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Gender norms examples

Gender norms are socially and culturally mediated principles that govern the expected behavior of women, men, girls, and boys in a society. Examples of gender norms include the idea that women should be passive, men should be leaders, girls should be good at sewing, and men should be good at physical tasks. Gender norms work to construct ideas of what is "normal" for a man or woman, and in turn, what is considered "abnormal" and even worrying. Thus, gender norms are often considered to be damaging to individual liberty. The defining norms of gender are neither static nor culturally universal and change over time. According to social constructionism, gender, like all social identities, is a social construct. Social constructionism is a sociological theory of knowledge that holds that characteristics often thought to be unchallengeable and solely biological—such as gender, race, ability, and sexuality—are instead products of human interaction and constructed by cultural and historical contexts (McKinley, 2015). For a formal definition, here's how the European Institute for Gender Equality defines gender norms: "Gender norms are ideas about how women and men should be and act. Internalised early in life, gender norms can establish a life cycle of gender socialisation and stereotyping." The following are gender norms – or in other words, things that may have in recent history been considered "normal" – in the context of historically patriarchal cultures such as those in the West. Stoicism vs Empathy - Men are stereotyped as being stoic and not letting their emotions rule them, while women are stereotyped as being highly empathetic and compassionate. Hero vs Supporter - Men are envisioned in many films and cultural narratives as the individual heroes, while women are often envisaged as the background characters, supporting the man. Strength vs Kindness - Men are expected to be strong and firm, while women are expected to be gentle and kind. Active vs Passive - Men are expected to take action while women are normally seen as passive in order to "act like a lady". Preoccupied with Power vs Looks - Men are stereotyped as being preoccupied with money and power, while women are stereotyped as being obsessed with their looks. Independent vs Dependent - Men are seen as strong and independent, while it's traditionally considered normal for women to be dependent upon the men in their lives. Quiet vs Talkative - It's considered normal and ideal for men to be quiet and thoughtful, while women are expected to be talkative and even gossips. Analytical vs Creative - Outdated norms hold that men are analytical (meaning they should be in charge of making decisions) while women are creative. Bold vs Shy - Gender norms hold that men are bold and brash, while women are ideally shy and quiet. In fact, a bold woman may be accused of being 'bossy'. Blunt vs Tactful - Similar to the above point, a man is often expected to be a little blunt and assertive, while a woman - conforming to the ideal of being more quiet and reserved - is expected to be tactful, or in layman's terms, "act like a lady". Leader vs Follower - Traditional normative ideals hold that men are supposed to be leaders and women are supposed to be followers. Today, we still have the concept of the 'glass ceiling' where women continue to face subtle stereotypical assumptions that lock them out of leadership roles, Rugged vs Refined - Gender norms hold that attractive men are rugged - perhaps with scars and a little facial hair to accentuate the rugged look, while attractive women are refined and soft. The 'refined woman' ideal comes from the idea that these women were of elite status who didn't have to do chores for the family. Provider vs Nurturer - The man is seen as the provider or breadwinner, while the woman is seen as the nurturer of the family. Domineering vs Submissive - A masculine man continues to be idealized as domineering (especially in Hollywood films) while attractive women are traditionally idealized as being submissive to the man. Public sphere vs Domestic sphere - Traditionally, men would come together to make decisions about society while women would be confined to their homes. Construction vs Caring Industries - When women moved into the workforce, they moved into 'domestic' or 'caring' industries such as healthcare and education, which modernized but nonetheless continued the idea that the domestic sphere is the women's sphere. Women are often assumed to be better as teachers and nurses, while men are presumed to be naturally better as engineers and pilots. Moreover, men are generally better paid than women which in sociology is called the "gender pay gap". According to sociologists, pay practices are 'socially constructed' and under-evaluate women's labor in a range of ways. For instance, wages are heavily influenced by social pressures, actions of employers, governments, and trade unions. A key historical reason for male-dominated professions having higher wages was because it was expected that men would be required to be the breadwinners of the family. Moreover, women are still seen by most societies as secondary earners, and they work in industries that are unfairly seen as less difficult by society, hence justifying lower salaries (Grimshaw & Rubery, 2007) Some individuals and societies expect that women will take care of the children, cook, and clean, while men take care of finances and do household repairs. These norms affect women's and men's opportunities all over the world. According to Save the Children US, household chores are much more likely to be performed by girls than boys. Girls account for two-thirds of all children who perform household chores for at least 21 hours per week, this amount of time can negatively impact a child's schooling. Likewise, women spend two to 10 times more time on unpaid childcare and domestic work than men. On the other hand, men and boys are more often targeted for active combat roles by armed groups because of the association of masculinity with defending homes and communities. (Save the Children US, 2022) This differentiation is likely due to cultural stereotypes about who should do what jobs around the house. The education system is affected by gender norms, such as women and men being expected to pursue certain gendered careers. Moreover, the educational system generally is unequal, and many subjects focus on men, for instance in history books. Schools often reflect and replicate the discriminatory gender norms found in society. According to Levtov (2013) discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes is seen in teaching practices, such as responding more directly to boys or asking boys more questions, and through classroom organization, such as gendered assignment of chores - asking girls to clean and boys to chop wood. Norms and stereotypes that affect learning and education outcomes are common, and often reflect perceptions of girls' competence. Often, boys are steered towards the subjects that may lead to more lucrative careers in later life (Marcus, 2018). While gender norms affect all children, they are proven to disproportionately affect girls. More than 575 million girls live in countries where inequitable gender norms contribute to violations of their rights, like health, education, marriage and gender-based violence. (Save the Children US, 2022) Gender norms describe how men and women are expected to behave in a given social context. Regarding decision-making, the man historically often had the last say. This means for example in choosing the place to live, choice of school for children, and financial decisions. According to sociological studies, men are more likely to hold leadership positions at their working place. Some of the reasons why men are appointed to leadership positions are that the expected 'normal' image of a leader is that of a man (e.g. it's hard to picture a female president - because there hasn't been one yet!) The main negative stereotypes that hinder women's career advancement are: a woman must be obedient a woman is for staying at home and cooking a woman is for having a baby without a man, a woman cannot succeed See More: Examples of Decision-Making Gender norms influence society and its politics. Women are still behind in political engagement worldwide, such as contributing to campaigns and joining political organizations. Women's opportunities in politics have long been affected by gender norms, alongside with other sociological factors such as wealth and ethnicity. There are several factors to why women lack opportunities in politics, for instance, less time due to household chores, differences in income and education, and ties with other groups such as trade unions. Thus, we have concepts such as the glass ceiling, where it's perceived that women find it very hard to rise to the upper echelons of politics and leadership. The term 'gender norms' was first popularised in the 1970s by feminists in order to distinguish between culturally constructed male and female roles, behaviors, and preferences. According to feminist theory, gender is socially constructed rather than determined by biology. Feminist sociologists developed this idea further, arguing that gender is best conceptualized as a social system that assigns resources, roles, power, and privileges according to whether a person is perceived as male or female. According to feminist theory, most societies are deeply hierarchical, favoring the male or masculine over the female or feminine (Cislaghi & Heise, 2019). Furthermore, norms are only one element of the gender system, along with gender roles, gender socialization, and gendered power relations. Gender norms are the social rules and expectations that keep the gender system intact. Traditional Patriarchal FemininityTraditional Hegemonic Masculinity1. Empathy1. Stoicism2. Nurturer2. Provider3. Emotionality3. Logic4. Kindness4. Strength5. Passivity5. Active6. Submissivity6. Domineering7. Preoccupied with looks7. Preoccupied with power8. Dependent8. Independent9. Domestic sphere9. Public sphere10. Talkative10. Quiet11. Creative11. Analytical12. Tactful12. Blunt13. Shy13. Bold14. Follower14. Leader15. Refined15. Rugged Gender norms describe how people of a certain gender are expected to behave in a given social context, leading to double standards in society. We learn what is expected of our gender from what our parents and teachers teach us, as well as through religious, cultural, political, media and other social institutions. We call this gender socialization. Examples of gender norms are that women takes care of the children and cook, while men chop wood and go to combat. 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(Save the Children US, 2022) This differentiation is likely due to cultural stereotypes about who should do what jobs around the house. The education system is affected by gender norms, such as women and men being expected to pursue certain gendered careers. Moreover, the educational system generally is unequal, and many subjects focus on men, for instance in history books. Schools often reflect and replicate the discriminatory gender norms found in society. According to Levtov (2013) discriminatory gender norms and stereotypes is seen in teaching practices, such as responding more directly to boys or asking boys more questions, and through classroom organization, such as gendered assignment of chores - asking girls to clean and boys to chop wood. Norms and stereotypes that affect learning and education outcomes are common, and often reflect perceptions of girls' competence. 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It is thought that children are aware of their gender by the time they are 3 years old, long before they come to recognize any other type of group they may belong to (Stockard, 2006). In gender socialization, it is important to distinguish between sex and gender. When referring to anatomical or reproductive differences between men and women, many social scientists use the term sex (Kretchmar, 2011). When referring to gender, this is a social construct which is believed to exist on a continuum and involves ideas about masculinity and femininity. The central idea of gender socialization is that societies have their own ideas of what gender is. People and cultures throughout the world recognize that there are different gender groups and they have assigned roles and responsibilities. Through gender socialization, people develop their own beliefs about gender and ultimately form their own gender identity. People may not be consciously aware of the gender norm decisions that they make. Gender roles and norms are often built into the script of what a man/woman should do or be. Examples of Gender Socialization An example of gender socialization is how toys are gendered, being marketed towards boys and girls.In many toy stores, there are often segregated 'boy toys' and 'girl toys.' The toys for boys may often be blue and come in the form of action figures, toy cars, and building blocks, whereas the toys for girls are often pink and come in the form of baby dolls, dress-up games, and toy cooking and cleaning sets. The types of toys and activities are marketed to reinforce what genders should do. For instance, the toys advertised to boys reinforce that to be male involves being adventurous, strong, and logic driven. The toys advertised to girls reinforce that to be female means to be maternal, physically attractive, and to manage household tasks. The advertising for these toys is also usually targeted at specific genders. The boxes for 'girl toys' for instance may be various shades of pink and display a young girl playing with the toy on the box. If a girl sees this, she will likely understand that this toy is targeted for her, rather than packaging which is blue and displays a young boy playing with the toy. We normally refer to the people responsible for our socialisation as agents of socialisation and, by extension, we can also talk about agencies of socialisation (such as our family, the education system, the media and so forth). Gender socialization is a form of primary socialization which is the process by which children and infants learn the norms and behaviors associated with their gender. It is thought to occur within the family, peer groups, mass media and school curriculum (Bhattacharjee, 2021). Parent socialization Parents are often the first socialization of gender that children experience. Gender socialization can often begin as soon as parents find out whether they are expecting a boy or a girl. Before the child is born, they may begin painting the baby's room a certain color and buy specific clothing which is 'appropriate' for their child's gender. The language that parents use around their child can also reflect gender socialization. Girls may be referred to as 'pretty' or 'delicate', whereas boys may be described as 'strong' and 'boisterous'. Children learn from this language how they should be according to their gender. Often there are different expectations for children depending on their gender. Girls may be expected to help out their mother with cooking, shopping, and cleaning activities. Boys may be expected to have high job aspirations, engage in sports, and help their father with fixing things. Children tend to be especially attentive to same-gender models (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Therefore, when children observe their same-sex parent exhibit specific behaviors or engaging in activities which differ from other genders, the child is more likely to exhibit the same behaviors. The way that parents behave with their child may differ depending on the child's gender. Girls may be encouraged to play and behave in a polite and quiet manner, whereas boys may be encouraged to play louder and rougher. Even if parents try not to reinforce gender norms, if they have their own gendered socialization from when they were younger, these parents may be inadvertently reinforcing this onto their children. Peer socialization Children can also be socialized by their peers in different ways, according to their gender. It is thought that by the time children reach the age of three, they often prefer playing with other children of the same gender (Wharton, 2005). This is often found across a variety of cultures and continues until adolescence. They often prefer to play with peers who share similar interests and thus are more likely to be socialized by peers of the same gender. An explanation for gender-segregated play is that boys and girls play very differently and seek out others whose play style is similar (Stockard, 2006). Girls often form intimate friendships with a small number of other girls and they take turns speaking and expressing agreement. Boys often play in larger groups, engage in rougher activities, and use interruptions and boasts. When spending time with peers, boys and girls learn what is 'appropriate' for their gender. They may discuss with each other what boys and girls should do. Peers can 'punish' each other for engaging in activities that do not conform to their gender. Girls seem to face less pressure than boys to conform to gender norms than boys and are less likely to receive negative attention for participating in 'cross-gender' activities and games (Wharton, 2005). School socialization Teachers and other educators may place expectations on children based on their gender. They could do this by labeling and organizing students in group activities or creating different activities for boys and girls. As with parents, teachers may use gendered language when speaking to and about boys and girls. Schools may encourage boys to engage in science or mathematics whereas they may be more forgiving if girls are not succeeding in these subjects. Teachers may also discipline students in different ways depending on their gender, which may reinforce children's beliefs and assumptions. Media socialization Gender socialization through media can include through movies, television, and literature. The media can reinforce gender stereotypes so that children have ideas about what it means to be a boy or a girl. In a lot of movies and TV, men can often be seen as the heroes and going on adventures. In comparison, women are usually outnumbered by the number of male characters, are often portrayed as being physically attractive, and are frequently introduced as the love interest for the male characters. Female characters are often seen as passive characters who need to be rescued by men and dressed in a way which appeals to the male gaze. Studies show that children who watch a lot of TV tend to have more sex-stereotypical views of men and women and that this influences their choice of toys, career aspirations, and self-esteem (Burn, 1996). While the media is beginning to portray males and females in non-stereotypical ways, a lot of older media shows them in traditionally gender-appropriate ways. For instance, women are shown doing housework or as being stay-at-home mothers, whereas men are shown engaging in a wider variety of activities. Social learning theory is most closely associated with the work of psychologist Albert Bandura. This theory relates to the behaviorist approach which defines learning in terms of stimulus and response. Social learning theory explains that gender socialization comes as a result of children being reinforced, both positively and negatively, for gender appropriate and inappropriate behavior (Wharton, 2005). For example, if a boy plays with a 'gender appropriate' toy such as a football, he may receive positive reinforcement from his father. Whereas, if the boy plays with a 'gender inappropriate' toy such as a doll, he may be ignored or receive negative attention from his father. According to this theory, children learn what is appropriate from noticing the behavior of their same-sex parent. A young girl may learn what it means to be female by observing her mother, whereas a boy learns what it means to be male by observing his father. Social learning theory can be discredited by research which has shown that parents who exhibit sex stereotypical behaviors are not more likely than other parents to have children who exhibit sex stereotypical behaviors (Stockard, 2006). Likewise, children are not thought to be passive learners as social learning theory makes them out to be. Instead, they are more actively engaged in their socialization than the theory suggests (Wharton, 2005). These schemas tend to be polarized so children come to the understand what they believe is acceptable and appropriate for different genders. Gender schemas provide an efficient way to hold new information and make new situations more predictable. Children develop more elaborate gender schemas as they develop their gender identity and their understanding of gender roles. This theory suggests that the gender schemas are internalized in a way that males and masculinity are the norm and are more highly valued than females and femininity (Wharton, 2005). A limitation of gender schema theory is the issue of individual differences. The theory does not account for why children with much of the same environmental influences respond differently to gender appropriate behavior. Psychoanalytic theory The psychoanalytic theory of gender socialization is different from other theories as it is not a learning theory. Founded by Sigmund Freud, its application to gender socialization was outlined in the 1970s by Nancy Chodorow. The theory suggests that some aspects of gender identity result from unconscious psychological processes and not from conscious processes such as modeling or schemas. A key factor of gender socialization according to psychoanalytic theory is the role of the mother as the primary caregiver. Chodorow argues that children's first identification is with the feminine since they spend more time with their mothers early in life. Eventually, children need to develop a sense of themselves and their own gender identity. For girls, this process is easier since they have already identified with the mother. For boys, however, they must first reject their feminine identification and develop masculinity. This masculinity is defined as being 'not feminine'. During this process, boys also learn to often devalue femininity. Criticisms of psychoanalytic theory for gender socialization are that the theory is hard to empirically verify. It also reinforces gender stereotypes, places too much emphasis on the unconscious, and does not explain how children who were not raised by mothers develop their gender identity. How Does Gender Socialization Affect Society? Women are devalued in many societies, tasks and behaviors that are associated with femininity and being female are often devalued. Women often complete more unpaid labor such as housework and childcare since this is seen as a feminine role and is not appreciated by being paid. Inequalities in the workplace Since women are often devalued, many employers may have the gender bias that women will be weaker workers, especially if they have extra labor to do at home. Women can still experience a wage gap for completing the same work as men. Women-dominated jobs such as those in healthcare are often underpaid in comparison to male-dominated roles. Women who have children also find they may experience a 'penalty' in the workforce and are not afforded the same opportunities as men who have children. Negative attitudes about different genders Children often favor their own gender in their attitudes and show gender discriminatory behaviors to other genders. Gender segregated behavior may be supported by adults and may become a problem when children need to be able to function in gender-integrated settings such as school. Children may find that they are not able to effectively relate with other genders which can further separate them and enhance differences. Both boys and girls tend to associate positive characteristics with their own gender. However, after the age of 6, it is found that many girls stop showing this pattern and mostly consider that something that requires a lot of intelligence should preferably be done by a male (Bian et al., 2017). Thus, girls can often develop negative feelings and attitudes towards their own gender and their own abilities. Moreover, suppose society has very strict ideas about gender. In that case, this can negatively affect individuals who identify as non-binary, transgender, or anyone who does not subscribe to their assigned gender at birth. It can be hard for these individuals to be their true selves in a society that sees gender as being on a strict binary. Limitations for men Gender socialization is limited to both men and women in society. Boys and men can experience gender role conflict and pressure to succeed and dominate in their careers. They may feel like a failure if this is not what they want to or cannot do. Men and boys may also intentionally avoid expressions of affection with their peers, believing that anger is the only appropriate expression of emotion for them. They often view more vulnerable emotions and crying as being feminine and would not be comfortable displaying these in front of others. If a boy were to express typically 'feminine' traits, they would be at risk of being bullied, so they learn not to display these traits. Likewise, if men are pushing down their vulnerable emotions, this can eventually damage their mental health and they could be less likely to reach out for help if they were struggling. Finally, if men are socialized into being more aggressive, they may be more likely to commit crimes and specifically display acts of violence against women. Frequently Asked Questions How does gender socialization relate to gender stereotypes? Gender stereotyping is where a set of gender attributes, characteristics, or roles are ascribed to people by reason of their membership to their gender. People are thought to be socialized to have gender stereotypes. If society has specific ideas about what each gender should be, and these are socialized to children, this can lead to them having stereotypes about other genders or adhering to their own gender stereotypes. Although gender stereotypes tend to become more flexible later in childhood with the development of cognitive flexibility, in many instances, they can persist throughout life and continue to influence behavior (Solbes-Canales et al., 2020). Interestingly, gender stereotyping is less restrictive for female stereotypes than for male stereotypes, meaning that females are less scrutinized for not adhering to gender stereotypes, but males are. How does gender socialization relate to sexism? The persistence of traditional gender roles exacerbates gender inequalities, encourages rigid behaviors, and maintains unbalanced power relations within societies in favor of men (Marcus, 2018). With society having the attitude that women are weaker or less competent than men at the same work, this can lead to discriminatory behavior towards women. The roots of prejudices, discrimination, and violence against women can be traced back to widespread gender stereotypes, which come from gender socialization (McCarthy et al., 2018). Is gender socialization important? Gender socialization is thought to be important since it helps individuals to develop their gender identity - deeply held internal perception of one's gender. Being aware of gender socialization and gender roles means that individuals can choose what they most identify with and develop their own identities. Can gender socialization occur throughout life? Although a lot of gender socialization occurs during childhood, it is a lifelong process. The beliefs about gender that are acquired in childhood can affect people throughout their lives. Many new ideas about gender can be learnt well into adulthood, meaning that new expectations can be learnt.Through gender socialization, people have shaped ideas about who they believe they can achieve. For instance, a man may believe he is capable of being successful in his career compared to woman who may think she will have less success due to being a woman. Can gender socialization be tackled? It can be useful to become more aware of how individuals have been socialized based on their assigned gender. In this way, people can consider whether they behave or make decisions based on how they have been socialized, or whether it is because it is their own choice. Since there are a lot of issues with gender socialization, parents and educators can put things in place to ensure children are not restricted by their gender. They can use gender neutral terms when speaking to the children, ensuring that boys and girls are being spoken to in similar ways. Parents can encourage children to play with a wide range of toys and activities during early childhood and can help to create playful environments where children interact with a mix of genders. Also, parents and teachers can discuss and challenge gender stereotypes with children and not put so much emphasis on gender differences. In this way, children should have an understanding that they do not need to be stuck in their traditional gender roles. References Bhattacharjee, N. (2021). Through the looking glass: Gender socialisation in a primary school. In Gender and Education in India A Reader (pp. 40-52). Routledge. Bian, L., Leslie, S. J., & Cimpian, A. (2017). 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