Gender schema theory and stereotyping

My internal assessment experiment is based on gender schema theory which is closely related to stereotyping. Why is it inappropriate for boys to cry and be weak and why do girls wear pink and play with dolls? These inevitable claims are unconsciously present in everyday life where the society around us implies our roles as either a female or male. Thus, our aim was to find out to what extent knowing baby's presumed sex will influence perception and choice of baby's character by the participants?

We based our experiment on studies by Rubin, Provenzano and Luria (1974) that showed that parents will describe their female and male newborns differently no matter how similar they are to each other. Another experiment carried out by Condry and Condry (1976) showed that people perceive and thus will describe differently a crying baby differently depending on baby's gender. Both experiments share the same hypothesis that the baby boy and girl will be described by adjectives typical for their sex although they appear to look alike and behave similarly.

We carried out a similar experiment where we showed a video of a baby and introduced it as a baby boy, girl and of neutral gender to three different groups formed of the IB students in our school. We used an independent sample of 10 students in each group. Our results showed a statistically significant difference between the adjectives attributed to a female and male baby, Therefore we proved our hypothesis that the group where we represented a baby boy on the video mainly described the baby with masculine adjectives while the group where the baby was introduced as a baby girl mainly described the baby with feminine adjectives. The group

which didn't know the baby's gender described the baby with approximately the same number of female and male characteristics.

Although our experiment has quite a few limitations, our conclusion tends to show that our society stereotypes people from their early age.

INTRODUCTION

My internal assessment experiment is based on gender schema theory that concerns the development of mental framework that directs the behaviour of an individual as a male or female.

Stereotypes are generalizations about a group of people whereby we attribute a defined set of characteristics to this group. Stereotypes appear useful; they give us an easier way to look at a complex world and an individual.[1]Cultures and societies define the roles of men and women and thus the gender schema is used to organise following experiences so children's perceptions of men and women are an interaction between their gender schemas and their experiences. Moreover there is extremely high agreement among members of the same culture what's being considered as a female or a male trait. Eventually, children will incorporate their own self-concepts into their gender schema and will assume the traits and behaviours that they deem suitable for their gender – girls will say " I am a female – therefore, feminine, sweet, gentle and play with dolls" while boys will claim " I am a male – therefore, masculine, strong, aggressive and play with trucks". When considering the combination of traits describing males and females, they can be described as two orientations towards the world. Males are stereotypically considered to be instrumental, i. e. the ones who make things

happen and change the world while females are stereotypically relational, i. e. they are emotional and concerned with social relationships.[2]

Our experiment is based on Rubin, Provenzano and Luria (1974)[3]. They met with mostly Caucasian parents during the first day after the birth of their first child and they interviewed 15 pairs of parents with sons and another 15 with daughters. Both female and male babies had similar weight, length and were in general healthy. Infant sons, in comparison with infant daughters, although similar in length, were described as bigger, large-featured and attentive while the girls were described as delicate and small. Parents did not distinguish between boys and girls when freely describing newborns. Parents might have described babies in a way they did because a parent looking at a seven pound girl will focus on her tiny hands and feet when a parent looking at a seven pound boy will focus on his relatively large head. Although participants were parents that have an image how his new born son should be like when he grows up, the results are surprising. Similar to the next experiment and our experiment, description of the baby will depend on his/her gender.

Another experiment was performed by Condry and Condry (1976)[4]which showed a 9 month old crying baby in response to the opening of a jack-in-the box that is neither positive nor negative. To the half participant the baby was introduced as the baby boy David and to another half as the baby girl Dana. When participants thought the infant was a boy, they believed he was showing anger and described him as assertive. The group to whom the baby was introduced as a female thought she is showing fear and thus was described passively. The variables are same as in our experiment; i. e. they

showed the same video and the responses were dependent on the baby's sex. Similar to the previous experiment, description of the baby will depend on his/her gender.

Both experiments – Condry and Condry and Rubin, Provenzano and Luria share the same hypothesis that the baby boy and girl will be described by adjectives typical for their sex, although they appear to look alike and behave similarly, because our expectations about male and female role in the society lead us to interpret certain behaviours in a biased way.

RESEARCH QUESTION: To what extent knowing baby's presumed sex will influence perception and choice of baby's character by the participants?

HYPOTHESIS: There is a statistically significant difference in the number of male and female characteristics attributed to a male vs. female vs. child of unknown gender, i. e. a baby boy group will mainly describe Tom with masculine adjectives, a baby girl group will mainly describe Maya with feminine adjectives and there won't be a difference in the number of male and female characteristics attributed to unknown gender baby

NULL HYPOTHESIS: The number of male and female characteristics attributed to a male child is not statistically significantly different than to the number of male and female characteristics of a female child or the number of male and female characteristics attributed to a child of unknown gender.

METHODS

DESIGN:

The experimental method used is an independent sample and it is appropriate because we are testing three different groups and looking for results based on the baby's gender, i. e. these groups are not interrelated so we will avoid demand characteristics. We follow certain ethical guidelines; the experiment is harmless and we will hand out the consent form to our participants where they will be informed of anonymity and their right to withdraw from the experiment. Nevertheless, we got permission from the parents to use a video of their baby. The debriefing letter was given at the end of the study.

IV: gender of the baby told to each group, i. e. baby represented as Tom (male), Maya (female) or Baby (unknown gender)

DV: chosen adjectives by the participants based on the baby's gender[5]

CV: same video in all groups (Tom, Maya and Baby groups), same standardized instructions and same questionnaire

PARTICIPANTS:

We chose the sample from our school – XV. Gimnazija from Zagreb, Croatia. We did an opportunity sampling, i. e. we chose classes in agreement with their teachers – it's quick, convenient and it doesn't disrupt the classes of the students. We selected 3 classes (9th to 11th grade), meaning our participants are 14 to 17 years old boys and girls from the International Baccalaureate (IB) programme – they are schooled in English so there should be no language barrier. All our participants are of similar background – middle and upper class Caucasians. The ratio of male and females is

approximately 48: 52. There are around 10 students in each group. Many participants will be familiar with the little babies because they have younger sibling but we believe this won't influence our results.

MATERIALS:

Equipment – 1 projector, 1 lap top, loudspeakers

Video of the baby – 57 seconds long, we got it from my family friends who have an infant

General consent forms to each participant presented in the Appendix[6]

Standardized instructions for participants presented in the Appendix[7]

Questionnaire of 31 adjectives that were chosen by asking final grade students to choose male, female and neutral adjectives from a list of 150 adjectives. Those adjectives that were checked the most times were put into the questionnaire presented in the Appendix[8]

Debriefing letters to each participant presented in the Appendix[9]

PROCEDURE:

time: around 20 minutes per group

Enter the classroom and represent ourselves

Explain why are we doing the experiment and give them an option to opt out if they don't agree to be a part of the experiment

Hand out the consent form and collect it

Read the standardized instructions

Introduce the baby as a baby boy, baby girl or of unknown gender

Play the video

Hand out the questionnaire with adjectives and tell them to tick 5 adjectives that describe the baby the best

Give them 5 minutes to check 6 adjectives

Collect the questionnaires

Thank them for their participation and attention

Go to another two classes and repeat the procedure with the different baby names

Read the debriefing letter to all the participants involved in the experiment

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics shows that Tom was mostly described with the male characteristics, Maya with the female characteristics and there was no significant difference between the number of female and male characteristics attributed to Baby (unknown gender). These results are shown below:

Table 1 represents descriptive statistics of male, female and neutral characteristics attributed to a baby represented as Tom. Each of 12 participants attributed 3. 34 male characteristics, 0, 84 female

characteristics and 1, 84 neutral characteristics to Tom in average. Furthermore, mode, i. e. most participants gave Tom 3 male characteristics, followed by 1 female and 2 neutral. The measures of variability are rather small.

Table 3 represents descriptive statistics of male, female and neutral characteristics attributed to a baby represented as Baby. Each of 9 participants attributed 2 male characteristics, 2 female characteristics and 2 neutral characteristics to Baby in average. Furthermore, mode, i. e. most participants gave Baby the same number of male and female characteristics followed by 2 neutral characteristics. The measures of variability are rather small.

Inferential statistical analysis

Our hypothesis has been accepted my inferential statistical analysis:

I have chosen to compute the chi-square test because it is the most appropriate test for data presented in frequencies.

d. f. = (rows – 1) Ã- (column – 1) = (3 – 1) Ã- (3 – 1) = 4

From Table G for 4 degrees of freedom[10], the critical score is 9. 488. Our value is bigger (38. 98) and therefore we conclude that the differences in the obtained frequencies between 3 conditions (boy, girl, neutral) are statistically significant from those ones that would be expected by chance.

DISCUSSION

Our study has confirmed our hypothesis which states that a group of participants where the baby was presented as a baby girl, described the baby with more feminine adjectives. A group where the baby was introduced as a baby boy, described the baby with masculine adjectives. A group which didn't know gender of the baby, described the baby with approximately the same number of masculine and feminine adjectives. As it is visible in Table 1, the group where the baby was represented as a baby girl described the baby with 4 (out of 6) feminine adjectives in average, while the group to whom the baby way represented as a baby boy described the baby with 3 male adjectives in average (Table 2). The neutral group associated the baby 2 masculine and 2 feminine adjectives in average (Table 3). Our results are coherent in relation to Rubin, Provenzano & Luria and Condry & Condy studies because both studies have shown that the baby boy and girl will be described by adjectives typical for their sex, although they appear to look alike and behave similarly. In our case, the baby looks and behaves the same but was represented as of different genders to three groups.[11]

Setting our results in the context of the gender scheme theory in introduction, we can conclude that the society is prone to gender biases and indeed labels children's behaviour based on their sex and expects them to behave according to the expectations of the society. Girls are expected to be feminine, gentle and play with dolls while boys will are expected to be masculine, aggressive and play with trucks.

The strongest feature of our experiment is that we used independent sample as design and thus we were able to avoid demand characteristics among the participants. We randomly chose 3 classes of IB students (classes 9 – 11) and

those students were Caucasians just like the baby on the video. Therefore their opinion was free of any racial prejudices; baby of a different race could have affected our results. Since the experiment was anonymous, the participants could freely tick 6 adjectives that describe the baby the best within 5 minutes. Furthermore we followed all the ethical guidelines by getting consent from parents to play a video of their baby. We explained the experiment to participants and handed out the consents forms and the participants had a choice to refuse participating in the experiment. After the experiment was done and the results were collected and calculated, participants received a debriefing letter which explained goal and the results of the experiment.

The biggest limitation of our experiment is the way we grouped adjectives according to characteristics typical for males and females. Some of the adjectives were ambiguous, i. e. they can go for both males and females (such as cute) and some other adjectives are difficult to relate to an infant (such as flamboyant). We tried to overcome this limitation by playing the video to our classmates who helped us out grouping the adjectives which describe male, female and unisex characteristics. Our experiment was in English and although our participants are a part of the IB and the classes are held in English, some of them didn't know the meaning of some adjectives. A few we had difficulties with translating and explaining the adjectives. Another limitation is that some of the participants did not seem too serious while ticking the adjectives and there is a possibility that they randomly filled out the questionnaire. Another possible subjective limitation is that it might

be hard to choose only 6 adjectives among 31 but if we have given more adjectives to tick, it would be harder to do a statistical analysis.

If we were about to repeat the experiment, we would not put 31 adjectives but rather 20 and the groups would have the same and bigger number of participants; it would be easier to compare statistical analysis which depends on the number of the participants. Furthermore, the adjectives should be revised to dodge the ambiguity. We would choose older participants who would take the experiment more seriously. We wouldn't choose the IB students but rather local students and give them a questionnaire in their mother tongue and thus there wouldn't be any language barrier which led to confusion. We could improve a video by having a longer footage where the baby does other activities such as bathing, playing and interacting with parents and/or other children so the participants could get a more detailed in-sight into baby's behaviour.

As visible on Figure 1, the median number of masculine adjectives is the highest for a boy group and the median number of feminine adjectives is the highest for a girl group but there is no difference between medians in a gender unknown group. Although there is room for minimizing the limitations, these results implicate that the society is prone to prejudices and perceives females and males differently from their early age.

REFERENCES

http://books. google. hr/books? id= DHbKTvVQzuYC&lpg= PA194&ots= eeAHAKpBxe&dq= Condry%20and%20Condry%20gender%20schema&pg=

PA195#v= onepage&q= Condry%20and%20Condry%20gender %20schema&f= false (November 26, 2009)

http://www. colorado. edu/conflict/peace/problem/stereoty. htm (November 26, 2009)

http://family. jrank. org/pages/686/Gender-Gender-Roles-Stereotypes. html (November 26, 2009)

http://en. wikipedia. org/wiki/Gender_schema_theory (November 26, 2009)

A Survey of Social Psychology, Leonard Berkowitz, CBS Publishing Japan LTD, 3rd edition, 1988; pages 153 – 160

Basic Topics in Social Psychology (donno the author and yr published); page 392

Experiment, Design and Statistics in Psychology – an Introduction, Colin Robson, Penguin Books, 2nd edition, 1983; pages 56 – 60