity having the implications that this has for the socio-emotional development of both boys and girls. Boys seem to assume early on that aggressiveness is more frequent among their peers and male adults while girls also perceive that difference as they may find inevitable.

It is considered that women are much more concerned about their physical appearance than men. They naturally care a lot about their image. They are more likely to feel insecure with their physical appearance. Women are also developed a more negative body image by comparing that how they look with prevailing beauty canons. This aspect is at the base of various mental health problems like eating disorders. This is much more frequent among women rather than men.

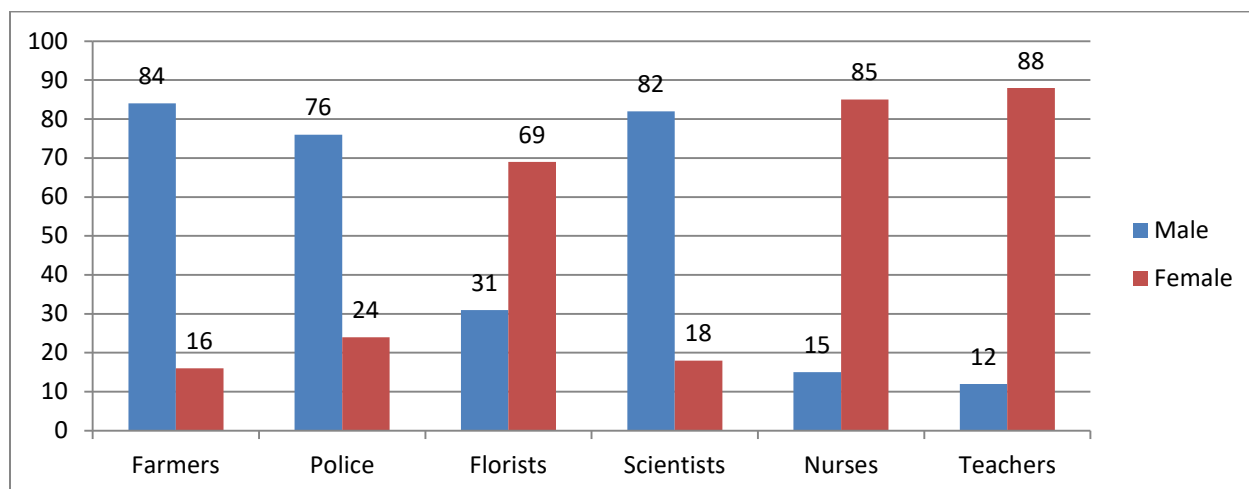
7.2 Stereotyping of Professional Roles

This data reveals that there is a greater stereotyping of the male professions than of the female professions. Respondents of this study indicated greater flexibility (“both men and women can carry out this profession”) for professions associated with women against for those associated with men. The professional field seems to be more rigid with respect to masculine related schemes than with those associated with traditional feminine schemes. Hence, the more traditionally masculinized professions were more often “banned” for women than womanized professions were for men.

TABLE-2: CATEGORIZATION OF PROFESSIONAL ROLES

CATEGORY	MALE IMAGE	FEMALE IMAGE
Farmers	84	16
Police	76	24
Florists	31	69
Scientists	82	18
Nurses	15	85
Teachers	12	88

Source: School Children of Aligarh City

FIGURE-2: CATEGORIZATION OF PROFESSIONAL ROLES

This data depicts that majority of our respondents of this study mentioned that male are farmers. While 83.6 per cent of working women in India are engaged in agricultural activities. Their work includes planting, weeding, harnessing, and threshing. Yet when we talk about a farmer we only think that only men are farmers. Almost 68 percent respondents of this study considered that the police profession should be carried out only by men. On the other side, respondents also applied gender biases at the time of analyzing female professions. More than half of the respondents of this study reported that the florist profession should be carried out only by women. Girls of this study were slightly more rigid as compared to boys when considering these professions. Same as men are refers to the Scientist profession.

The tendency to perceive and internalize to a greater extent the roles attributed to one's own group seems to be confirmed in the professional sphere only for girls not for boys. In short, all boys and all girls know and moderately internalize gender schemes for male professions. However, girls seem to acquire the professional biases associated with their own sex more strongly. It is interesting to note that a significant part of the respondents considered that the profession like police or scientists are only be carried out by men. This result depicts that there are still professional areas that are generally associated with men. By this data it is shown that women do not seem to have a place in these particular types of professions.

There is another example given to the children of these schools by giving the name of two professions i.e. nurse and teacher. It was found by the help of this exercise that majority of the respondents of this study mentioned that women are suited in these particular types of professions. As they think that women are passionate and they take care of their family members so they can easily handle taking care of the patients at hospital. As we observed that this students of this study associated this profession from the household chores. That is why, they thing women are more appropriate in nurse professions rather than men. The interesting point is observing here that the school books presented and reinforced such types of gender stereotypical roles by which students categorized certain types of professions with particular gender.

When presenting examples that destroy these rigid schemes, the exposure of more contra-stereotypical models seems necessary since in these two professions it is certainly less frequent to find women. The professions with greater social prestige are those that are most associated with men, compared to those who receive less salary and have less status, in which case the answers are frequently more flexible. In this sense, the contexts surrounding the child (whether immediate, such as school or family, or virtual ones such as television or internet) must make an effort to destroy this rigid stereotyping of schemes when considering a specific profession such as typical of men or women.

8. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Both boys and girls of young age interiorized traditional gender roles in the area of physical appearance as well as professional roles from their childhood through socialization process. In order to change these patterns, it is necessary to completely rethink about the process of socialization and initial education and much more attention should be paid to teach equal values both to boys and girls. Boys can be kind and girls can also be aggressive same as boys can become nurse and girls can also become scientist. The choice of a job must be associated with the personal interests and real abilities of each person, without limiting the professional expectations of children and affecting their vocational choices on the basis of sex.

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