IMPACT OF FAMILY ON THE DEVELOPMENT AND CONSTRUCTION OF MASCULINITY

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ABSTRACT

Masculinity is primarily constructed within the family by the primary socializing agents ---- father and mother through the process of gender socialization. The present paper explores how notions of masculinity are developed among adolescent boys with the help of their interaction with parents. The research is carried out by studying fifteen parents (both father and mother) of adolescent boys who stay in Kolkata by using mixed methodology. The paper explores interaction between Parent-child with the help of dimensions ----- career choice, housework, dress-code and association of boys with the outside world. Firstly regarding career choice, parents expressed their affirmation in giving freedom to their male child to pursue career as per their choice as compared to a girl child. Regarding dress-code, boys are given greater freedom by their parents to wear short dresses both in private and public spaces as compared to girls. Parents even allowed their boys to step outside (after evening) which is prohibited for girls since girls run a higher risk of being victims of sexual assaults. Thereby, parents are the major socializing agents who transmit the notion of masculinity as they want their sons to be socially constructed as a 'MAN'.

Adolescence, gender socialization, Masculinity, socialization.
INTRODUCTION

‘A child’s earliest exposure to what it means to be male or female comes from parents’ (Witt, 1997). Family plays a pivotal role in the construction of masculinity. Parents are mostly the major socializing agents of their children instilling the conceptions of masculinity and femininity through the process of ‘gender socialization’.

Socialization is the process by which any individual becomes a functioning member of society by internalizing the norms and values of society and by learning to perform one’s social roles. Gender socialization is the process of learning the social expectations and attitudes associated with one’s sex. It is the process by which men and women behave in different ways: different social roles are learned by them. For example, boys are socialized to handle office work and be the bread-earner of the family whereas girls are socialized to do all household chores. i.e, girls learn to look after household and bake and clean the house. Gender socialization occurs through such diverse means as parental attitudes, schools, how peers interact with each other, and mass media.

Boys are raised to conform to the male gender role, and girls are raised to conform to the female gender or role. Since parents are the major socializing agents, so both of them help to construct and develop notions of masculinity among adolescent boys.

Adolescence is a period of transition of physical, sexual, psychological development. It occurs during the period from puberty to adulthood. Adolescence is also associated with teenage years its physical and cultural expressions may start off early and end later.
According to Raewyn Connell, “Masculinity can be defined as those patterns of practice by which both men and women (especially men) engage in the position of gender order\textsuperscript{1}.”

The concept of masculinity gained its importance since the inception of men’s movement during the 20\textsuperscript{th} century where men challenged the gender stereotypical attitudes of society towards them ------- men can not show emotion, mental and physical weakness and playing of his role in society often leads to the cultivation of practices, which often increases men’s excessive competition, alcoholism, risky demonstration of masculinity.

Adolescent boys undergo different physical, social and sexual changes which affect and develop their notions of masculinity. Thereby, parents also play significant role in constructing such notions of masculinity among the adolescent boys.

Against this backdrop, my paper will explore how adolescent boys are developing their notions of masculinity through their interaction with their parents (both father and mother).

Note: \textsuperscript{1}http://www.raewynconnell.net/p/masculinities_20.html
LITERATURE REVIEW

Here, I discuss some selected dimensions regarding the background of masculinity along with parents’ role in socialization process of both boys and girls followed by role of parents in adolescent’s career choice.

HISTORY OF MASCULINITY

With the development of feminist movement during the twentieth-century, men’s movement also started which mainly comprised of men’s groups who had different perspectives on issues regarding women’s oppression and other issues related to gender. Four main divergent groups can be cited in men’s movement: The first men’s movement was established along with the emergence of feminist movement for the support of its demands. “These were mainly the liberal-minded intellectuals, accepting a feminist analysis of social practices and gender-based differences, which have tried to work together with women to promote the requirements of the liberal part of the feminist movement and to minimize gender-based discrimination in society.”

Another part of men’s movement, sometimes known as the father’s movement, was made up of men frustrated by what they call anti-male prejudices in society. The third group of men’s movement mainly consisted of religiously oriented Christian men in order to bring about change in society as a result of women’s oppression and emancipation. This rhetoric emerged due to the stereotypical view of male and female roles in society. They regard that society has disrupted and disintegrated due to the disruption of basic values of civilization and the only way of correction is to return to the stereotypical (patriarchal) distribution of gender roles.

During the 20th century various debates took place in society regarding the problems with men’s studies and masculinity (-ies). Due to these problems, a group of academic researchers concentrated on the problems of masculinity. “Their activity was also partially motivated by the development of negativistic tendency of male movement and thus formed as a response from academic circles to a certain negativistic parts of men’s movement, which tried to discredit gender studies as an anti-male scientific based instrument”.  

Major emphasis during men’s history was paid to the patriarchal order which prevailed during that period along with its causes and methods of constituting it. Among them, it was the study of Raewyn Connell that acquired great importance and influence which regarded masculinity as a configuration of gender practices that establish men’s superiority in the entire patriarchal structure of power relations.

The concept of ‘ideal masculinity’ came into existence during the Enlightenment period. This concept was based on biological difference which was further based on anatomical difference between men and women. Henceforth, both the categories of man and woman were separated which became the only and primary source of identity in society. With the development of biological difference between men and women also developed the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

The concept of hegemonic masculinity came into existence during the 19th century which was characterized by a middle-class bourgeoisie ideal. Hegemonic masculinity was first coined by Raewyn Connell by which she meant a dominant form of masculinity. This type of masculinity was characterized by power, authority, heterosexuality, aggression and technical expertise.

PARENTS’ ROLE IN SOCIALIZATION PROCESS

The initial socialization of children takes place within the family in which they are born where parents play a significant role. The initial lesson about gender is also given by parents to children. The selection of toys for men and women after birth is the earliest manifestation which takes place during this process. Such preference for toys for both boys and girls mainly comes from parents since they purchase and select gender-typical toys for boys and girls. “Toys contribute to the socialization of gender and social role identities. Thereby, if parents select and purchase toys for their son or daughter which is ‘gender-appropriate’, the learning of appropriate gender roles will be fostered and encouraged” (Idle, June 1993).

Since fathers reward and appraise same-gender play and does not allow cross-gender play, henceforth boys become more gender-typed than girls. However, within the family, a mother is found to always engage her children in toy play than a father.

As per a study carried out in western countries, gender-typed activity is the consistent manner by which parents treat boys and girls differently. For example, parents are more likely to provide their sons with toy vehicles like action figures (Batman, Superman) and sports equipment whereas they are more likely to provide dolls, kitchen-sets to their daughters. This leads to gender-typical identity and fosters gender division of labour in future.

Other ways that parents adopt to influence children’s gender development include the encouragement of different behaviour and activities in both sons and daughters along with role modelling.

GENDER-STEREOTYPICAL EXPECTATIONS OF PARENTS

Gender-stereotypical expectations are manifested also through personality traits and abilities (e.g., boys are aggressive whereas girls are timid) and gender-typical roles like (e.g., men can be scientists whereas girls are only avid readers). However, this kind of gender-stereotypication decreased as society attained gender equality in the recent decade. As a result of this, there has also been a rise in the endorsement of adults in gender-egalitarian attitudes.
In contemporary society, parents show variant perspectives regarding gender equality where some hold traditional expectations based on gender while others embrace egalitarian attitudes toward their daughters and sons.

**THE DIFFERENTIAL TREATMENT GIVEN TO DAUGHTERS IN COMPARISON WITH BOYS**

In different parts of the world, parents from poor socio-economic background or parents with financial constraints are found to have a strong preference for sons over daughters. Due to this inequality, preference and priority ranging from health to education is given mainly to sons. In many parts of the world, parents with limited financial resources have a strong preference for sons. This is the way in which parents socialize both boys and girls differently in society.

There are also various other ways though which parents encourage gender stereotypes though they are not overtly supporting it. “This is commonly seen in parents’ use of essentialist statements about gender. Examples would be “Girls like dolls” or “Boys like football.” In these instances, the parent is expressing what is known as a descriptive stereotype (i.e., describing general patterns or “essences” about each gender) rather than prescriptive stereotype (i.e., stating what should occur)” (Leaper, August 2014).

On the other hand, some parents in industrialized countries are flexible regarding the play activities which they consider acceptable for their daughters than sons. For example, there have been cases where American parents were found to encourage and support participation in athletes (which is a masculine-stereotyped activity) in their daughters. While, there are hardly any parent who encourage doll play (which is a feminine-stereotypical activity) in their sons.
THE IMPACT OF PARENTS ON THEIR CHILDREN’S SOCIALIZATION IN GENDER ROLES

Growing up in a society which always embraces gender stereotypes and biases, children learn to adopt and accept gender roles which can foster gender inequality. Children are exposed to various factors regarding gender roles while moving from childhood to adolescence. The behaviour and attitudes which are initially learned at home are also fostered and shaped by school, peer group and impact of mass media. But, the greatest influence comes from the parents within the family where they pass on their traditional beliefs about gender to their son and daughter.

Parents differential treatment of their sons and daughters begins from childhood which is later manifested through career aspiration, handling household work, dress-code and staying outdoors after evening.

Male children are preferred to female children by majority parents throughout the world. To aggravate the situation, parents who prefer sons are more likely to take recourse to technology in order to determine the sex of their child. “This preference for male children is further emphasized by the finding that parents are more likely to continue having children if they have only girls than if they have only boys” (Leaper, August 2014).

The major reasons cited by women for their preference for sons are to please their husbands and to carry on the name of family. The reasons cited for preference for daughters include having a companion for themselves along with the pleasure derived from dressing a girl.

“Parents encourage their sons and daughters to participate in sex-typed activities, including doll playing and engaging in housekeeping activities for girls and playing with trucks and engaging in sports activities for boys” (Leaper, August 2014). Though both father and mother reinforce and foster gender stereotyping and gender inequality in their children, fathers have been found to have fostered gender stereotypes more likely than mothers.
The primary influence on gender ole development during the initial phase of life comes mainly from parents. Socialization being a two-way interaction process, where each person in interaction influences the other person; thereby parents and children engage in such reciprocal interaction where children are found to elicit and respond to behaviours.

The attitude of parents (which includes parental affection) towards their children both in childhood and in later life provides a profound impact on their children’s sense of self and self-esteem. The children often internalizes the messages which their parents convey regarding what is acceptable for each gender which further influences their later lives.

**ROLE OF FAMILY IN ADOLESCENT’S CAREER CHOICE**

Parents want to see their children successful in life for which they influence and help them to achieve their goals. The career aspiration and the goal development of children (both boys and girls) are shaped by their parents, guardians and families.

Most of the education and training that adolescent boys and girls receive from their parents are ‘unconscious’ ----- parents’ expectations and attitudes are absorbed by their children (teenagers) as they grow up.

*Some of the key influencers are:*

- *The expectations parents have for their children's education and career.*
- *The example they set for their children.*
- *The values they show to their family, friends and to society.*
- *The opportunities they offer their children to learn and develop.*
- *The kind of parent-child relationship they develop.*

It is in this backdrop that the main problematic theme of the paper has been conceived. In view of any lack of research work on the theme both in Kolkata and India, the purpose of the paper thus fills in the vacuum that exists.
NATURE AND SCOPE OF WORK

The research mainly explores how notions of masculinity are developed among adolescent boys with the help of their interaction with parents.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research methodology may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically.

The research is carried out by studying fifteen parents (both father and mother) of adolescent boys (aged 16-17 years) who stay in Kolkata by using mixed methodology.

**Qualitative research:** This type of research collects, analyzes and interprets the narrative information.

**Quantitative research:** This type of research collects, analyzes, interprets and presents numerical information.

**Mixed Methodology:** Mixed Methodology research is a research in which the researcher collects the data and analyzes it followed by integration of its findings using both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study.

The sample size of the paper is fifteen, a selected study of fifteen parents of adolescent school-going boys who reside in Kolkata.

The sampling technique that is used in the research is Non-probability Purposive sampling since it is based on researcher’s judgement along with Snowball sampling.
DATA ANALYSIS

AGE: All the parents (both father and mother) are within 40-50 years of age.

OCCUPATION: All the fathers are employed either in Banking sector or in private firms. All the mothers are housewives and are non-employed.

CLASS: All the parents belong to middle class and are from nuclear families.

1. PARENTS PERSPECTIVE ABOUT THEIR SON: Majority of the parents (both father and mother) have responded that they like to pamper their ‘only’ son; However, if the parents have both son and daughter then they treat their son differently than their daughter since they regard that a boy can settle down more successfully than their daughter who are bound to get married due to social pressures after attaining a certain age (25 years).

2. ASSOCIATION WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSOCIATION WITH THE OUTSIDE WORLD:</th>
<th>NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS</th>
<th>PERCENTAGE (%)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
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Majority of the parents have responded that they generally permit their boys to go out any time (after evening) after a certain age since girls run a higher risk of becoming easy victims of any sexual assault or other atrocities. On the other hand, the remaining respondents have responded that they don’t allow their son to go outside after evening
since they fear that their son will fall into trouble from which it will be difficult for them to save their life.

3. **MIXTURE WITH BOTH MALE AND FEMALE FRIENDS:** Most of the respondents have opined that they allow their son to mix with both male and female peers so that they are able to get any kind of help from both of them, both in academics and non-academics.

4. **DRESSCODE AND MASCUlINITY:** Majority of the parents provide greater freedom to their sons (boys) to wear short dresses both in private and public spaces as compared to girls who are not allowed to wear such short attires in public space as they believe dress-code and violence have a strong relation which can lead girls into trouble.

5. **MASCULINITY AND HOUSEWORK:** Regarding housework, most of the respondents (parents) have responded that they hardly asked their sons to perform any household chores (cleaning, cooking etc.), especially when there is a sibling (sister) in the family. Even if there is no sister, boys are rarely taught any housework or told to do so. On the other hand, the remaining parents have allowed their sons to handle housework as they regarded that boys should also learn to do housework which will prepare them for future situation if anytime they face crisis (if his mother falls sick and is unable to carry out housework).

6. **CAREER ASPIRATION:** Regarding career aspiration, most of the parents generally allowed their boys some freedom and space in comparison with a girl child. Parents are willing to undertake more financial burden for boys’ career aspirations compared to the girl child. Whereas, the remaining parents affirmed in providing enough freedom for their career choice.
CONCLUSION

It is within the family that masculinity is developed through the process of gender socialization. Gender socialization defines individuals as masculine and feminine.

Masculinity of the adolescent sons is mainly constructed through daily life experiences like ---- housework, career aspiration, dress-code and association with the outside world. Parents hardly asked their sons to perform any household chores (cleaning, cooking etc.), especially when there is a sibling (sister) in the family. Even if there is no sister, boys are rarely taught any housework or told to do.

Regarding career aspiration, parents generally allow boys some freedom and space in comparison with a girl child. Parents are willing to undertake more financial burden for boys’ career aspirations compared to the girl child.

As far as dresses and dispositions are concerned boys are allowed to wear short dresses in both private and public spheres whereas girls are not given such freedom and often criticized for wearing inappropriate attires.

Parents generally permitted the boys to go out any time (in the evening) after certain age since the sanctity of male body is never at jeopardy while girls’ bodies are always in danger since the purity of their bodies is sacrosanct.

Thus, parents are the major socializing agents who transmit the notion of masculinity as they want their sons to be socially constructed as a ‘MAN’.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH
The research work that was carried out was a short-scale study done in Kolkata with limited sample size and time constraints. Hence, further research work should be undertaken on the present paper with increased sample size in order to pursue future analysis.

REFERENCES


