DIMENSIONS OF GENDER STEREOTYPING IN CONTEXT OF INDIAN WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

A man may say that women have nothing to do with the cars and the bikes while a woman may say that men are insensitive. This perception is not because of their nature but the way they are brought up and the manner in which their nurturing is done. This is inherited in them since their childhood. Somewhere consciously or sub consciously, we define the roles and the code of conduct for men and women from their very tender age.It becomes convenient for the society to judge a person if there are set standards or benchmarking even if they are inaccurate, simplistic and generalised. As per this so-called theory, components of masculinity and femininity are given more importance than to the components of human personality. Gender stereotypes have negative as well as positive connotations. Positive impact includes the avoidance of chaos and confusion as the responsibilities in a broader sense are defined for both men and women. Although women have become self-sufficient now but gender stereotyping gives her exemptions in some physically loaded tasks like carrying luggage while travelling, putting on gas cylinders and so on resulting in unintentional distribution of work. The negative impact includes the feeling of superiority or tolerance of injustice which leads to domestic violence and other such civil and criminal wrongs. This chapter focuses on the general concepts of gender stereotyping and its implications on the lives and lifestyles of men and women especially at workplace.

KEYWORDS: *Stereotype, Perception, Masculinity, Femininity, Self-Sufficient.*

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Introduction

Gender stereotype is the generalization about the characteristics of the entire group based on gender. Gender stereotyping can be defined as the set of beliefs about the purported qualities of males and females (Eagly, 1987). Stereotyping is an attempt to understand the 'type' of person and then the society putting them into classification assuming that everyone belonging to a certain group has the common attributes like the other members of the group. Gender stereotyping is the term used for categorizing men and women. The Psychology Dictionary defines gender stereotyping as 'the relatively fixed and overgeneralized attitudes and behaviours that are considered normal and appropriate for a person in a particular culture based on the person's biological sex.' In general, men are considered as aggressive, decisive, reasonable and risk-taking whereas women are considered as kind, humble, emotional and relational. For example, we often hear the phrase terms like 'male mechanics' and 'female kindergarten teachers' as gender stereotyping reinforces the belief that kindergarten teachers require characteristics associated more with women. This clearly shows that beliefs and expectations concerning the qualities that men and womenoften dictate the type of job they are considered appropriate for. Gender stereotype is the pillar of socialisation. Through them, boys and girls at their early ages are assigned the norms, roles and expectations.

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General Perceptions

- Men discuss; Women gossip
- Men hear; Women listen
- Men hate shopping; Women love to shop
- Women are emotional and cry; men get angry
- Men are insensitive
- Women are bad drivers
- All men love sports
- Parenting comes more naturally to women than it does to men

Gender roles are the powerful means of social organization that impact many aspects of the society. By virtue of living in a social world, individuals informally learn the appropriate or expected behaviour for their sex. The repetition of such behaviour and rules from generation to generation convey the impression that this is the way things are, the way they have always been and will be. No matter how modern we become, how westernize our lifestyle is, how contemporary our thoughts are; the question still arises that how seriously the male bread earner notion hasbeing extricated or how we accept men showing their emotional distress and cry or how we actually appoint female driver for our car.

This stereotyping begins the moment the nurse comes and says 'It's a boy' and then on, even in the most educated families, subtle stereotype begins. Cars and guns are bought for him, his room is decorated with blue colour. Conscious or sub-conscious motives of running the family through him bring joy. While growing up, if he cries he will be told, 'Don't cry like a girl'. He perhaps learns to suppress his emotions as he thinks that it is 'girlish' to express them. Parents ensure that he develops the right male interests as sports, driving, managing money and would most likely be discouraged to cook or serve. He will be dispirited from choosing the careers like teaching or counselling as they are considered as 'softer' careers meant for girls.

On the other hand if a nurse says, 'It's a girl', the equation changes within a minute. Her room is decorated with pink and dolls are bought for her. Conscious or sub-conscious motives of 'saving for her marriage expenses/dowry' may despair. 'Good manners' like talking and laughing gently would be taught. Being delicate and submissive are considered as her qualities. She would be expected to choose the 'right interests' as cooking, singing, dancing, etc.

Difference between 'Sex' and 'Gender'

We make the distinction in these two terms as sex being in biological category includes genes, hormones, and genitalia while we use the term gender as a socio-cultural term includes learned characteristics, behavioural patterns and cultural expectations. Gender identity is neither binary (boy or girl), nor static. There is a considerable dynamism and diversity in institutionalization of gender. Gender is different from the sexual orientation. It is a complete spectrum. The identity of human beingsis not only given by biology but from the viewpoint of society. Renowned Bollywood actress Priyanka Chopra rightly examines, 'Men have a different DNA. Women believe that they can change their guy but they can't and they shouldn't.'

Gender Stereotype at Workplaces

Evidences suggest that gender stereotyping is present as the qualities believed to be necessary to succeed in business as per which women are considered as inferior to men in organizations (Marlow, 2002). It has also been reported that there is a gender bias with regard to the assessment of leadership in organizations (Metcaalfe,1993). Though leadership is a widely researched topic in organizational literature, there is a little research whether corporates in this contemporary society see characteristics associated with leadership as masculine or feminine characteristics.This paper is an effort to fill that gap. Gender role stereotype is common in society and is encouraged through socialization during childhood and adolescence by parents, schools, peers and most importantly the mass media. Men and women learn at their early ages that certain tasks are related with one gender and not with another. The study of history also reveals the stories of kings rather than queens. Political leadership is also seen to be dominated by men across the world. Even in business, leadership role models are men.

Since leadership is an abstract concept, the perception of society plays an important role in its definition. It seems to be a circle as in through the childhood nurturing, we assume men to be leaders

and if we see the other way visibility of male leaders in all walks of life would have led to analysing a person not from his qualities but the biological sex. Even entrepreneurship is also seen as masculine task as it requires the features like risk bearing and decision making which are considered as characteristics of males.

The situations are certainly improving at least from the view point of women. In the recent years, more than ever before women have emerged as the successful leaders in the fields which were earlier supposed to be dominant by men such as business, politics and sports. Anita Roddick, Indira Nooyi, Angela Merkel, Sonia Gandhi, SainaNehwal are being looked upon as the role models now. But it is not that easy to prove things in a male dominated society. It is also argued that only female managers believe that feminine characteristics are suited to managerial tasks. As the number of women in managerial positions increases, women see a stronger relationship between characteristics of women and managers. On the other hand, just a small increase in the number of women leaders do not seem enough for men to change their deep-rooted concepts about the men being the first and the perfect choice as leaders.

A study reveals that the effects of gender-based stereotyping can be devastating, potentially undermining women's capacity to lead and face serious challenges. Most alarmingly, men consider women to be less adaptable at problem solving which is one of the qualities most commonly associated with effective leadership and a hallmark to become a CEO. Further, this study reveals that women make up only 2 % in top management positions among Fortune 500 Companies. In society, gender stereotyping may lead to the feeling of superiority and domestic violence while in companies; it may have the effects like dissatisfaction among the employees and lack of the feeling of belongingness.

A Call for Action

It is the time to break the glass ceiling. It is very difficult to change the mindset of people when they are nurtured and brought up with that thinking. Some strong steps have to be taken by the parents, schools, socialists and corporate sector to reduce, if not abolish the phenomenon. Simply hiring some more women executives or instituting some lectures is not enough. In recent years, companies have shown increased commitment to the inclusion and advancement of women in the workplace. But still the representation of women in leadership remains stagnant. Unless the companies and the society as a whole take steps to eradicate this bias, women leader will always be underestimated. Boys from the early age must be brought up in a way to bust the stereotypes as 'let toys be toys, not doll or a car', meaningful meet ups between thee genders at the workplace and teaching and reminding men that cooking is a life skill, not a gender specific chore. The natural traits of the men and women make them unique but the generalization and stereotyping may be diluted with the organic and gradual steps.

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