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Parents Have a Significant Impact on Children's Developing Understanding of Gender

Gender typing can be described as the process through which children develop values motives and behaviors that are viewed as appropriate for either females or males within a particular culture (Fulcher, Sutfin, and Patterson 330). Parental influence has a major impact on how children develop an understanding of gender. In a society that is full of gender stereotypes and biases, it is expected that children adopt gender roles based on how the parents bring them up (Eibach and Mock 203). In the family setting, a child moves from childhood to adolescence following exposure to various factors which have a major influence on their behaviors and attitudes (Knoester and Eggebeen 1535).

Every time a child is born, the first thing that the parents ask is whether the child is male or female. The assignment of gender on children is one of the strongest social identities that culminate in shaping the rest of the life of the child. During childhood, children will spend most of their time with their parents. As such it is expected that the parents will have a major impact on their gender development (Tenenbaum and Leaper 630). Examples of the most elaborate ways through which the parents will affect children's gender development are through role modeling. The other ways include the fact that they might encourage some behaviors in their sons and daughters and discourage others. Children gain gender awareness knowledge from the society they are brought up in (Stanca 742). The knowledge is mainly acquired through overt behaviors, encouragements, discouragements as well as a myriad of other activities.

In the contemporary society, it is difficult to raise up a child without experiencing some form of gender bias or stereotyping. One of the most common is the fact that boys are expected to be better at math than girls. Another one is that girls are expected to nurture children better than boys. Therefore, as the children grow and develop them are exposed to the various gender stereotypes whether from the environment or directly from the people near them. As a result, the children will perpetuate the elements from childhood on to adolescence.

The child's awareness of self is, therefore, a product of a multitude of factors, ideas or even behaviors they are exposed to as they grow up. When a child is introduced to some information, it is internalized and effected through parent- child relationships (Trussell 331). The ideas are then reinforced when the children move on to more diverse environments. As they continue to develop the stereotyped behaviors which turn into entrenched and therefore become part of the child's concept.

At an early age, the children understand sex role differences that have been developed in the society (Brodzinsky 18). Children between the age of one and two have the capabilities of using the gender stereotypes to negotiate across generalizations of activities objects and even occupations (Goldberg, Kashy, and Smith 10). In some cases, children have been spotted to deny the reality so as to make situations to go in line with their gender expectations For instance, a child whose mother plays the role of a teacher may grow up having the notion that only men can take up the profession (Katz-Wise, Priess, and Hyde 44).

When it comes to boys, they have a definite edge about parental preference (Perrin 5). It is a common event that most parents all over the world prefer male children to female children. In the same regard, people who prefer male children have been seen to use technology in selecting their children (Buddeberg-Fischer et al. 40). Again most people have been seen only to

develop an interest in girls only if they have boys. The reasons why women prefer the boy child

is mainly to please their husbands (Gibb et al. 241). Others do so as to carry on the family name

while others prefer the male children so that they can be a companion to their husbands. The

women prefer daughters so that they can be companions to themselves or because of the fun of

dressing them or even doing their hair (Tasker and Wren 315).

It is evident that parents encourage their children to participate in gendered activities

from an early age (Sutfin et al. 501). For instance, the girls are encouraged to practice doll

playing while boys are encouraged to engage in truck playing or other sporty activities. The toy

preferences in children have been associated with parental sex typing (Craig and Killian 1344).

This is because at an early age parents will provide toys and even reward the achievements

differently. Although fathers and mothers have participated in gender-typing, men have been

found to be more vigilant in reinforcing the gender stereotypes (Nelson et al. 9).

An evaluation of both girls and boys rooms revealed that girl's rooms are decorated with

color pink and dolls (Rahilly 338). Boy's rooms, however, are decorated using blue color and wit

sporty toys such as vehicles and other tools. In another dimension, parents tend to assign house

chores to girls as opposed to the boys. In this case, the girls will be allocated domestic chores

such as cooking and laundry (Ralli et al. 233). Boys tend to be assigned duties such as painting

and mowing lanes. The effects of this are that as the children grow they will develop what is seen

as gender-stereotyped perceptions about gender (Little 315).

Some parents have been seen to play a major role in determining the socializing factor in

sex role development. More so, parents are the major influence when it comes to the

development of gender roles during childhood (Bass 2). The parental attitudes towards their

children have longstanding impacts on their lives. They affect the self-esteem as well as the

sense of self of each and every child (Patterson 241). The messages presented by parents concerning gender and what is expected of each are so strong that even if the children are introduced to other behaviors they are likely to revert the old ones (Knoester and Eggebeen 11).

There has been a vivid transformation in the women's and men roles over the last forty years. The main effect of the change is that the traditional image of the two parent's heterosexual family life is no longer the norm. Earlier, the father was viewed as the provider of the family while the mother was the house maker. Currently, roles have reversed with many parents pursuing major jobs and even more fathers getting involved in childcare. Another change is that the structure of families has changed with several children being raised by gay/ lesbian parents (Tasker and Wren 315). Even though there have been all these changes, it is evident that the parenting arrangements continue to persist. This means that the contemporary parents do not bring up their sons or daughters differently. Moreover, it is evident that how the parents treat their children have a great impact on the various aspects of gender development (Umberson, Pudrovska, and Reczek 612).

The dramatic social changes in the world have resulted in the entrance of the women into the labor force (Biblarz and Stacey 16). Consequently, most fathers tend to be involved in childcare. The shift in the trends towards men involvement in childrearing has a negative impact in gender stereotyping (Katz-Wise, Priess, and Hyde 18). Following active childcare, the fathers demonstrate that the role of the males is inclusive of nurturing as well as other instrumental activities (Fulcher, Sutfin, and Patterson 330). Also, in research conducted on children raised by same-sex families reveals that in relation to children brought up by heterosexual parents, children who are brought up by same-sex parents tend to develop what is seen endorsed gender stereotypes (Abele and Spurk 225). In cases where the same gendered parents divide labor with

one acting as a caregiver and the other one as the breadwinner then the children are most likely

to develop stereotyped perceptions about adult roles as well as occupations (Fedewa, Black, and

Ahn 9).

In other cases, parents with limited financial resources have been shown to have a strong

preference for sons. Therefore priorities have been accorded to the sons over daughters (Song

241). The priorities, in this case, are health and education. Although it is not as common one

way in which parents promote rendered activities is by socializing the boys and girls differently

(Ha, Seltzer and Greenberg 316). Also, it is evident that most parents have gender-typed

expectations for both the boys and girls (Lynch 54). For instance, the boys have for a long time

been regarded as aggressive. More so, girls have been considered as good at reading. With the

sensitization of gender equality issues, there has been a corresponding increase in cultures of the

world (Mapp 40). As a result, there is a deep variation on the kind of the parental expectations

from tier children. Parents also have been shown to be in support of some gendered domains

such as family roles. Most importantly parents, particularly the fathers, have been shown to be

more rigid in their expectations for their sons as opposed to their daughters (Menjívar, Carling,

and Schmalzbauer 192).

From the preceding evaluation, the first and earliest exposure of a child of what is male

or female originates from the parents. From a time that they are infants parents render different

treatments to either male or female children. For instance, the girls are dressed differently from

the boys. Also, the parents give differentiated toys and expect varied behavior from both

children. It has been determined that parents expect differentiated behavior from both boys and

girls even as early as 24 hours after birth. Such behavior makes the children internalize the

parental messages regarding gender. The analysis, therefore, affirms the statement that "parents

have a major effect on children's developing understanding of gender."

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