

# An analysis of the evolution of gender roles assignment



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How Father Met Mother Unfortunately, it is only through the television, movies, books and magazines that I am given access to certain eras or periods in history that seem so distant yet so paradoxically near as well. A great example of such a period would be the 1980's. I say this because first, I was born in 1992, about three years off from 1989. And secondly, many of the societal contributions and cultural influences made in the 1980's are still prevalent in today's society. Michael Jackson, who made his name in the 1980's, is still considered to be the epitome of a music pop star by majority of today's musicians.

Another element of the 1980's that I find interesting to tackle is gender dynamics. Many of us, I included, have always wondered how our parents dated? Where did they go to hang-out? What were the norms and values upheld by teenagers during that era? And how far has the 21st century teenager shaped and molded reality fitting for an era of extensive independence and liberal thinking. The evolution of gender roles, in my opinion, is the root of the drastic difference between the lifestyles of a 1980's teen as compared to its 2012 counterpart.

Obviously, I never lived in the 1980's, but based on what people have said and what I have seen through the various outlets of media, I think I can offer a fair evaluation of what it was like to be a teenager in the 1980's. Gender typing, the process of acquiring gender role characteristics, continued its evolution during that decade. One major proponent of that change was the content of television programming. Media is an evident agent of the social learning theory. People learn about their appropriate gender behavior by observing and watching television personalities acting in certain ways.

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In the 1950's, through the continuous serial which was regularly shown in the afternoon, television was society's glue. In a decade when men were obligated to work while wives maintained the house and kids, television was used to preserve such a structure. Daytime shows reinforced gender roles especially those of women. Because of this, husbands were assured that their wives would stay at home to fulfill their roles and not engage in anything displeasing like extra-marital affairs. That physical object which aims to empower people with independence and openness of mind to a world of realities was also a tool used to retain an existing structure of life. The way of life, especially of late 1980's females, changed due in large part to the shift of television focus, from legal drama, family discord to younger characters and social issues. And because of this, relative to earlier decades, being a 1980's teen was probably less regulated by unchangeable societal structures and expectations as much as the psychological changes taking place resulting from an increasingly independent world.

Although older studies trivialize the impact culture has on gender roles, more and more studies have suggested otherwise. I would describe the 1980's culture as one of a communal experience. The first images that come to mind when I think about the 1980's include hanging out at each other's houses, having sleepovers, going roller skating, watching MTV, checking out girls at the mall, playing softball, going on family vacations. Devoid of the influx of technological innovation that the 21st century individual constantly witnesses, 1980's teens simply did more things together.

But more times than not, these groups of teenagers were distinguishable by their gender. I'm guessing parties were more like soirees with the girls on <https://assignbuster.com/an-analysis-of-the-evolution-of-gender-roles-assignment/>

one side of the disco club and the guys on the other. Groups were gender dominated. One group of friends would be made up of jocks while another was a bunch of valley girls. So, in other words, teens lived out a communal experience defined by gender identity, in the sense that it wasn't only their sex that segregated them into different groups but their own sense of gender.

Some girls associated femininity with being the so-called daddy's girl while others defined femininity by conservatism. It is clear that gender identity coupled with gender roles as depicted in media helped 1980's society categorize teenagers. It's not so much of biology's responsibility but more of integration with selected environments that allows males and females to mold their character into what they intend it to be. This interesting interplay between communality and segregation resulted in the formation of common stereotypes, both racial and gender.

These included the jocks, nerds, popular girls and many more. In this case, the gender differences were situated by socialization with one another, presumably of the same group, and social integration. In my opinion, this allowed the members of these different categories to distance themselves from actually integrating themselves in reality. They had their own little bubble that could not be popped. This observable fact, I think, made courtship that much harder for guys. I think 1980's men had to exert much more effort in pursuing the girls they liked because of the radically different notion of womanhood.

I think 1980's girls began to take more pride in themselves and not in what others thought of them to be. I say this because girls started to think of themselves in a much higher regard relative to previous years. I think the formation of cliques led to girls to possess some sort of superiority complex which guys had to encounter upon courtship. If the guy did something bad to that girl, then it was as if he wronged the whole clique as well, a case that wouldn't usually have a happy ending. On the other hand, I think that premarital sex became much more common and acceptable in the 1980's.

Because of the increasing awareness of AIDS, I think the option to have safe-sex encouraged more teens to break conservative boundaries and engage in risque and promiscuous activities. I'd say being a teenager now parallels the teenager of the 1980's in some ways. The first similarity lies in the fact that sex is becoming more and more common. The years following the 1980's saw a rapid rise in premarital sex, abortion, use of contraceptives and many more. The rapid progression of technology and science has led to a society inundated with all forms of sexual manifestation on television, magazines, internet and many more.

The 21st century is simply building on what the 1980's helped in starting. Many teenagers nowadays, male and female alike, are dehumanizing themselves in the sense that they abuse that human-defining quality of ours, which is independence and free will. I think teenagers nowadays possess a worrisome amount of curiosity. Curiosity is a good quality to have but the inability of teenagers to control themselves in the face of curiosity is a testament to the lack of discipline and character many teens have

nowadays. And I think this is a major difference between the 1980's and 2000's.

In the 1980's and most especially in the context of the Philippines, I think that although girls were becoming more self-aware of themselves in the sense that they started gaining the upper hand over their male counterparts, they were still regulated to a certain extent by their parents and society itself. Yes, they would hang out with boys in disco clubs, but many times chaperones and even their own parents would accompany them to these gatherings. Things have tremendously changed over the years to the point that I'd label the contemporary teenager as arrogantly independent.

Teenagers have become so independent that they think they can do anything with their time, money and body. The sex-saturated culture we live has very much encouraged sexual deviance among the youth. One-night stands aren't something rare in today's world. The goal of majority of today's male teenagers is to get into the girls' pants which sometimes is consented to by the girl herself. Many teenagers, girls and boys alike, have lost respect for their body. The rapid pace of technological development has led the youth into an age of disillusionment, leading them to devalue themselves and others.

The premium is on the high speed transfer of information rather than the fostering of human dignity. We all currently live in a world overflowing with contradictory values, notions, concepts and opinions about gender. This, in itself, is detrimental to a person if you analyze it from the perspective of the gender schema theory. The gender schema acknowledges the fact that the

world is already being recognized at such an early into the two concepts of being male and female. The theory continues by explaining how we then absorb different behaviors and concepts of femininity and masculinity and organize those around our schemas of genders.

I think today's environment is harmful because of the conflicting values that are inculcated in us at home, school and by our peers. Girls and guys alike are taught by parents to practice the virtues of modesty and conservatism but the movies and even our peers, on the other hand, encourage us to dress scantily and literally auction off our bodies. We are taught to be ourselves and not attempt to please everyone yet homosexuality is considered taboo by a lot of conservatives. This friction has caused a wide a variety of problems among males, females and homosexuals.

Gays and lesbians nowadays are at a crossroads, whether to ride along with the liberalization of society and come out of the closet at the risk of ridicule or mask their true inclinations towards the same gender. I guess my nearest link to the 1970's and 1980's is my parents. They're the two people who can vividly describe these decades in great detail to me. Was the depiction of the 1980's by the movie " Dear Heart" an accurate one, in terms of gender dynamics? First, I got the impression that the 1980's was a very cheesy period in a relatively cute manner.

My parents told me that couples would exchange high school rings as a token of commitment to one another. Commitment is one facet of a relationship that tends to become the root of separation nowadays. Many males, especially the jocks, are usually labeled as so-called playas. They take

pride in fooling around with a multitude of women. My parents told me that they were very committed to each other. My dad's friends at that time were the ones playing the field. My dad further explained that this was probably so because of all the effort he had to put in order to win my mother's heart.

He went on to narrate a story of how he played a mean trick on my mother to get her attention. My father, a college senior at that time, opted to take a full term serving as a student teacher in La Salle rather than to make a thesis. And coincidentally, my mom was his student in one class. That was how they met. During one session, my father announced that he would be giving a surprise test. According to my dad, all of his students started to silently curse him. But, what he was watching out for was my mom's reaction.

She was also in a state of shock because, according to my mom, she did not study at all. After those initial tense moments, my dad then distributed the test. And yes, it was extremely difficult. Fortunately for his students, my dad eventually told them that it was just a joke. The test was not to be recorded. I can't believe that he did this just to get the attention of my mom, whom he found very cute. I got the impression that the process of courtship, although arduous indeed, was very fulfilling also. It was a testament to a real and sincere love between individuals.

My father also further described how courtship was very structured back then. He had to meet her very strict and conservative parents and ask permission from them to bring their daughter out. Having been single my entire life, I'm not too sure if guys nowadays still follow this practice. Well, to



me, it's as if relationships have lost its structure. Becoming a so-called item is as spontaneous as it can get nowadays. There isn't that one specific moment or stage in a friendship that separates being best of friends from being lovers. My mother's account of her teenage life was quite different.

Her parents were stricter with her as compared to my dad's. But unsurprisingly, my mom told me that they were more lenient with her younger brother. Again, this just highlights the common perception people, including parents, have about girls, that is they are more susceptible to danger. Aside from this, my mom couldn't really remember much from her teenage years. She never really went out and partied. According to her, she was more integrated into her family than with her friends. She lived in a very traditional and Filipino household.

She would go on pilgrimages and spend more time finishing novenas rather than hanging-out with friends. She and her parents became more receptive of the outside world when she started dating my dad. My parents told me that they'd usually hang-out in disco clubs or at the homes of their friends as portrayed in the movie " Dear Heart". Additionally, my dad mentioned that parties during his time were segregated into girls and guys and that the guys would have to ask the girls if they'd like to dance, a practice that is still being done nowadays.

In terms of socialization, my parents, both La Sallians, denied speaking any bad taglish as depicted in " Dear Heart". They said that La Salle, back then, was home to English speakers. That's why it's no surprise that my father, especially, is terrible at speaking the vernacular. My mother, on the other

hand, was more fluent in Filipino. Both my parents came from highly devout Catholic families. I think this strong faith-based foundation proved vital in the type of lifestyle they lived during their teenage years. This was also very infectious because it shaped the way my brother and I behaved as teenagers.

I know for a fact that my brother and I have never broken the law, smoked anything, may it be pot or even a simple cigarette, and never violated another person's body. I credit my grandparents for raising my parents in such an admirable manner. My parents' accounts of their teenage years greatly parallel my own thoughts about the 70's and 80's. Stricter rules were more or less imposed on girls as compared to guys. Parents were more protective of daughters not because they loved them more but because of society's depiction, through media, of women as a vulnerable gender.

And apparently, I was also right about the fact that guys spent more time and effort in the courtship process back then. In this paper, I have presented three angles of teenage-hood. After looking closely at those three angles, I realized that adolescence isn't so much defined by ages or biology as it is by the setting we are exposed to. The teen years of our lives are indeed very much socially constructed by time, culture and place as well. I know that I am in no position to make an absolute generalization about teenagers living in a certain period because time is just one of the many factors that shape teenage reality.

Living in 1980's China or Korea was vastly different from my parents' experience of adolescence. Although we are told by our parents to be who

we are, especially in the period of adolescence, and not try to pretend we are somebody else, society has unfortunately shun those individuals who freely, creatively and responsibly exercise their freedom. Going back to my point about the gender schema theory, teenagers nowadays are confused as to whether they should listen to their parents, peers or even the media.

Girls are told to personify virtues of care, gentleness, patience, humility but television continuously glorifies female celebrities who party, get drunk and wasted. Gays are supposedly living in an environment more tolerable of the third-sex but we still read news everyday about occurrences of homosexual bullying. Living in a gender-controlled world is very difficult and although attempts have been made to foster a greater sense of gender tolerance, not everyone is treated fairly. And this change in mentality needs to start with ourselves. Every Filipino is obligated to oppose discrimination and uphold the value of equality.