

Gender stereotype

Introduction:

We need to get sensitized about gender stereotypes as they perpetuate inequality and reinforce difference between men and women, rather than viewing individuals as people first and equals. Stereotypes put pressure on boys and girls to conform to certain notions of 'masculinity' and 'femininity' which can really limit and restrict young children. Stereotypes influence the activities children engage in, their interests and skills and ultimately the roles they take in society as adults. So for this we need to be aware of what are gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes are the given societally derived characteristics of an entire group based on gender. Gender stereotypes are culturally defined expectations about sexes, which begin developing early in life and become more extensive as children grow older. Gender stereotypes are the beliefs that people have about the characteristics of males and females. The content of stereotypes varies over cultures and over time. These expectations are often related to the roles that the sexes fulfil in the culture.

Though it is frequently misunderstood, gender refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for a person based on their sex. 'Sex', on the other hand, refers to the biological determinants – chromosomes and genitalia – that distinguish males and females. When we talk about gender stereotypes, we are referring to the socially accepted ideas of what is appropriate for a boy or a girl based on their sex. While gender is often discussed as exclusively masculine or feminine, it should be recognised that gender identity exists across a continuum.

Although it may seem harmless, labelling attributes and behaviours as inherently masculine or feminine can flow on to influence the work and roles that are considered to be 'normal' for each gender. Examples of socialised gender roles are that women are assumed to be better suited to career roles, such as nurses and teachers, and are expected to take on domestic duties, and that men are believed to make better leaders and often seen as the natural 'breadwinners'. These gender roles and stereotypes are reinforced through a number of societal channels – toys, sports and games, clothes, books, the media, education, teachers and families.

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Children learn some aspects of stereotypes at a very young age. By the age of 2 ½ –3-years, children show evidence of having some rudimentary knowledge of the activities and objects associated with each sex. Children's gender stereotypes of activities and occupations develop quickly during the preschool years, reaching a very high level by kindergarten. During the elementary school years, gender stereotypes broaden to include sports, school subjects, and personality traits. With age, children become increasingly knowledgeable about gender stereotypes and yet the rigidity of their stereotypes declines as they increasingly recognize the cultural relativity of these norms (Huston 1983). Some evidence suggests that boys hold more rigid gender stereotypes than girls and are held to more rigid ideals than girls. In adolescence, flexibility in stereotypes fluctuates in response to two opposing forces—increasing cognitive flexibility tends to increase adolescents' flexibility in applying stereotypes whereas increasing pressure to conform to stereotypes in preparation for sexual roles and adult status increases adherence to stereotypes (Ruble and Martin 1998).

Girls

EXPECTATION Sensitive, emotional & physical fragility, carer, focus on appearance, gentle and “proper”.

SOCIALISATION Toys focused on: baby dolls, cooking, princesses, art and craft. Social reinforcement through: social media, TV, authority figures.

GENDER ROLES High value on appearance (being pretty), Being compliant (nice, sweet, gentle), Submissive roles (mummies / princesses).

Boys

EXPECTATION Strong, adventurous, practical, rough, leader, non-emotional “boys don’t cry”, like to get dirty.

SOCIALISATION Toys focused on: action, construction, technology, fighting & conquering. Social reinforcement through: social media, TV, authority figures (parents and carers).

GENDER ROLES Men must be physically strong, aggression is an acceptable part of male behaviour, a willingness to put themselves in harm’s way (superheroes / action figures).

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Effects:

- Gender stereotypes shape self-perception, attitudes to relationships and influence participation in the world of work. In a school environment, they can affect a young person's classroom experience, academic performance, subject choice and well-being. The assumptions we make about boys and girls may be conscious or unconscious and can result in students being treated differently or offered different opportunities based on their gender.
- Gender stereotypes can have a direct impact on children's development, health and wellbeing. For example, the encouragement of boys to participate in more active, gross motor skills activities, certain sports, or problem solving activities can allow them to develop their muscle power, but also learn skills like negotiation and decision making. It is vital to also ensure that girls are as actively encouraged to participate in similar activities so that they are also able to fully develop these skills. Likewise, it is important to encourage boys to participate in diverse activities that develop skills in areas like arts/craft, and caring and nurturing.
- Pressures to conform to what is considered 'normal' for one's gender can also have wider health implications, particularly for young girls. The societal importance that is put on women and girl's looks and appearance can lead to concerns over body image, and the potential development of eating disorders.
- The research available on children's and adolescents' academic gender stereotypes suggests that from a young age, individuals categorize math and science as 'boys' subjects' and language arts and spelling as 'girls' subjects' (e.g., Plante et al., 2009; Rowley et al., 2007). Researchers suggest that gender stereotypes about subjects influence students' achievement (Bigler and Liben, 2006).
- The influence of the endorsement of gender stereotypes on students' achievement has been explored in studies examining boys' endorsement of masculinity stereotypes. Many stereotypes about masculinity (e.g., aggression, physical toughness, and emotional stoicism) are in stark contrast to the compliance and responsiveness required of students in the classroom. Consistent with the hypothesis that high endorsement of these stereotypically masculine ideals is negatively related to achievement, US middle-school boys with average levels of achievement tend to

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endorse traditional masculine stereotypes at a higher rate than boys classified as 'gifted' (Shepard et al., 2011). Similarly, extremely masculine gender-typed US boys are less engaged in school and have lower achievement than their less extreme male peers (Ueno and McWilliams, 2010). Endorsing stereotypes about masculinity – and behaving in those stereotypically-masculine ways – appears to be related to lower academic performance.

- For both boys and girls, there may be confusion regarding gender identity if a child doesn't fit into the gender mould that society has created for them, and bullying of those children who don't conform to what society says it means to be a boy or a girl.
- Gender inequality can have a profound impact on the mental and physical health of women and girls, and has been identified through international research as the underlying cause of violence against women. Evidence shows that levels of violence against women are significantly and consistently higher in societies, communities and relationships where there are more rigid distinctions between the roles of men and women.

Agents: How they can influence

- Family dynamics can especially influence gender specialization. Parents of sons are more likely to emphasize the paternal breadwinning role for males. The effects of parental expectations of gender roles can especially be seen in the role children play in household duties. Girls generally do more housework than boys and the type of housework assigned to children largely depends on gender. Thus, household dynamics further advance gender role expectations on children. Children's toy preferences are significantly related to parental sex-typing, such as girls playing with dolls and boys participating in sports. The way that parents communicate with their children are different based on children's gender, parents are more willing to express their emotion and use emotional words more frequently toward girls than to boys. Also, when both children have encountered difficulty, girls are encouraged to solve problems based on focusing on internal emotion expression and adjustment while boys are encouraged to deal with external entity problems. So parental role is very vital in handling with gender stereotype. Parents can raise children without stereotypes and can make them unlearn the biases they might learn from school or other sources. For this, parents should be first aware of the gender stereotypes which are unknowingly present in them and can get transferred easily to their off springs.

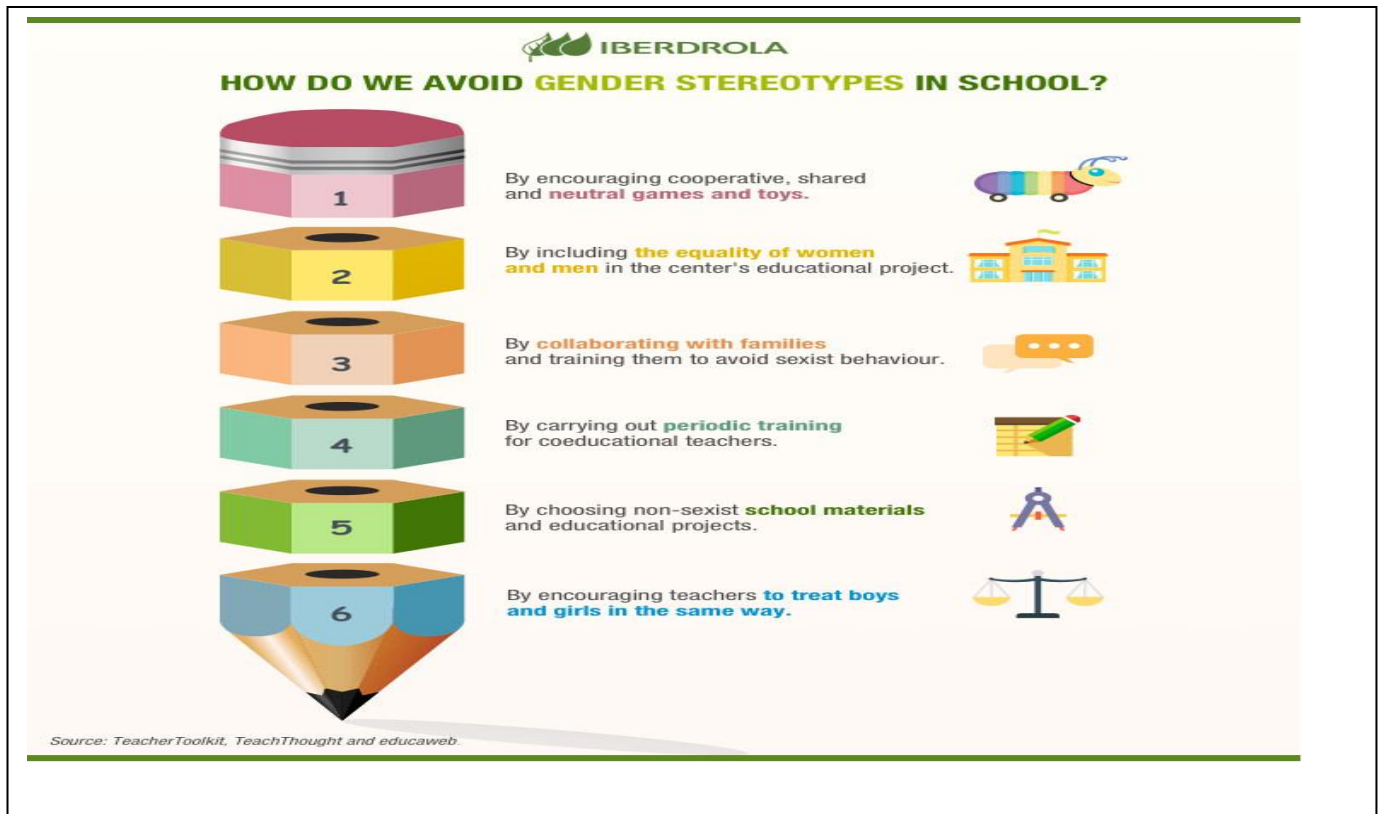
Parents should expose children both boys and girls to variety of toys and not restrict them to gender specific toys. Both girls and boys should be introduced to female role

models, may be a female police or a female scientist and also male role models who have opted for different professions, like a male dancer or a male chef. This is important to make them realise that both boys and girls are capable of taking any profession or to excel in any field, depending on their interest and not based on some assumption about their capability. Parents should make sure, children should learn that there is no gender specific chore and to be independent we should learn all household works. Children should be encouraged to have all kinds of hobbies and parent- child quality time should be spent in exploration of these. Parents should be more cautious about what they speak and how they behave with each other which would be a reflection of their own beliefs on gender stereotype.



- The seed of stereotypes is sown in education, and education is where the solution lies. Therefore, as UNESCO states in its Global Education Monitoring Report, the support of governments is crucial. For example, curricula, textbooks and teacher training programmes should be periodically reviewed to ensure that gender stereotypes are not perpetuated and apprenticeship programmes, tutorials, networks or scholarships should be considered to promote and encourage the incorporation of women. Within schools, the role of teachers becomes essential when it comes to

providing quality, gender-neutral education that promotes students' welfare and respect for professional standards.



- When a child enters adolescence, peer group plays a very important role in shaping his thoughts and behaviour. So peer group might play an important role in shaping gender stereotype. This can be rectified by parents and teachers by having open conversations and proper education.
- Society as a whole plays important role in promoting gender stereotype either prominently or in a subtle way. Media and advertisements also play important role in promotion of gender stereotypes. Movies often portrays women as the damsel in distress rescued by a strong and brave man, or women as carrying out the household works while men as the bread earners can have a huge influence on the movie buff

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youth of today. However these mediums can again be used positively to promote an egalitarian attitude.

Importance of spreading awareness among youth and promoting gender equality:

- Breaking down gender stereotypes from a young age helps to stop the negative consequences of inequality and discrimination as children grow into adults; and this means that children aren't limited by expectations based on their sex. By providing children with environments that encourage non gendered norms and expectations, children can feel more accepted and celebrated for their individuality. They can broaden their aspirations and be more likely to reach their potential.
- As per India's Census 2011, Youth (15-24 years) in India constitutes one-fifth (19.1%) of India's total population. India is expected to have 34.33% share of youth in total population by 2020. So youth constitutes a large section of Indian population. This provides them the opportunity to bring about a social change if they themselves can bring about a change within.
- So it becomes important to channelize the youth in a proper direction with proper upbringing and education. If the youth can advocate against gender stereotype and have an egalitarian attitude towards gender, in future they can provide with a generation without gender stereotypes.
- Youth had the power to influence others and to work for others so encouragement of non-stereotypical behaviour based on gender, in them might help to mobilise them for a greater cause and build a better society.