

Gender Socialization Process Agents and Social Effects

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Introduction

Gender socialization begins when a child is born. The process of gender socialization continues with age, and the process reaches its maximum intensity when the child reaches the age of adolescence. It is a significant contributor to the unequal treatment of individuals based on their gender at educational institutions, at the workplace, in terms of employment opportunities, and in general empowerment.

The central concept of the process of gender socialization is the expectation of society toward females and males to behave and act differently. Also, such a phenomenon tends to treat girls and boys differently through different socialization. The boys are raised by society to behave in the manner that males are expected to act. On the same note, the girls are raised in such a manner as to conform to society's established role of the female.

The Process of Gender Socialization

Gender socialization has become a part of our daily lives. It is a process through which specific gender roles are assigned to individuals, and they are expected to be strictly followed by the individuals. It internalizes the values of the society to effectively adapt to the culture of the individuals.

In a vast majority of cultures around the world, society clearly categorizes the meaning of the terms male and female. This process of categorizing or defining gender roles translates into individuals defining themselves as girls or boys. Furthermore, these assigned gender roles are strict in nature, and people of both genders are expected to behave in conformity to their assigned genders. For instance, males have been traditionally assigned roles that are based on the characteristics of strength, aggressiveness, and domination. On the other hand, females are expected to be sensitive, understanding, passive, emotional, and nurturing. From the birth of a child, she or he is taught these gender values. These values are further strengthened as the child grows and views people of certain genders acting and behaving in certain ways. It can also be observed in the kind of toys that the boys are given. These toys are often large in size, noisy, and represent aggressiveness and violence. On the contrary, the girls are given toys that are gentle, like dolls and dollhouses, that emphasize the aspects of nurturing. Therefore, as the children grow and play with these toys, consciously and subconsciously, they begin to behave according to society's expectations of their gender.

The establishment of gender identity takes place when the child reaches the age of two years. According to Sigmund Freud, it is the age when the child begins to imitate a parent of the same gender as the child. Therefore, if the parents strictly behave in conformity to their expected gender roles, the child begins to feel it is their responsibility to act the same way.

The Agents of Gender Socialization

The process of gender socialization further intensifies as the child grows. (Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Martin et al., 2002) A number of agents influence the child to conform to certain gender roles.

Family

The first agency that influences a young child is the immediate family. In itself, it can be considered a whole world, and the child learns while living in this world. The family life of the child is not merely characterized by biological tasks, like protection from the outside world or feeding, but it also plays a vital role in impacting the child to develop certain behaviors according to the gender assigned at birth.

The family of a child serves as the first platform of socialization. The child develops a sense of their gender roles. The family members, especially the parents, treat the child according to their assigned gender. A notable example of this fact can be the different kinds of toys that the boys and the girls are made to play with. The toys of the boys represent strength and aggressiveness, like robots and cars. While the girls are given toys that tend to enhance their feminine characteristics and the ability to nurture, like dolls or other things like that.

In a majority of cases, the gender roles incorporated into the minds of the children through their parents remain embedded in their minds, and they act in a manner that is acceptable to society throughout the remainder of their lives.

School

As the child grows up, she or he goes to school to gain an education. However, educational institutions act as the second agency to influence these children to act in accordance with the societal expectations of their gender. In addition to teaching the children how to read and write, the schools also assist in the character development of the children. They are instilled with the teachings of cooperation with others and obeying the rules set by society.

The teachers at the school play a vital role in setting expectations for the children according to their genders. They instill the belief that when children mature, they have to necessarily pursue certain careers or professions depending on their particular genders. Therefore, they influence and even sometimes force the children to act as per their gender. Furthermore, the friends that they make at

school also impact the process of gender socialization. (Conerly et al., 2021) Through interaction with friends and peers, the children learn to conform to the behavior that is accepted by their gender.

Media

In addition to the family and schools, the children also learn from the media, either print or electronic. The rapid rise of media over the years has significantly impacted the learning process of children. The programs displayed on television represent different genders in specific ways. The women are shown to be emotional and sensitive, while the men are shown to be strong, aggressive, and supporting the women. These programs and advertisements further influence children to act in a specific manner.

Negative Impact of Gender Socialization on Females

The females are the ones who are the most adversely affected by gender socialization. They are assigned the role of being the nurturing ones. Females are expected to be responsible and always be there for the males in their lives. Such a characterization of the female gender has an adverse effect on the development of girls. They are limited to certain roles and are considered inferior to men. Also, they are expected to be the ones responsible for caring for the children. This thinking puts a lot of pressure on working women as they have to work very hard, come home, and are not able to get any rest.

Such a phenomenon is unfair to females. The employment opportunities are limited for them. The jobs requiring high physical labor, like engineering, are considered unsuitable for women. As stated earlier, since their birth, girls are treated by their parents in a manner that perceives them as sensitive and prone to damage. They are not allowed to stay outside for long as it is thought they cannot protect themselves. Also, women are sexually harassed in schools and at the workplace due to their gender and are generally paid less than their male counterparts.

It is not an adequate treatment, as it puts a lot of pressure on females to prove themselves. This pressure may result in affecting the health of the women in terms of the onset of depression or other impacts on physical health.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be efficiently said that gender socialization is a negative phenomenon. It predetermines the roles an individual is expected to conform to according to their gender. Women are the ones most adversely affected by it, as they are not considered equal to men and are supposed to be the nurturing ones. Furthermore, females are put under a lot of pressure to prove their worth to society, and still, job opportunities are very limited for them.

References

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