

Socialisation for
feminine behaviour.
thus, the basic
patterns



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Socialisation and the Gender Roles: Sex roles are not inborn, but learnt.

Sex roles are learnt in the course of the socialisation process like any other roles. A major goal of socialisation is to teach people to behave appropriately and to define themselves in ways which are consistent with their statuses. If their status is male, they will be trained for masculine behaviour, and if their status is female, they will be trained for feminine behaviour. Thus, the basic patterns of behaviour expected of the sexes are learnt in the family environment very early in life. They are further strengthened in the schools, in peer groups, through the mass media, and in many other specific agencies, ranging from sports teams to work places. Let us consider the role of the family, the schools, and the media in the sex-role socialisation of new born individuals. : Parents and family is the most important people who constitute the dominant influence in shaping gender identity.

Children are given a gender label from the beginning and are treated according to the label. As the child grows, gender identity is established through four processes namely; (i) moulding or reinforcement, (ii) opportunities, (iii) role modelling, and (iv) explicit verbal instruction. (i) Reinforcement or Moulding: Parents at home treat their children differently depending on their sex. Boys are normally given more freedom while girls are treated protectively. Girls are expected to be mild, gentle, pleasing, shy and not very competitive. Boys are given much more rigorous sex-role training.

Any “ effeminate” behaviour on the part of the boy is highly discouraged, and if such tendencies continue they are regarded as “ psychological disturbances. ” As a result of this training, children learn their sex roles

quickly and effectively. (ii) Opportunities: Boys and girls in the family are provided with different opportunities. Although girls may sometimes wear jeans, boys are not allowed to wear female dresses such as skirts, sarees, or chudidhar. From this point of view the masculine role seems to be more restrictive than the feminine.

Similarly, girls are less likely to get toy guns, trucks, trains, or bats and balls. Boys are less likely to receive dolls and carriages. Girls are permitted to wear their mothers' old jewellery, dresses and high-heeled shoes, snow, powder, lipstick, nail polish, and so on. Male children are strongly discouraged by their own mothers to use or play with such things. Boys, mostly go along with the 'masculine' way.

They often play with their fathers' things such as – pens, diaries, calculators, torches, keybunch, documents, 'tooling glass, etc. The boys are expected to help their fathers, while the daughters are expected be of some help to the mothers in the kitchen. (iii) Role Modelling: Role modelling is a major mechanism of gender socialisation.

Children come to know of their masculine and feminine roles much before they realise the sexual basis for gender labelling. By the age of three, nearly all children know whether they are male or female, and by the age of four, they have very definite ideas of what masculinity and femininity should involve. Hence, they accept their categorisation as a boy or girl.

A male child usually identifies with his father and a female child usually wants to be like her mother. As a result, boys become interested in tools,

vehicles, and sports and they try to be assertive and exhibit more
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courageous behaviour. Girls, on the contrary, are interested in fashionable dresses, hairstyles, jewels, make-up and cooking. They develop the passive, submissive, mild and gentle side of their personalities.

Role modelling is more effective when the child has a strong and warm relationship with the role model. (iv) Explicit Verbal Instruction: Sometimes, in the process of socialisation into gender roles the child is often told that certain behaviour is, or is not, a part of the gender role: " Boys are stronger than girls", " Ladies first, gents next", " Girls make the house beautiful", " Boys do not cry like girls", " Girls are supposed to wear modest dresses." " Girls are not supposed to play rough like boys do." Providing different opportunities is probably more important than these verbal instructions. Verbal instructions to have their importance particularly when the individual has not already begun to identify with the proper role model : In the modern societies, schools constitute an important agent of gender socialisation.

The school continues the sex roles training for the children which the family has already begun. The school continues the lesson by teaching boys and girls appropriate behaviour in the wider outside world. (a) Textbooks: Textbooks are a major means through which students come to know about the world outside their families and classrooms. Textbooks, of course, do not directly address the children as to how they should behave as boys and girls.

These text books comment on gender roles through the characters that figure in the lessons. Female and male characters in the lessons provide models for young people who are forming self-identities. School textbooks also encourage acceptance of the traditional sex roles. Several recent

studies have shown that the literature for children, from pre-school onwards, suggests as to how children and adults as belonging to male or female sex, should behave. Examples: (i) " In a study of picture books that had been awarded as prizes for " excellence" by the " American Library Association", Lenore Weitzman and her associates (1972) found that one third of the books had no female characters at all. In the total sample of books, males outnumbered females in a ratio of 11: 1... The ratio of titles featuring males and females was 8: 3. Throughout the books boys were presented as active and girls as passive ..." (ii) In another study of school textbooks, Marjorie U'Ren (1971) found that only 15% of the illustrations that featured people, included women.

As she points out, " we tend to forget the simple fact that the female sex is half the human species, that women are not merely a ladies' auxiliary to the human species ". U'Ren summarises school book gender differentiation with regard to personalities. " The emphasis on masculine strength extends beyond physical qualities. Males of all ages are pictured as having greater mental perseverance and moral strength than females.

Not only are females more often described as lazy and incapable of independent thinking or direct action, but they are also shown as giving up more easily. They collapse into tears, they betray secrets, they are more likely to act upon petty or selfish motives. " ' (b) Leisure Reading: What the children read during their leisure time also influences their gender role assumptions. Children's literature everywhere has been found to contain stereotypic behaviour which describes traditional male and female gender roles. Normally, in all typical social stories the father of a family is pictured

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as a person who goes out for work while the mother who does not go out for work confines herself to the home and mostly to the kitchen work.

Again the girls in the family are depicted as younger females assisting their mother to carry on household drudgery while the boys are presented as persons taking part in adventurous activities. Florence Howe (1971) has strongly criticised this type of a domesticated, home-loving mother. ' (c)

Course Segregation: Academic courses and sports activities which the students opt for in schools are distinctly gender – segregated. Physical education classes have traditionally been segregated by gender. Certain classes such as sewing, embroidery, home science, are meant for girls.

Courses such as carpentry, plumbing, garage work, etc.

, are rarely chosen by females. Many sports such as – wrestling, football, field hockey, cricket, volleyball, etc., are restricted to male sex.

The Mass Media: As it is well-known, the mass-media which includes films, books, magazines, comics, television, radio, and records – are a powerful agency for socialisation. Although some media address factual matters, most material selected is presented for entertainment. What is transmitted, therefore, is not a realistic portrayal but an exaggerated version of social life. Gender images are often caricatures of either the audience's or the sponsor's ideal people. Thus, an audience's ideal male is not just brave he is ridiculously brave; he is not just an honest idealist but is prepared to risk his life to pose himself to be so. Further, he is incredibly good-looking and lucky. The female ideal is a superhuman who is beautiful, tolerant but cunning and properly fulfils the male's adolescent sex fantasies. i.

Advertising: Advertisers normally present the images of men and women in such a manner so as to impress the intended consumers. Sponsors may also portray the genders in ways which are appealing to the opposite sex. The image of women is presented variously and sometimes vulgarly in magazines and television advertising. Women, for example, are either portrayed as sex objects in an attempt to market various products to men, or as domesticated housewives, in order to market home maintenance products to women. Advertisers have found out one of the most effective devices of reaching a male audience and that is to associate their product with a seductively smiling female. The sexuality of women is thus exploited.

Women writers have strongly criticised this type of exploitation of female gender for commercial purposes. “ Advertising..... legitimizes the ideal, stereotyped roles of woman as a temptress, wife, mother, and sex object, and portrays women as less intelligent and more dependent than men. It makes women believe that their chief role is to please men and that their fulfillment will be as wives, mothers, and homemakers. It makes women feel unfeminine if they are not pretty enough and guilty if they do not spend most of their time in desperate attempts to imitate gourmet cooks

It makes women believe that their own lives, talents, and interests ought to be secondary to the needs of their husbands. What is important is that the media do not transmit a unified image of male and female gender roles.

Often one sees traditional roles, frequently one witness's fantasy roles and sometimes one sees the modern egalitarian roles. Role of Culture: Our definitions of appropriate gender role behaviour are influenced by our culture

also. Socially accepted ideas of how men and women should behave are <https://assignbuster.com/socialisation-for-feminine-behaviour-thus-the-basic-patterns/>

circulated among people in different ways. Language that we speak and the institutions through which we work also influence the circulation of such ideas. (a) Role of Language: Differences between the sexes are reflected through language. We cannot speak of the other person without making reference to the other person's gender.

In fact, in every discussion of a person, gender is revealed, but not age, race, ethnic background, religion, or social status. This constant reminder of who is male and who is female contributes to gender socialisation. The use of language is one means by which people learn what males and females should not be. Name-calling provides strong social control.

(b) Influence of Interaction in Institutions on Gender Socialisation: Men and women's participation in institutions too has its influence on gender socialisation. In most of the societies today women play very minor role in the major social institutions such as -government, religion, economy legal institution, and to a certain extent, in education. In many societies, women voters outnumber men, but their direct participation in political institutions is far from satisfactory. The proportion of female members in religious, legal and political organisations is comparatively low. The number of women in the paid work-force area is slowly increasing but not their leadership positions in the areas such as government, politics, industry, business, education, religion, etc. Women still constitute a minority in occupying the positions of formal power and prestige. For example, not a single woman has assumed the office of the President of America or the President of India. In neither of these countries, has a woman assumed the office of the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

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Male and female children observe this and assume future roles for themselves. As far as the institution of family is concerned, women are still socially central and dominant. They only organise and take lead in most of the family activities. Women usually look after children, cook, wash clothes, clean or supervise the cleaning. “ In order to come to parity with men in the other institutions, women must achieve cooperation within the family that will free their energies to work elsewhere if they choose to do so.” It is clear from the above that through many different agents’ people are socialised into gender roles. Families give the earliest reinforcement for acting appropriately according to one’s gender, and the environment continues to teach what is acceptable and what is not for men and for women.

Gender roles are demonstrated and reinforced in almost every aspect of one’s social life.