

GENDER SOCIALIZATION: THE NEW MASCULINE GENDER ROLE IS SETTING BOYS UP FOR FAILURE.

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BOYS UP FOR FAILURE.**

Senior Capstone Project

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Abstract

The overall purpose of this research is to investigate the impact of gender socialization on male children. The research problem investigated how gender socialization norms and societal practices impact the development, success and mental health of male children. The research looked for a correlation between violence and gender socialization and a reverse correlation between male and female success. It used qualitative and ethnographic information from peer reviewed articles and studies and draws from the American Psychological Association (APA) *Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Men and Boys* 2018 and UNICEF's 2020 data on Gender and Education. The study found that gender socialization norms and societal practices do impact development, success and mental health of male children. It found a correlation between gender socialization and male violence but it did not find a decrease in the rate of male success correlated to an increase in the rate of female success.

Introduction

On a recent trip to Children's Place, a popular children's clothing retailer, there were found opposing displays stacked high and separated by gender. The "male" display meant to lure in parents, grandparents and gift-givers was riddled with tshirts toting messages such as "I'd Rather Be Gamin'", "I'm Not Lazy, I'm in Energy Saving Mode" or "There Is No We In Pizza". The "female" display countered with "Girl Boss", "The Future Is Ours #Girls" and "Girls: Leaders Winners Feminists". What message is being presented? There have been centuries of gender inequality and intolerance which desperately needs to be corrected (Gerson 2009); but is fighting inequality with inequality the way to a balanced, fair and truly equal society or are these messages essentially neutering one sex and offering them no hope for success or acceptance until they either shrivel up in fear or explode in uncontrollable rage.

The balance between the roles of the genders is constantly changing. (Weingarten 2015) The roles that each gender plays within society and to each other have been evolving over the course of human history. Societies throughout time have been matriarchal or patriarchal and now, it is being recognized that the bi-polar nature of gender may very well be inaccurate. (Weingarten 2015) As a society, humans tend to categorize things; neatly and clearly labeling them so they know where they belong. (UNICEF 2020) They do this in subtle ways. Ways that seem innocuous at the time but turn out to have ramifications that could have been predicted with minimal foresight. Simple things like choosing blue decor when a male child is expected and pink when the child is female can align those colors with those sexes in society's eyes.

There are subtle differences even in the words we choose. “Sex”, as defined in the Merriam Webster dictionary, refers to the biological differences between males and females while “gender” is defined as the social and cultural differences between males and females not the biological ones. It is with the later that this research is focused on. The differences in gender socialization and what developmental effects they can cause. This research will investigate how gender socialization norms and societal practices impact the development, success and mental health of male children. To even try to begin investigating these questions, one needs to look into the fields of Anthropology, Sociology and Psychology.

Gender socialization refers to the learned cultural role a male or female is supposed to play in society. (UNICEF 2020) This learning starts at birth and continues throughout one's life. (Saiful et al 2015) It starts with the pink/blue choice before the baby is even born. Or perhaps with the choice of yellow, telling the baby that they are neither or both male and/or female consciously rejecting gender stereotypes. These imposed gender stereotypes are determined by cultural, economic and societal influences. Gender socialization is peppered with phrases like “be a man and don’t cry” and “true ladies aren’t demanding”. These gender socializing phrases categorize behavior into one of the two polarized categories of male or female. (UNICEF 2020) This aligns behavior with a particular sex. By aligning behavior with a particular sex, gender socialization labels behavior outside the gender normative as deviant and forces that behavior to be suppressed. (UNICEF 2020) For example, if a person is male and is naturally sensitive, they would be forced to suppress the expression of their feelings to conform to the gender normative or channel their feelings into something that conforms with their gender normative like anger.

School shootings are now so common that they have branded society with fear. In 2019, there were 45 school shootings. More than any other year on record. In 2018, 29 people were killed and 48 people were injured in just three school shootings. (Farr 2018) The number of these shootings have been steadily increasing for the past 50 years and an alarmingly high percentage of the shooters have been male (Farr 2018). Armed with the knowledge of gender socialization, the question presenting itself becomes why are so many of those lashing out, armed and angry males? Is there a correlation to gender socialization?

Further research may show a correlation between increasing emasculating social messages being given to male children and an increase in violence in social situations. In addition to this, a steady decrease in the success rates of men and a steady increase in the success rates of women may be found. If male children are told that they can never amount to anything; they can never do anything right and they are destined to eat pizza and play video games, this is bound to produce men who feel frustrated, angry, sad and confused. A counterpart to this would be the young women who have grown up to be powerful and successful because they have been told their whole lives that they could conquer the world if they were smart and strong. This research is not looking at gender as polar but is focused on the place society is carving out for those who consider themselves male. Where do they fit in? What would happen if society were to deliver the same message to male and female children and all the shades in between telling them that if they are dedicated, smart, kind, understanding and compassionate they would be successful? Would a self-correcting, balanced masculine and feminine gender socialization norms be achieved?

The topic of gender socialization is a vast one. Through it, society is instructing children in what their role in society is. (American Psychological Association (APA) 2018 page 1) Society is telling them how to behave, what to feel and, more importantly, what not to feel. This instruction is being presented in the form of video games, tv shows, advertisements, clothing and a slew of other gender normative messages. Instead of being allowed to express their natural behavior, children are conditioned to conform and trained to deny their instinctual feelings. If allowed to follow their natural tendencies would children naturally create a more fair and balanced relationship between the sexes?

Thesis

Gender socialization norms and societal practices impact development, success and mental health of male children. Many men seem frustrated, dissatisfied and seem to have no avenue for expression. In light of the lack of acceptable avenues of masculine expression, there may be a correlation between male violence and gender socialization. Lastly, is there a decrease in the rate of male success and does it correlate to an increase in the rate of female success?

Method

This research will rely on qualitative analysis gained by critically reviewing secondary data sources and exploring peer reviewed scholarly articles and studies. The peer reviewed scholarly articles used include case studies, grounded theory, causal comparative and ethnographic research on gender socialization norms of males, behavioral analysis of males subjected to gender socialization norms and contributing sources such as peers, media, familial and social networks. Quantitative data was utilized from UNICEF to analyze the number of children, categorized by gender, being educated globally. Content analysis on the American Psychological Association (APA) *Guidelines for Psychological Practices With Men and Boys* and the movie, *Bowling for Columbine* were done. The research was done to investigate the practices and impact of gender socialization norms, investigate behavior caused by these norms and evaluate the impact on the success of males.

Literature Review

Gender socialization is “the process of learning cultural roles according to ones sex.” (LeMoyne 2007) Society, parents, schools etc...teach children what their roles are through the toys they choose to give them, the clothes they choose to put them in and the responsibilities they teach them they have. “Gender socialization is intertwined with the ethnic, cultural and religious values of a given society.” (LeMoyne 2007). Gender socialization is continuous throughout a lifetime. Fluctuating with the acceptable norms of the moment but can usually be seen through both a short-term and long-term lens.

Gender socialization begins before birth when parents, families and surrounding influences decide what attributes to impose on a baby; (Saiful et al 2015) whether or not they will encourage the softness of a “pink” girl or the hardness of a “blue” boy. Even before birth, family members and society have decided to have different expectations on the newborn infant depending on their sex. (UNICEF 2020) Once born, girls are often told to be “ladylike” while boys are told to be “gentlemen”. These two terms harken back to days that no longer exist but they are still used to subtly steer children in the direction society wants them to go.

Behavior

Gender socialization masculine norms include physical toughness (including competing in sports), demand for autonomy (including supporting a family), emotional stoicism (for example not showing vulnerability and dealing with one's problems alone) and heterosexual prowess (including exercising control over relationships). (Kågesten et al 2018) Because many gender socialization norms favor boys, boys are often not inclined to challenge them making it easy for them not to be aware of the negative implications of these gender socialization norms. They are often given preferential treatment and greater freedom which may be initially perceived as positive until they see that the preferential treatment comes with pressure to perform and the freedom comes with lack of guidance and support. (Kågesten et al 2018)

The gender socialization norm also often includes pressure to behave in a hyper-masculine hedronormative way. Boys may be ridiculed should they not behave in this manner even if their natural inclination is to be more empathetic. (Chu 2018) There is particularly strong evidence that parents and peers greatly contribute to establishing the gender socialization norms through

both direct and indirect communication (Kågesten et al 2018) and modeled behavior that they are not always aware of. One such modeled behavior is the division of labor in the home based on sex. Peers also seem to be important in supporting gender socialization norms. The strongest peer or “the leader of the pack” (Chu 2018) often exerts pressure on the other boys in the group forcing them to conform to masculine gender socialization. Schools and media often play a key role in influencing gender socialization norms harkening back to the T-shirt example. Comedian Michael Ian Black is quoted as saying “the last 50 years redefined womanhood. Women were taught they can be anything. There is no commensurate movement for men who are still locked into the same rigid, outdated model of masculinity.”

As gender roles universally change, for example more and more homes now being run by same sex parents, the behavior changes will, in boys and girls, happen faster but only with societal support. One key to this is behavioral modeling. In Philadelphia, a 5 week workshop called “Boys To Men” is teaching different aspects of masculinity. The aspects of masculinity are openly talked about and discussed which, in itself, challenges the gender socialization norm of emotional stoicism. The discussions range from honesty, positive relationships, forgiveness and communication. These are often topics which would provoke peers to socially ridicule the speaker into conformity but by creating a safe exploratory environment the investigation yields behavioral change which can propagate. Programs like these are choosing to teach “positive manhood.” The term “positive manhood” is the antithesis of “toxic masculinity” or the idea of rigid stereotypes of violence and aggression being the de facto idea of manhood. (Velez 2019) The concept of positive manhood strives to instill both resilience and sensitivity. Positive male behavioral modeling allows boys to have healthy experiences and healthy interactions with men

who are demonstrating positive masculinity and who accept the boys as positively masculine without requiring them to live up to negative gender socialization norms. (Velez 2019) This relationship anchor allows the boy to remain grounded against the pressure of negative gender socialization.

While it is true that men currently dominate professional and political fields, they also commit 90% of the homicides in the United States (Pappas 2019) and they represent 77% of the homicide victims (Pappas 2019). This indicates that “traditional masculinity is psychologically harmful and that [gender] socializing their emotions causes damage that echoes both inwardly and outwardly.” (Pappas 2019).

The American Psychological Association (APA) issued guidelines to help people in the field of psychology to better work with boys and men in 2018. Similar guidelines for girls and women were issued in 2007; 12 years earlier. For 12 years, male gender socialization norms were reactionary, leaving boys with little support or guidance to navigate the newly emerging world where girls have guidelines helping them change and navigate their gender socialization norms. Psychology, as a field, has always been myopic. Since it first was practiced in 1879, psychology has been about the psychology of men. Major studies have largely only studied men and boys who represented humanity. (Pappas 2019) Researchers treated gender as bi-polar with males and females on opposite sides, representing and inclined to opposite attributes. This polarity was an absolute disservice to women but it was also a disservice to men. Instead of treating the space between those born female and those born male as gradient, psychology pitted them against each other. The polarity of the approach disregarded treating either sex for what they actually were, observing their actual attributes and inclinations, and instead assumed that their attributes would

just be oppositional to one another. Society used psychologies bi-polar position to reinforce gender socialization norms that were constricting and inaccurate.

Gender is no longer a male-female binary. (McDermott 2019) As the male-female binary is changed to include the LGBTQ community, it becomes even more important to address gender socialization norms as 85% of the LGBTQ community reports experiencing harrassment and pressure to conform to masculine gender socialization norms. The landscape of masculine gender norms is vast. It encompasses culture, religion, sexuality and personal experiences. To reconcile all of these contributing issues into a healthy masculine gender norm is extremely difficult but, unless it is done, boys and men will be trying to follow norms that conform to a society that no longer exists. At this, they can never be successful and they will be left feeling frustrated with a sense of failure. The way to approach the problem is for society to be aware of what the dominant masculine ideals are currently, the direction these ideals should be migrating to and their own biases towards these ideals. A beginning may be to encourage fathers to engage more fully with their children. (Pappas 2019) Once the expectations and implications of gender socialization norms are stripped away, the male-female binary collapses finding men and women have overlapping traits, emotional needs and engagements. (Pappas 2019)

In the early 1990's, studies were done investigating trait perspectives and normative perspectives. (Pleck et al 1993) This research was done to further update the "male sex role identity"; research from the 1940's to the early 1970's. Pleck's theory was that the growing absence of male role models coupled with women's changing roles would leave men unable to acquire a clear gender model and left being insecure about their role in society. (Pleck et al 1993) This could have a myriad of effects on developing males in society, including the possibility of

males choosing not to take any role because there was no clear path for them. The problem with the research was that it considered masculinity as a cultural constraint rather than a biological characteristic. (Pleck et al 1993) Without incorporating the biological characteristics of the research subjects into the studies the research would be incomplete. With this perspective, males would be left thinking that they controlled or influenced all of their traits and, therefore, would experience negative reactions when they could not control their traits often leading to negative behavior.

The new APA guidelines, released in 2018, still associate masculinity with the traits of stoicism, competitiveness, dominance and aggression and do not address the positive masculine traits such as being protective of one's loved ones which the production of the hormone vasopressin promotes. (Komisar 2019) "What's unhealthy isn't masculinity or femininity but the demeaning of masculine men or feminine women." (Komisar 2019)

In their everyday interactions with adults and peers, boys are exposed to cultural messages about masculinity and pressure to conform to masculine norms that emphasize physical toughness, emotional stoicism, projected self-sufficiency and heterosexual dominance over woman. (Chu 2014) Gender socializing boys in this manner has shown to lead boys to align masculinity with these negative traits and it is found to hinder their relationships and personal growth. If boys do not conform to the social norms presented to them they often are left with low self-esteem, feelings of self hatred and feelings of insecurities. (Chu 2014) These feelings can lead to negative or more risky behaviors like alcohol use, drug use, poor academic performance, unprotected sex, violence and posturing. There seems to be two schools of approaching this issue and both focus on behavioral modification through gender socialization influence. For example,

by exposing boys and men to positive gender social modeling, boys will adjust their own behavior accordingly and self-correct, reconciling that the message they once received through gender socialization modeling was either incorrect or has changed in some way.

Other approaches also include positive behavior gender modeling but also include explicit statements of gender norms through education and positive gender socialization norms extended from communities like peers, parents and media. All of these models work from a normative perspective in so much as they believe that gender norms are social constructs (Pleck et al 1993) and they can be changed but there is little research on the trait perspective which studies whether or not males actually have these gender norm characteristics.

Feminist research revealed girls and women's rejection of gender socialization norms may be positively associated with well-being. (Chu 2014) Boys were found to reject gender socialization norms either implicitly by valuing intimate relationships or acknowledging the importance of close friendships, or explicitly by opening speaking out against gender socialization norms.

Problems stem from living in a culture that does not value boys "stereotypical male nature".

(Way et al 2014) Encouraging the rejection of gender socialization norms is especially important to avoid them becoming problematic when they manifest themselves in silences, distortions and disconnections. (Chu 2014) These traits can easily manifest when the boys do not fall easily into the societal gender norms and they cannot force themselves to conform. With the support of at least one close relationship positively modeling healthy gender socialization norms, it is possible for boys to resist negative gender socialization norms.

The strict polarity of gender norms can also pit the sexes against each other if males envy classically feminine traits like being emotional. (Way et al 2014) Traits need to be accessible to

both sexes and both sexes need to be taught healthy ways to express them. There is a point when boys begin disconnecting with these natural traits in the name of gender socialized masculinity. (Way et al 2014) Before this point, boys value close relationships, expression and intimacy. Boys use both implicit and explicit tactics to resist gender socialization norms but become increasingly more accommodating to these norms as they grow older. (Way et al 2014)

Health

“As boys transition into adolescence, they face distinct factors and health problems that shape their health trajectories throughout their life course.” (Kågesten et al 2018) Adolescent boys are more likely to engage in alcohol, tobacco and drug use. (Kågesten et al 2018) This self damaging behavior can have severe consequences on their own development and will impact their immediate and extended social circles. It has been found that boys are less likely than girls to ask for help early (Kågesten et al 2018) making it more difficult to mitigate the negative behavior created by gender socialization suppressing their ability to communicate.

Boys are also more likely than girls to engage in excessive gaming which can lead to sleep deprivation, less physical activity and greater exposure to unhealthy products and media.

Researchers have found a correlation between conforming to masculine gender socialization norms and risky health behaviors such as heavy drinking, using tobacco and avoiding vegetables. (Mahalik 2007) Gender socialization norms had associated the negative behaviors of heavy drinking and tobacco usage with being masculine and eating vegetables with being feminine and, therefore, not to be done by men. Boys and men receive a disproportionate amount of negative discipline, have a disproportionate amount of academic challenges, and lack gender sensitive

healthcare. (American Psychological Association (APA) 2018) There is also evidence that there is a masculine reluctance towards self-care. (Yousef 2015) Communication can destigmatize the negative feelings of masculine gender socialization norms by allowing boys and men to realize there are others who feel the way they do, therefore, validating their own feelings. This problem needs to be rectified urgently as the suicide rate of men has increased between 28% and 38% (depending on race) since 1999. (Pappas 2019) Masculine requirements to remain stoic and provide for loved ones can lead to prolonged stress which can have serious health ramifications, most notably “John Henryism” or the compulsion to just work harder to overcome something, experienced by African American men as they try to cope in the face of stress and discrimination. (Pappas 2019)

The National Institute of Health’s (NIH) “Real Men, Real Depression” is helping normalize help-seeking behavior in men by showing “classically” masculine models struggling with mental health issues in an effort to demystify and destigmatize mental health. (Pappas 2019) This program is trying to address the masculine gender socialization norm of “pushing down” your emotions which has been found to interrupt a boy’s emotional development. (Chu 2018) Men need to discard their harmful ideologies of traditional masculine gender socialization norms which include violence and sexism and adapt flexibility while focusing on the positive aspects of masculine gender norms like courage and leadership. (McDermott 2019)

Education

“These gender roles and expectations have large scale ramifications.” (LeMoyne 2007) The decision of what resources to give which person is often made based on gender. By teaching one

sex to be dominant and one sex to be submissive, you have trained one sex to allow the other to take what resources are available while the other sex does without because their trained perception is that they are of lesser value. These resource allocation issues can be serious if they are medical, nutritional or educational in nature. For example, according to UNICEF Data on Gender and Education, there is a significant impact on the numbers of boys and girls educated and their performance. As gender socialization is addressed, a push has been made to make sure girls around the world are educated. Over the past few years the numbers of girls not being educated has decreased. Simultaneously, the numbers of boys not being educated has also decreased but at a slower rate. (UNICEF Data 2020)

Violence

Masculine ideals such as toughness, stoicism, heterosexism, self-sufficient attitudes and the lack of emotional sensitivity are characteristics that are passed down to boys from the men in their lives and the society around them. Boys live under intensified pressure to display gender appropriate behaviors according to the ideal male code. (American Psychological Association (APA) 2018) and these pressures increase as the boys age. If gender socialization norms consist of the above characteristics without interventions, negative effects can manifest. Gender socialization norms that uphold patriarchal codes requiring men to achieve dominant and aggressive behaviors (American Psychological Association (APA) 2018) can manifest negative behaviors.

As small children, violence and aggression are used to express emotions and distress. As the child ages, this behavior shifts to asserting power over another or over one's own situation and

masculinity, especially when threatened. This is sometimes expressed in the form of bullying, assault, physical aggression and verbal aggression. (Feder, Levant & Dean 2010)

The Masculine Gender Role Strain Paradigm (Pleck 1995) identifies three characteristics which can develop from the current masculine gender socialization norms: Discrepancy, Dysfunction, Trauma. Discrepancy is aggression that develops after a man experiences self-perceived failure to live up to masculine expectations. Dysfunction is aggression that develops when a man maintains normative masculine expectations. Trauma is the lasting impact on a boy or mans mental health due to masculine gender socialization norms. (Pleck 1995) Men or boys may express all three of the above characteristics in violence towards others. Without interventions and positive masculine gender socialization modeling, these violent acts may escalate as noted by the fact that 90% of criminal violence is committed by men and 78% of the victims of such violence are also men. (Cooper & Smith 2011)

Results

Society is changing faster than the gender norms can catch up. The American Psychological Association (APA) *Guidelines for Psychological Practices with Men and Boys* were released in 2018. This is 12 years after similar guidelines were released for girls and women. Guidelines for the LGB community were released in 2012. Guidelines for older adults were released in 2014; for transgender and non-gender conforming persons, 2015 and for racial and ethnic minorities, 2017. Men and boys were released last. (American Psychological Association (APA) 2018)

The research has shown that the preferential treatment that men and boys receive comes with aspects that can hinder a boys development and mental health. (Kågesten et al 2018) For

example, autonomy comes with the pressure of supporting a family without any support for the men themselves. Boys are pressured into conforming to gender socialization norms at a young age and these pressures increase with age. Through research, negative gender socialization norms have been identified as, but are not limited to, physical toughness, demand for autonomy, emotional stoicism and heterosexual prowess. (Kågesten et al 2018)

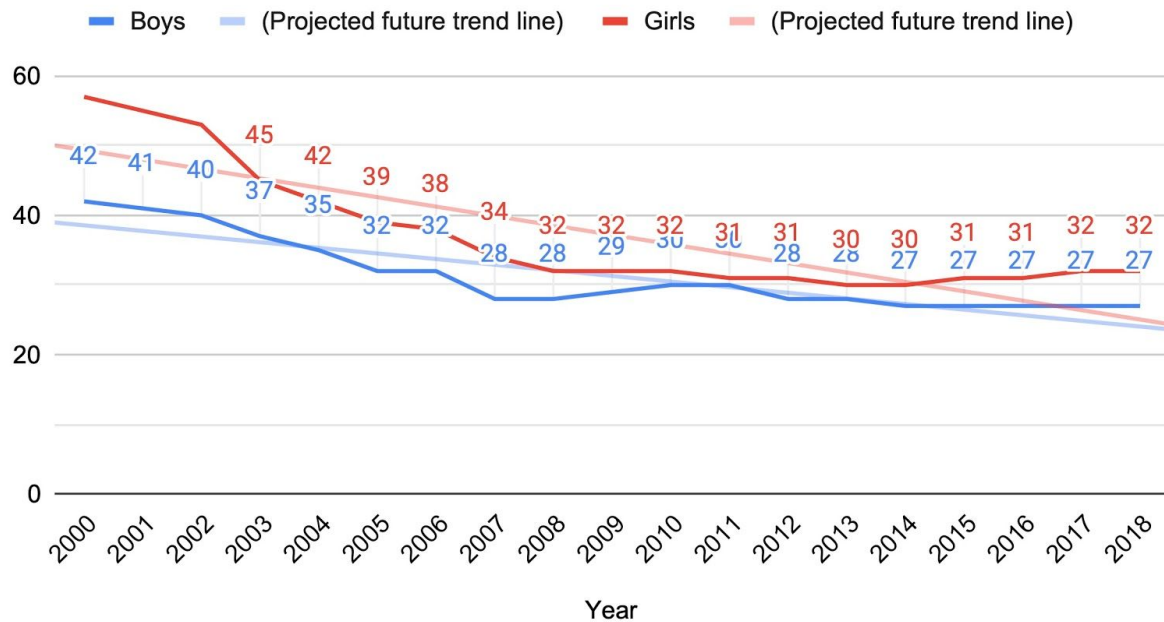
It has been shown that behavioral modeling is an extremely effective way to convey both negative and positive gender socialization norms. (Chu 2018) This modeled behavior can either pressure a boy or a man into conformity or give them a healthy behavioral model to emulate and make them comfortable with their masculinity. Whether positive or negative, behavioral modeling seems to be the most effective delivery system for gender socialization norms. (Velez 2019) Resistance to negative gender socialization norms has also yielded happier men (Way et al 2014) but, without intervention, the problem of the negative impact of these masculine gender socialization norms will get worse.

The following graph was created from UNICEF's 2020 data on the number of children, in the millions, not being educated worldwide. The numbers of both boys and girls not being educated has been steadily decreasing. (UNICEF 2020) This graph includes trend lines which indicate the decrease will continue into the future. The trend lines indicate that they will likely cross at some point in the future further indicating that the rate at which the number of girls not being educated ($R^2=0.718$ UNICEF 2020) is decreasing faster than the rate of boys not being educated.

($R^2=0.78$ UNICEF 2020) This once again speaks to the availability of resources. If a classroom has 25 seats and there are 30 students, how is society making the decision of who will get the seats? If there is a finite number of seats and there is a concerted effort to balance the gender

differential of the sexes being educated, where are the boys supposed to go when it is not possible to create more seats?

Boys and Girls NOT Being Educated (in the millions)



Further investigation should be made into the cooperative gender socialization norms being taught in schools, by peers, parents and families and how they are conveyed by the media.

Investigation should be done on the effectiveness of aligning the gender socialization norms being conveyed from each source correlating the alignment of groups with the time at which positive behavioral change can be noted.

In order to address the problem of gender socialization norms and practices having a negative impact on development and mental health of male children, the problem itself must first be acknowledged on a multi-tiered, societal level and the roots of these gender socialization norms must be investigated to find ways to rebuke them and design new norms. The new gender

socialization norms should promote intimacy, expression and honesty while still supporting the healthy aspects of masculine gender norms (for example, competitiveness) and they must be supported and propagated through a multi-tiered societal approach to be effective. Positive, equal gender socialization that accounts for both natural inclination, flexibility, healthy interactions and overlapping traits will come after boys and girls are given the ability to redefine their roles. Unconscious bias direct behavior has propagated gender socialization norms. (Spekton 2018) By consciously redefining these norms, gender role awareness becomes increased and by consciously modeling the new redefined gender roles, implementing behavioral change will be more effective.

Conclusion

How can these masculine gender socialization norms be corrected? There is evidence that small group participatory activities focusing on gender reflection and gender norms (Kågesten et al 2018) can have a positive effect on boys. The open conversation and positive gender modeling seems to build equitable gender attitudes (Kågesten et al 2018) quickly but the attitudes do not always translate into behavioral changes. For behavioral changes the programming of gender socialization in children, both male and female, societies, media, schools, families and peers would have to occur, preferably simultaneously. A universal, systemic change is called for. Gender socialization messages are embedded in culture and need systemic change to be addressed effectively to cause sustained behavioral changes. Such gender socialization norms as male entitlement, privilege, control and power over women need to be addressed in addition to “boys own victimization, trauma, social exclusion and marginalization.” (Kågesten et al 2018)

Fixing unequal gender socialization norms cannot be done by addressing the problems of only one of the sexes. Gender socialization problems of both sexes must be addressed on a societal level in order to implement change and move towards equality. There is a problem, however, the majority of the data comes from high-income and low-income countries that have the resources to study these issues. Less evidence has been collected from middle income countries. Collection of information from a wider range of sources would be able to correlate the behavioral patterns across socioeconomic and cultural differences which would more clearly assign the behaviors to a gender. There is also a lack of structure in the collection of behavioral evidence. Guidelines for what ethnographic observations and data is collected and when it is collected should be standardized to gain a better perspective of the broader picture.

If one sex is promoted or favored over the other than those who deviate from the gender socialization norm will have an increasingly difficult time to succeed. As society changes its' gender socialization norm towards girls, the pressure on boys is much greater. The gender socialization norms for girls leave less room for positive gender socialization norms for boys. Gender socialization norms are perpetuated on a finite number of topics and resources. For example, in the structure of a company, there is one CEO. If girls are being instructed by gender socialization channels that they can expect to be that CEO, boys are essentially being told that they will not be that CEO. There is only room for one CEO. Society needs to change the playing field by creating gender socialization norms that are not hierarchical in nature. The success of one gender should not rely on the failure of the other. There would be room within society for both genders to succeed.

Programs in India, Northern Uganda and Nepal have been implemented promoting an emotionally engaging curriculum (Kågesten et al 2018) taught to both boys and girls. In all three cases, the curriculum has resulted in positive behavioral changes migrating to a more fair and equitable environment.

“Changing masculinity norms require motivating boys to challenge the power and privilege conferred to them as well as addressing the social ridicule and stigmatization of those who do not live up to the ideals of masculinity” (Kågesten et al 2018) while simultaneously redefining female gender socialization norms to create a positive, complementary environment and these new gender socialization norms must be supported by a socioecological approach which would include whole communities. Females have benefitted from the open conversation redefining the gender socialization norms and now it is time to have that open conversation about male gender socialization norms; encompassing both male and female roles in society, their natural natures and the complexities of masculinity. By destigmatizing the conversation about masculinity, the isolationist behavior of males that can lead to so many possible negative outcomes can be avoided and the rate of feeling successful as males and as people can increase.

To address violence caused by imposing negative masculine socialization norms, preventative strategies such as redefining gender socialization norms will allow for more freedom of expression (American Psychological Association (APA) 2018) replacing negative masculine constructs with ones that promote healthy behavior and condemn violence. (Krug et al 2002) Identifying risk factors and implementing positive masculine gender socialization norm modeling. Lastly, condemn social norms that promote male dominance, violence and negative competition. (American Psychological Association (APA) 2018)

The key to correcting the current situation is a multi-level systemic correction of negative masculine gender socialization norms migrating away from stoicism, toughness, lack of emotional sensitivity and negative self-sufficient attitudes towards a masculine gender socialization norm that promotes healthy competition, expression, intimate relationships, shared burdens, inclusion, and the de-stigmatization of mental health help. This needs to be a universal masculine gender socialization reform supported by parents, peers, families, media, cultures and societies to avoid the negative feelings of frustration and futility boys and men are often left feeling under the current masculine gender socialization norms.

To address our original questions: Gender socialization norms and societal practices do impact development, success and mental health of male children. There is a correlation between male violence and gender socialization. In the case of a decrease in the success rate of men and an increase in the success rate of women, there does not seem to be a correlation.

The codependent value of positive gender socialization norms for boys and positive gender socialization norms for girls need to be investigated simultaneously. By addressing both issues simultaneously, the positive behavioral changes may be accelerated.

An investigation into increasing the spectrum of psychology professionals with the goal of balancing the gender and demographic field must be done. An increase in psychological professionals that represent the cultural and gender differences of the people they are helping while still modeling positive gender socialization norms could be more effective. The establishment of what the healthy gender socialization norms are without trying to “correct” inherently masculine behavior to conform to society needs to be completed..

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