SOCIALIZATION AND GENDER ROLES WITHIN THE FAMILY: A STUDY ON ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR PARENTS IN GREAT BRITAIN

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ABSTRACT

The way we are, behave and think is the final product of socialization. Since the moment we are born, we are being moulded into the being society wants us to be. Through socialization we also learn what is appropriate and improper for both genders. The vast literature on this topic has pointed out a consolidation of the debate. It allows us to identify important problematic bonds relative to the achievement of their gender identity throughout their adolescence and to build reciprocity and complementarities between the sexes and the valorisation of fundamental contexts such as family. Socialization is a relational process between adolescents and parents and its objective is to build identity [in this case gender identity]. If the topic of gender is extremely important for the overview of sociological studies, it is even more important if it is seen from an intergenerational point of view speaking about gender socialization.
This paper will focus on how in particular family and parents' attitudes mediate traditional gender roles and the effect of their attitude towards gender roles.

Keywords: gender, socialization, youth, generations, family, stereotypes, gender roles.

INTRODUCTION

This paper[1] is concerned with understanding different dimensions of gender socialization, which vary in their impact on the young and which are essential to build up a gender identity.
The aim of the article is to analyse how the gender socialization process deals with the structural and symbolic dimension of the relationship between parents and children. More precisely I intend to address the following questions:
[1] what are the patterns of association between socio-economic conditions and parents' gender attitude?
[2] what are the direct impacts of parents' gender attitude on the young, taking into account the latter's socio-cultural conditions?
Using survey data, I will show different behaviours and strategies, among parents and sons.

1 1 SOCIETY AND GENDER ROLES

According to psychologists such as Sandra Bem [9], one cognitive process that seems nearly inevitable in humans is to divide people into groups. We can partition these groups on the basis of race, age, religion, and so forth. However, most of the times we split humanity on the basis of gender. The first thing we instantly determine, when meeting someone new, is their gender.
This process of categorizing others in terms of gender is both habitual and automatic. It's nearly impossible to suppress the tendency to split the world in half, using gender as the great divider.
When we divide the world into two groups, males and females, we tend to consider all males similar, all females similar, and the two categories of "males" and "females" very different from each other. In real life, the characteristics of women and men tend to overlap. Unfortunately, however, gender polarization often creates an artificial gap between women and men and gender roles that are very difficult to change in time.

1.1 1.2. Gender stereotypes for males and females

Stereotypes are representative of a society's collective knowledge of customs, myths, ideas, religions, and sciences [30]. It is within this knowledge that an individual develops a stereotype or a belief about a certain group. Social psychologists feel that the stereotype is one part of an individual's social knowledge. As a result

of their knowledge, or lack of knowledge, the stereotype has an effect on their social behaviour.

Stereotypic behaviour can be linked to the way that the stereotype is learned, transmitted, and changed and this is part of the socialization process as well. The culture of an individual influences stereotypes through information that is received from indirect sources such as parents, peers, teachers, political and religious leaders, and the mass media [27] [30] [47] .

In order to understand stereotyping, an individual must first be made knowledgeable about the definition of a stereotype[2]. Stereotyping is how we perceive each other, especially individuals outside our group. What we believe to be "normal" is associated with who we are hanging out with. Which are usually our friends and social networks [25] [27].

Gender stereotypes are related to cognitive processes because we have different expectations for female and male behaviour [15] [45] and the traditional gender roles[3] help to sustain gender stereotypes, such as that males are supposed to be adventurous, assertive aggressive, independent and task-oriented, whereas females are seen as more sensitive, gentle, dependent, emotional and people-oriented.

Here we will deal with the opposite male dominance and feeling superior to women. Of course, not all men have power and arrogantly dominate women; indeed, according to Miller [32], many men are dominated by "the system" and considered disposable. Also, women are given certain advantages and "protected" in many ways that men do not enjoy. Clearly, each sex has and utilizes power in certain ways and we are getting more equal, but, clearly, the sexes aren't equal yet [1, 6]. The most recent suggestion to solve this problem is to completely disassociate gender from all personality traits. [28][29]

Within the two career families [3] of today, the women-are-inferior attitude is muted and concealed, but the archaic sex role expectations are still subtly there. The old rules still serve to "put down women and keep them in their place." [22]

By nature, men and women have some biological differences, but it is life experience that reinforces or contradicts those differences. The

truth lies in differential socialization, which claims that males and females are taught different appropriate behaviours for their gender.

2   3 GENDER SOCIALISATION

Socialisation is the process, through which the child becomes an individual respecting his or her environment laws, norms and customs [7] [36] [37].

Gender socialisation is a more focused form of socialisation, it is how children of different sexes are socialised into their gender roles [23] [30] and taught what it means to be male or female [18] [33].

Gender socialisation begins the moment we are born, from the simple question "is it a boy or a girl?" [24]. We learn our gender roles by agencies of socialisation, which are the "teachers" of society. The main agencies in Western society are the family, peer groups, schools and the media. In respect with gender socialisation, each of the agencies could reinforce the gender stereotypes. Gender differences result from the socialization process, especially during our childhood and adolescence [7].

The classical example of gender socialisation is the experiment done with babies that were introduced as males to half of the study subjects and as females to the other half. The results are interesting and quite disturbing at the same time. The participants behave differently according to the sex they had been told [24]. [23].

These findings show that other people contribute a lot to how we see ourselves only on the basis of gender.

3   *3.2   The   family   as   gendered relationships: influences   on   gender socialization process*

It is said before that **parents** are the primary influence on gender role development in the early years of one's life [28] [31] [38].

With regard to gender difference, the family in fact, unlike other groups, is characterized by a specific way of living [19] [21] and constructing gender differences through a process that is surely biological, but also relational and social. The family is " the social and symbolic place in which difference, in particular sexual difference, is believed to be fundamental and at the same time constructed " [39]. In particular, in the family the gender characterization reflects the individualities of the parents.

The family is therefore a "gender relation" [41]. In the family, the relation with the father and the mother assumes therefore one fundamental importance in

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[2] A stereotype is defined as an unvarying form or pattern, specifically a fixed or conventional notion or conception of a person, group, idea, etc, held by a number of people and allows for no individuality or critical judgment [35].

[3] Traditionally, men are supposed to earn a living to support their families. They are to be aggressive and in charge. Women belong at home cooking, cleaning, and caring for children. They are to be submissive and weak. Gender stereotypes such as these pervade society today [26].

the definition of the gender belonging, because it's the first experience of relation with males and females. Gender identities and the expectations towards male and female roles are socialized within the parents-children relationship; such expectations are today various and new[4] compared with the past [34].

The models from which fathers and mothers take inspiration need to be verified because "the crisis of the paternal authority has given more space to the father in shaping the educational relation with the child. They think that the important thing is to converse and to build convincing representations of the world" [12]. The gender socialization inside the familiar relations evidences therefore also the temporal dimension of the transmission of styles and expectations between parents and children [40] [42]. The parents' generation, in comparison with the child's one, can highlight marked differences too. Parents today probably have different expectations from those their parents had, and their children have even more different expectations. We must go deeper into the matter on how transmission of gender differences happens today and how the gender belonging is constructed..

If such differences seem to diminish on the one side, on the other instead they move on different areas in comparison with the past [3]. Between children in fact the sexual difference "produces various models of belongings and continuity" [3], and they are today completely different from those of the previous generations.

In the past, families had different educational demands[5] for their sons and daughters after puberty , they then tended to differentiate them in the sense to promote the autonomy of the males and the dependency of the females. It was implicit that the boy should realize himself, even if against familiar ties, while the girl had, in some ways, to accept and to conserve them. This difference has always favoured the fact that young women lived their desire of autonomy with a sense of guilt and of independency with intolerance [4] [11].

A child's parents are the first socialization agents he or she will come into contact with. Parents teach stereotypes through different ways and behaviour[6]: "the way they dress their children,

they way they decorate their children's rooms, the toys they give their children to play with, their own attitudes and behaviour" [26].

4   3.3 A relational approach to gender roles socialization

The most important aspect of the sociological reflection is the ability to use the concepts elaborated in the theoretical debate at an empirical level, realizing "a hermeneutic" connection between the interpretative framework and social life.

Gender socialization can be read like a "relational process" [19].

It is unavoidable that in the transformation a simplification is put into effect, a reduction of the complexity of the terms in game, because you need to lead back to the factors that explain a social phenomenon to one more rigid pattern of reality: in order not to fall into the trap of the merely casual interpretation it is necessary to always place, to the centre of attention, the relation between different factors that concur to see the phenomena from more points of view, in a multidimensional perspective .

The relational model [20] is assumed like the point of observation to verify the hypotheses in order to characterize those that are the gender socializing outcomes in the contemporary society.

Within a risky society [8] the relational model considers every phenomenon as the outcome of a process in which the challenges and the resources are put implicitly or explicitly in comparison. The risk therefore is given from the relation of adequacy/inadequacy between challenges and resources.

That appears clear if it is believed that every choice is linked to multidimensional situations, which are relational contexts, in which the phenomena are networks of phenomena and every node represents interlaces of challenges, ties and resources.

Speaking about challenges and resources in gender socialization simplifies reality and circumscribes a point of view from which to observe a phenomenon, but it always takes into account that is a relational phenomenon, in which more dimensions are intersected.

Consequently the gender socialization process is divided into two orders of factors, one leads the challenges and the other the resources, in the hypothesis that behind every phenomenon there are however the intentions of the actors who arrange in a more or less balanced way, with reference to the context of options that delimits the action, objects to reach and strategies of participation.

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[4] This has induced to support the idea of "disarmament of the father" [46]. So the mother plays the most important role because she often finds herself carrying out "traditional paternal functions, must propose models of identification to the sons, that sometimes are competitive with the roles carried out from the father. The mother offers to the adolescent son, that begins to be interested in how to live in society, also her model of employment, to produce yield, to be interested in the public thing [16]. This has modified the representation of the male and female roles in time.

[5] They then tended to differentiate them in the sense to promote the autonomy of the males and the dependency of the females.

[6] See also [2, 5, 17, 22, 43 and 46]

Figure 1 Analytical framework for the relationships between socio-demographic attributes, gender attitude parents and gender attitudes youth.
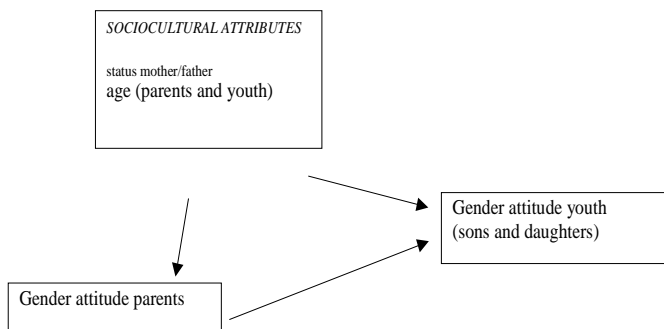
4. MEASURING GENDER SOCIALIZATION

I seek to measure the different dimensions of gender socialization using one of the most reliable British survey data sources, namely the British Household Panel Survey [BHPS][7].

The initial problem was to build up a data set containing "family data", that is to say constructing a matrix with father, mother and son for each household. Using Stata[8] it has been possible to create a new matrix importing data from various BHPS files and obtaining a triads file. So, at the end I obtained a new file with 717 families with both parents and at least one child.

The second step was the identification of variables for the analysis. To have a synthetic measure for gender attitude I decided to make some indexes in order to use them as numerical variable in multivariate analysis.

The data in the BHPS allow us to differentiate the dimensions I have illustrated above. As shown in the notes, there are eight questions of an ordinal nature for parents' gender attitude and two questions for the youth.

I have selected questions[9] that most closely match the gender socialization dimensions. With indicators for traditional gender attitude father and mother, and traditional gender attitude for the youth, some items reflected similar types of organisation that were rarely endorsed and were summed together, with the sum score being treated as a single continuous item.

5. Exploring gender relationships

In order to analyse the data, I used multiple regression analysis. In our case, three multiple regression analysis will be required - one for **father traditional gender attitude,** one for **mother** and one for **youth**[10].

Table 1 Regression coefficients of Father Gender attitude

	Beta[11]	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
Model			Tol.	VIF

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[7] The survey began in 1991 as the premier British panel study, and samples around 5,000 households and 10,000 individuals each year. Although some of the original sample members (OSMs) moved out, new members are added each year, including those OSMs who reach 16 years of age by the time of interview and all adult members of the OSMs' new household should they leave their original household to form new families. Thus, each year, the sample is appropriately representative of the population as a whole. I have used also the Youth Panel, started in 1994 that considered young people in the sample of the BHPS. I used wave 9.

[8] Thanks to dott. Elena Bardasi (ISER Institute) for helping me do this.

[9] Some variables have been recoded in order to have the same direction within the gender attitude dimension.

[10] Splitting the sample into males and females

[11] * p<0.05, ** p<0.01 and *** p<0.001; the same below.

	Beta	Sig.	Tol.	VIF
[Constant]		,000		
status father[12]	,09*	,032	,822	1,216
status mother	-,12**	,003	,817	1,224
age father	,15***	,000	,992	1,008
mother traditional gender attitude[13]	,34***	,000	,925	1,081
Traditional homework division[14]	,16***	,000	,931	1,074
R²=0.23				

	Beta	Sig.	Tol.	VIF
[Constant]		,000		
status father	,04	,345	,807	1,240
status mother	-,09*	,036	,806	1,241
age mother	-,04	,283	,927	1,078
father traditional gender attitude	,36***	,000	,904	1,106
division homework	,14***	,000	,920	1,087
R²= 0.19				

The **traditional gender attitude of the father** [tab. 1] is strongly influenced by the traditional gender attitude of the mother [0.34]. Further, the more traditional the housework division is the more stereotyped the father is [.16].

The status of the father is very little significant [.09] and even the mother status is more important and has an inverse [-.12] effect on the father gender attitude.

In the case of our father sample, it is clear how the relationship and the gender attitude of the mother are very important in determining the father's gender attitude. Even traditional housework division has a direct effect [0.16] on traditional gender attitude. The mother status has a double effect. A direct [-.12] and an indirect one[15] [−.15] and the total effect of the mother status is −.27

In the end the mother's status is very significant in its direct and indirect effect.

Table 2 Regression Coefficients of Mother gender attitude

	Beta	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
Model			Tol.	VIF

The **traditional gender attitude of the mother** is strongly influenced by the traditional gender attitude of the father [p= 0.36]. Further, the more traditional the housework division is the more traditional the mother's gender attitude is [p=0.14].

The status of the mother is very little significant [0.09] as well as the status of the father [0.004] but in the opposite direction. The mother's age and status have instead an inverse relationship with the mother's traditional gender attitude. The younger and the higher the status of the mother, the more the traditional gender attitude diminishes. It is clear that father's gender attitude has a predominant effect.

Table 3 Regression coefficients of Youth traditional gender attitude [Males]

	Beta	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
Model			Tol.	VIF
[Constant]		,003		
status father	-,01	,879	,870	1,150
status mother	-,18***	,002	,831	1,204
traditional gender attitude father	,18**	,003	,856	1,168
traditional gender attitude mother	,16**	,006	,854	1,171
youth self-esteem[16]	-,11*	,052	,928	1,078
youth age	-,09	,109	,950	1,053
R²=0.20				

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[12] Variables used for index building: Last amount received, Highest educational qualification, Employment status on Sept 1, year ago (same for mother).

[13] Variables used for index building: Pre-school child suffers if mother works, Family suffers if mother works full-time, Woman and family happier if she works, Husband and wife should both contribute, Full time job makes woman independent, Husband should earn, wife stay at home, Children need father as much as mother, Employers should help with childcare (?=.75) (same for father).

[14] Variables used for index building: Who is responsible for childcare, Who cares for ill children, Who does the grocery shopping [couples], Who does the cooking [couples], Who does the washing/ironing [couples], Who does the cleaning [couples] (same for father).

[15] Calculated as: -0.12 + (-0.09*0.34) = 0.15

[16] Variables used for index building: I feel I have a number of good qualities, I certainly feel useless at times, I am a likeable person, I don't have much to be proud of, I am as able as most people, I can usually solve my own problems, I am inclined to feel I am a failure, At times I feel I am no good at all (?=.88) (same for females).

The analysis[17] conducted on young males shows how the traditional gender attitude of parents is the main determinant on youth gender attitude [0.16 mother and 0.18 father]

In this case the mother's status has a very strong inverse direct effect [-0.18] and also a slight indirect effect [-0.09*0.16= - 0.01]. Summing up these effects we obtain – 0.19, which is the strongest effect of the gender attitude of the mother.

Interesting the self-esteem strong inverse effect [- 0.11] in contrasting a traditional gender attitude. Also if the age is higher the traditional attitude will diminish [-0.09].

Table 4 Regression coefficients of Youth traditional gender attitude[18] [Females]

	Beta	Sig.	Collinearity Statistics	
Model			Tol.	VIF
[Constant]		,000		
status father	-,18**	,002	,784	1,275
status mother	,01	,913	,751	1,332
gender attitude father	,11	,053	,772	1,295
gender attitude mother	,17**	,005	,769	1,301
youth self-esteem	-,13*	,018	,978	1,023
youth age	-,33***	,000	,978	1,022
R²= 0.22				

As for the males, parents' gender attitude has a strong effect also on young women [0.17 mother and 0.11 father]. So the more traditional the parents are, the more traditional the children will be.

Further, another interesting aspect is that the status of the father is much more influent on the females' traditional gender attitude than on the males' one. In fact the direct effect is – 0.18 and the indirect effect is 0.01 and the total effect is – 0.17. So a higher status is directly a good resource for females because this seems to reduce a traditional gender role transmission. Instead the total effect of the mother's status is near to 0 and insignificant. The traditional attitude of the mother is very important on the contrary.

Other two aspects are relevant in this analysis: the age and the self-esteem.

These two factors have a very strong effect in contrasting traditional gender attitude in females, more than in males. The more self confident and higher in age these females are, the less stereotyped attitude they have towards gender in the family. This means that growing up in a contemporary western society helps females to look for their own way of being women and

for new relationships with men.

5 CONCLUSIONS

I have tried, in this paper, to conceptualise and measure gender socialization. In fact the concept of gender socialization can be operationalized in three distinctive ways, as forms of transmission from parents to children, which depend on personal attitude and resources [self-esteem, age, status], and also on family life [housework gender division]. Technically, I have used path analysis models to measure scores of gender attitude dimensions from their categorical/ordinal component variables.

First, the paper shows that it is possible to operationalize these different dimensions using the BHPS, and that there is indeed quite good correlation between these types of gender attitudes; this implies that family life and relationship are very important and sometimes more important than structural variables.

Secondly, if one weighed the relative importance between relational and structural factors influencing gender socialization process, the evidence would strongly suggest that it is the former rather than the latter that is of greater explanatory power.

An interesting further consideration is that a cross-gender relationship between fathers and daughters, mothers and sons has emerged as significant in determining traditional/non traditional gender attitude.

During adolescence the identification with gender models goes through different relational mechanisms, which for example in this case stress more the relationship with the opposite gender.

The relation with the same gender seems to have a strong reinforcing power on an already existing traditional attitude; the relation with the parent of opposite sex instead could be a strong factor in reducing stereotyped attitudes. Probably because gender in the family is a relationship and could assume different features, sometimes a challenge, sometimes a resource.

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