Speaking to Children:

The Relationship between Adults' Talk and Children's Gender Identity

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Gender is one of the most influential and basic social labels (Winter, 2015), and children learn early on to name, sort, and identify themselves, as well as others, by gender (Berk, 2019). Moreover, parental figures have a direct impact on their children's understanding of gender (Winter, 2015). Parental attitudes towards gender have the power to change the course of their childlife in both negative or positive aspects. Given that children start to understand gender at a young age, and that parental attitudes towards gender influence children's gender identity by how parents communicate about and model gender-based roles, understanding parent-child communication surrounding gender, is pivotal for understanding how gender identity is formed as well as how (and if) it is maintained as children grow up. Understanding more about how communication around gender affects children can aid in raising the next generation to be more socially conscious about gender equity.

Research has shown that children start to understand gender around 18 months (Berk, 2019). Additionally, they have a developed idea of their own gender starting around ages two to three years old (Yanof, 2000). As such, what affects male and female identifying children to adopt differences in gender-based traits and behavior, separate from their biological predispositions, is learned and built on starting at a very young age. In one such illustration, Yanof surveyed children and reported that, whereas girls may point to a Barbie and say the doll is "like her," they do so, not based on the genital similarities between them and the doll but rather the socialized gender similarities they share, showing girls' ability to understand the concept of gender was more developed than their understanding of biological sex.

Whereas the present study focuses on gender, Yanof's study reveals that it is important to differentiate between sex and gender. Sex is described by the World Health Organization as "characteristics that are biologically defined" (Gender and Genetics, 2010); gender is "based on socially constructed features" (WHO, 2010). "The World Health Organization recognizes that there are variations in how people experience gender based upon self-perception and expression, and how they behave."

Rubin (1975) defines sex and gender in another way. She claims that "biological differences are fixed, but gender differences are the oppressive results of social interventions that dictate how women and men should behave. Women are oppressed as women and 'by having to be women'" (Rubin, 1975, p. 204). Additionally, Rubin classifies gender as "socially imposed division of the sexes" (p. 179). Other authors define a "coat-rack" view of gender: the premise that our biological sex as humans provides "the site upon which gender [is] constructed" (Nicholson, 1994, p. 81). Millett (1971) says that the differences in gender "essentially cultural, rather than biological bases" (pp. 28–29) that result from differential treatment and notes that it is "the sum total of the parents,' the peers,' and the culture's notions of what is appropriate to each gender by way of temperament, character, interests, status, worth, gesture, and expression" (Millett, 1971, p. 31).

The present study looks further into parental messages that children receive about gender (i.e., what it means to be a girl/woman or boy/man). Specifically, it focuses on memorable messages that young adults recall getting from their parents/parental figures as they were growing up. Memorable messages are defined as specific communication that may be remembered for extremely long periods of time and that people perceive as a major influence on the course of their lives (Cooke-Jackson & Rubinsky, 2018). Exploring memorable messages

about gender can help show the long term impact that early parental messages may have on people's understanding of gender and its connection to who they are. In particular, the research analyzes differences in the memorable messages male and female identifying people remember. If there were differences in the memorable messages received, the resulting evidence would indicate that there are differences in the way parents communicate to their children based on the child's gender.

Schematic Processing: Differences in Labeling

As children grow up, they categorize behaviors or activities based in part on beliefs about how each gender should act and what activities align for them to participate in (Berk, 2019). The beliefs a child holds about categorizing traits as male and or female are a result of their gender schema. Schema are cognitive representations of something created over time that affect how people perceive the world around them. Gender schema, a term introduced by Burns (1981), references how society affects what a person believes is correct for each gender in regards to behavior. As such, gender schema are socially constructed and can vary based on the culture of which they are a part of.

"Gender Schema Theory is a cognitive theory of gender development that says that gender is a product of the norms of one's culture" (Bem, 1981). Gender schema theory highlights the idea that human's gender development comes from their environment, including parents. The theory also focuses on, not only how the environment plays a role in peoples' gender development, but how this begins at a young age (Starr, 2017). Gender schema theory was created in order to highlight how masculinity and femininity are socially constructed (Bem 1993). "Specifically, gender schema theory argues that because American culture is so gender polarizing in its discourse and its social institutions, children come to be gender

schematic (or gender polarizing) themselves without even realizing it" (Starr, 2017). There are five main areas in which gender schema theory has been applied: development, discrimination/stereotyping, occupations, historically marginalized populations, and mental health and trauma (Starr, 2017).

Moreover, gender identities tend to be intersectional with other salient group affiliations. Intersectionality is defined by Merriam Webster as "the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups," and research findings are incomplete without considering all aspects of the subject's identity (Chow, 2007). For example, when studying communication around gender, someone's gender could be the reason for a difference in communication but it could also be the fact that that person held different religious views alongside gender, with specific ideas about, for instance, what it means to be a Muslim man. Kimbreley Crenshaw is the pioneer when it comes to coining, defining and putting into practice the theory of intersectionality. In Crenshw's words, "Intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here, and a class or LBGTQ problem there." (Crenshaw, 1991)

Gender as a Social Construct

Social theorists have found that a large part of how children categorize themselves as gendered comes from their environment (e.g., Fagot, n.d.). The development of gender schema may start from the first moments of life and, at first, take a nonverbal form. For example, as of about 1920, US children are often placed in blue or pink blankets at birth (Chiu et al., 2006). LoBue (2011) found the connection of colors with gender has an impact. LoBue studied over 200

children, aged seven months to five years old, to gain information about the relationship between children's preferences and their actions. In the study, there were eight pairs of objects differently colored, with one pink object included in each pair. By the age of two, girls, when asked to pick between pairs, were likely to pick one of the pairs that had pink in it. Female children's selection of pink makes sense, as many societies correlate the female gender and the color pink. (LoBue 2011; Winter, 2015).

That the color preference/connection is socially constructed as evidenced by studies that show children prefer primary colors such as blue or red to secondary colors such as pink or orange (Franklin et al., 2008; Pitchford & Mullen, 2005; Zentner, 2001). LoBue's (2011) study is important because it displays how something society views as an integral female preference, liking the color pink, is socially constructed, and that if not for environmental factors, children would choose primary colors. Some of these factors could include culture, family dynamics, and socioeconomic class. Young children's assumptions of gender are not made from biological cues but, rather, from socially imposed cues such as clothing, hairstyle, or other stylistic choices (Berk, 2019).

Nonverbal gender-based cues early in life have other long-term effects. Many careers differ in gender composition, with men filling more engineering and leadership roles, and women filling more "helping style roles" (Birns, 1976). Children's toys may influence these career choices. Elizabeth Truss, the Minister of Education for England, warns against gender-typed toys specifically and the long term effects they can have on careers of men and women (Paton, 2014). Truss states that "gender specific toys 'put girls off' maths and science" and warns against things such as a "boys oriented chemistry set" (cited in Paton, 2014). Furthermore,

Truss emphasizes the effect that parents have on their children's gender identity through the nonverbal cues they present to their children such as what toys they give to their child.

Truss argues for parents of young girls to buy them Legos, what has been sex-typed as a male toy, in order to promote engineering and other stem based careers. Truss is an advocate for desegregating the interior of toy shops by gender (Paton, 2014). Research supports the basis of Truss' claims. Studies have shown, for example, that male children are more likely to have parents' enforcement of male sex-typed toys, such as playing with cars, and stronger negative reactions, a form of nonverbal communication (such as replacing a toy) when interest in playing with non sex-typed toys is shown (Fagot & Hagan, 1991; Lytton & Romney, 1991; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974).

Social cognitive theory suggests that, as children develop the capacity to differentiate between males and females, modeling plays an important role in processing and applying this knowledge (Schunk 2012.) "Social cognitive theory, used in psychology, education, and communication, holds that portions of an individual's knowledge acquisition can be directly related to observing others within the context of social interactions, experiences, and outside media influences" (Schunk, 2012). Such knowledge is also affected by what important life figures communicate to us.

Parent-child Communication

An intergroup communication perspective focuses on the importance of the identity-forming groups a person belongs to and how this impacts communication (Gallois & Watson, 2018). "Parents are likely the most influential figures in a child's life when it comes to modeling gender through both implicit and explicit cues" (Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016). For most people, their earliest influence is their parents.. Parents are the first teachers of their children.

More specifically, parent's communication with each other and to the child about behavior and styles of discipline are some of the first messages children receive.

For the first several years of a child's life, they depend on their parents or guardians for everything. But how do parents, as first influencers, impact gender identity? Korner (1973) said one way that this occurs is that "mothers respond differently to boys and girls from the moment of birth" (p. 19). "There is little doubt from the literature that there is constant parental reinforcement of what culture considers to be sex appropriate behavior" (Korner, 1973, p. 19). Renzetti and Curran (1992) showed that parents also describe their newborns using gendered language, such as referring to their daughter as "tiny or delicate" or referring to their son as "strong" or "alert" (p. 32).

One hypothesis about the difference between mothers and their parental treatment of male and female children is that mothers subconsciously want their daughters to be similar to them, therefore modeling their behavior to reflect that while expecting differences from their son (Chodorow, 1995). A study done on children at age six months that shows mothers of girls touched, spoke to, and comforted female children more than they did with male children (Goldberg & Lewis, 1969). The Goldberg and Lewis study is also an example of differing nonverbal communication cues surrounding gender. Children pick up on the smallest of things and from a young age can differentiate a happy face from a sad one (Beck, 2019).

Parent Identity

The literature just cited shows that children learn a lot from their parents' subtle messages and cues regarding gender roles (Epstein & Ward 2011; Gelman et al., 2004). But this may occur in different degrees based on the parents' behaviors and attitudes. For instance, children who experience earlier sex-based preferences due to parental ideology are more likely to adopt more

stringent sex-based preferences themselves. Sex-based preferences are those that align with society's perception of how each sex should act, such as girls playing with Barbies and boys playing with cars. (Forman-Brunell, Whitney, Dawn, 2015).

Children who encounter early sex typing are more likely to see females as less aggressive than they see males (Paul Halpern & Perry-Jenkins, 2016). Likewise, Fulcher (2010) studied middle class mothers and their children to understand the relationship between mothers' gender schema and that of their children. Most of the children's gender schemas were similar to the gender schema of their mothers. The study consisted of children aged 7 to 10 whose mothers held traditional ideas about gender roles, and the children of these mothers reported career aspirations that fall into "traditional gender roles," following their mother's ideology (Fulcher, 2010).

Sutfin, Fulcher, Bowles, and Patterson (2007) studied children whose parents (both heterosexual and lesbian) had a less traditional gender schema. The researchers found that children aged four to six whose parents held an egalitarian (human equality/non-traditional) view of gender roles were also more likely to hold a similar egalitarian mindset. An additional study of 158 mothers and their fifth-grade children found that mothers with egalitarian ideologies provided equal help to sons and daughters with math homework, whereas mothers who were highly educated and held traditional views gave more instruction to sons than daughters (Lindberg, Hyde, & Hirsch, 2008).

Memorable Messages

This review has shown that gender is learned early in life, in part through the messages children get from their parents (either implicitly through nonverbal cues or explicitly through language). From this, children develop gender schema that organize their beliefs about what it means to be a

boy or girl. Parents do not communicate the same messages about gender; whatever form they take, however, these schemas can last across a person's lifetime. Moreover, a study done by Holman and Koenig Kellas showed that in many cases what is most important and meaningful coming from parent child communication, is not what is said but the child's perception of the conversation, especially when it comes to subjects that could be more sensitive such as sex or gender (Holman & Koenig Kellas, 2018).

The basis of Holman and Koenig Kellas's study was looking into the memorable conversations children had or did not have with their parents about sex. Likewise, one way to tap into both the long-term effect and differences in parental communication is to hear the memorable messages about gender that people recall their parents communicating. Parents and guardians are the primary influencers of children's socialization through childhood and, specifically, how their children first learn about gender. Indeed, they may be the only people their child communicates with about gender until a later age (Heisler, 2014). Parent-child communication is also unique because it exists within an established relationship, a form of intergroup communication. Messages may be memorable, because they result from such a central relationship (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017).

It is common for memorable messages to revolve around sex and gender or related constructs (Rubinsky, 2017). Heisler (2014), for instance, studied memorable messages from mothers related to sexuality. The author found that in many instances the memorable messages people remembered reflect stereotyped behavior or double standards based on biologically-determined sex and gendered beliefs, including that women should be more sexually reserved or abstinent then men. Not all research on memorable messages about gender is in the context of the family, however. Rubinsky and Cooke-Jackson (2017), for instance, studied the relationship

between the memorable messages that 186 women reportedly received about sexual health, how these memorable messages in turn affected their sexual behavior, how these messages about sexual health influenced their identity, and what memorable messages they wish they received.

The findings of their study showed a reported connection between memorable messages and behavior. One female participant reported overhearing a male say that "sex without a condom is so much better"; the participant said she then held the belief that if a man wanted to not wear a condom she would be okay with that in order to not "inconvenience him" (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017), even though intercourse without a condom could be harmful to the women's personal sexual health. Another women in the study recounted her sex-ed class in middle school where she was taught that, if she had sex before marriage, she would be giving a "secondhand gift" to her husband. The woman reported that the message shaped her identity and how she viewed sex for a large portion of her life and caused her to struggle with understanding herself as a sexual being (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017).

Some participants in the study mentioned parents' communication specifically. One women from the study said, "I think my family in particular have really stunted my own sexuality. because of them, I also grew up believing that queerness was inherently wrong, and that i was wrong for being uninterested in sex" (#184, 22-year-old, bisexual, cisgender woman) (Rubinsky & Cooke-Jackson, 2017). This report shows her view that her sexual identity was substantially impacted by the memorable messages she received from her parents.

Fathers' participation in their sons' lives may also have a large impact on the sons' gender identity and behavior (Pleck, 2010). Odenweller and Rittenour (2018) conducted a study surrounding the memorable messages passed from father to son that affected the son's perception of what it means to be a man. The study included over 150 men around the age of 25 who were

surveyed about the memorable messages they remember hearing from their fathers. The most frequent themes of the memorable messages were work ethic and responsibility. Some of the most commonly reported messages were “men should work hard,” and “it’s your responsibility to take care of your family” (Odenweller & Rittenour, 2018).

The majority of memorable messages passed from father to son, such as work ethic and responsibility, embody masculine themes based in self-reliance, being a family provider, strength and finding occupational success (Doyle, 1997). There were also memorable messages passed from father to son exemplifying feminine themes, however. Themes with a feminine character included an emphasis on honesty and authenticity, with one common quote being “real men cry.” (Odenweller & Rittenour, 2018). The presence of feminine messages in father-son communication is more recent and shows an evolving relationship between some fathers and sons (Morman 2002).

Studying specific memorable messages, through parent-child communication, and discovering how the messages differ by gender, has provided great insight into how parents communicate to children based on gender and surrounding gender. Studies such as Pleck’s (2010), Morman’s (2002), and Odenweller and Rittenour (2018) on memorable messages in the father son context and studies such as Rubinsky and Cooke-Jackson’s (2017) that study the memorable messages women encounter. Where the literature is lacking is comparing memorable messages about gender communicated to children from parents based on the sex of the child in order to compare the differences in messages that male and female identifying children receive. Looking into the differences in memorable messages that children receive based on their gender will shed light on why gender disparities exist today, why institutionalized sexism still appears and why societal gender biases occur. My study also looks into the effect that these

memorable messages have on the children who receive them, as they are kids, as they have grown up and how they anticipate these messages will be affecting them in the future. Finally my study will observe the juxtaposition of what messages participants received from their parents versus what messages they hope to impart on their future children.

Research Questions

RQ1: Are there differences in how male and female identifying children report being communicated to, in their early years, by their parents/guardians as displayed by the memorable messages they recount?

RQ2: Do these differences in communication, if they exist, reportedly affect children's behavior and identity? If so, how?

Methods

For this study, I used a qualitative survey approach. Marshall and Rossman, 2011, discuss the benefits of a qualitative survey in their video segment, *When Should a Researcher Choose a Qualitative Approach?*: "And so it's that complexity and the meaning that people make of their lives and their circumstances that can really come through through qualitative methods." The surveys are from primary data sources, my participants (Merrigan & Huston, 2020). In my study, I examine the memorable messages people recount receiving in childhood from their parents and or caregivers that they believe impacted the development of their gender identity.

My survey was conducted online, consisting of open and closed-format questions that are identical for every participant regarding the memorable messages sourced from research. (Merrigan & Huston, 2020). The closed format questions are easier to analyze as well as less time consuming for the survey taker to respond to. The open format questions allowed the participant to share more of their personal experience and get deeper with their responses which

is crucial for understanding the messages that they received from their guardians. When a participant has to fill in their own answer it is more demanding for them and requires more thought, which could be a deterrent to completing the survey, so I tried to limit the number of open format questions. There is also a fill in the blank section on the survey, where the participant was able to input the memorable messages they remember that I may not have included.

The first block of questions asks the survey takers about what memorable messages they remember, verbal and nonverbal as well as what they remember about their initial gender identity formation. Following that block, I had another set of closed-format questions regarding how these memorable messages impacted them and made them feel. Finally, I had a section where participants could say what they wish had been communicated differently. At the end of the survey, I had a section for a person to identify their parents' gender and their own race, ethnicity, religion, and if the participant has siblings. This provides important context when trying to discover if there are intersectionalities within the findings.

I recruited 38 survey participants who are currently in the Department of Communication at the University of Washington. I recruited them through sending out an email to the COmmunications department members asking for survey participants with a short blurb about what my survey would be focusing on. I analyzed the survey results for the most frequent memorable messages and their reported impacts to see if there is a significant difference in messages that male and female identifying participants received. 18 of the survey participants identify as female, 7 identify as male and one selected other for gender identification. My survey participants are undergraduates at the University of Washington, making the age range likely 19-23.

Findings

Exploratory questions. After gathering the data from my research there were many interesting and pivotal discoveries in regard to how adult's speech affects children's gender identity, view on gender and view of themselves. I recorded the most memorable messages participants remember being communicated with them, verbal and/or nonverbal. The data show that the majority of memorable messages received included prescriptive behavior from the parent to child, meaning that the messages utilized should or should not style of language. An example of this was "men should not show emotion." Another example of this was "women should stay pure for their future husband."

Out of all of the participants people either felt positive or negative about how their guardian spoke to them about gender but very few were neutral. 12/16 participants who answered this question said memorable messages affected them as they grew up, 3/16 said no, and 1/16 were neutral. The average age participants remembered starting to think about their gender was 4-5 years of age. Some positive buzzwords associated with people's first memories of gender were, "right, connected, powerful, who I was, natural. Some of the negative frequented buzzwords were "not good, unaware, confused, uncomfortable, polarizing." Memorable messages participants received about female behavior were, "women are supposed to be beautiful," "Bad behavior from boys is the woman's fault," "being skinny is more important than self esteem," "Women aren't leaders," "Women must give sex to their man," "Need to shave your body hair, girls aren't hairy," "Don't get bulky." Memorable messages regarding expectations of the male gender included, "Boys don't wear dresses," "Men need to be strong and hold back emotions," You need to cut your hair," "Take care of their family," "To be adequate you must be good at sports and physically fit."

Research questions. My thesis studied two main research questions. My first research question, are there differences in how male and female identifying children report being communicated to, in their early years, by their parents/guardians as displayed by the memorable messages they recount, was answered by survey questions 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, and 16. The memorable messages that male and female identifying children received from their parents have been shown through the data to be completely distinct based on the child's gender. The male children were given messages promoting themes of strength, both mental and physical, and to not display traits society deems feminine, such as emotionality, having long hair, and sensitivity. The female children were given messages of being polite, staying quiet, prioritizing beauty and being thin. Your goal should be to find and please a husband.

Several stand out quotes from verbal memorable messages for males were, "When I would play dress up with my brother my dad would sometimes get mad and say "boys don't wear dresses/ makeup" or something along those lines," Need to be muscular to be attractive, need to show strength, need to hold back emotions." Some standout verbal messages female children received were, "I remember rarely being called strong and a lot of my worth being connected to appearance, such as my weight and hair (and presenting as feminine as possible). My need to accept bad behavior from boys and now men has been ingrained in me since I was young because 'girls mature faster' etc. My mom has especially ingrained in me to value appearance as one of the most important parts of my identity, including teaching disordered eating, low self esteem and fat phobic and body dysmorphic views"; "The discussions surrounding why sexual assault committed by men against women is that women should not be out late, should not wear "promiscuous" clothing and should not "tease," as in consent is not a

continuous action but once given cannot be taken back"; and "I once talked about being a leader in something for what it was but my uncle told me that's not something a girl should do."

The survey also took into account nonverbal messages that were received. Some nonverbal messages recounted by male participants were the following: "When my mom gets mad she tries to hit me. I think it's b/c she knows I can take it. (for reference, I'm nearing 6ft 200+ lb and she's a dainty 5'1" MAYBE 140),``"constantly dressed 'like a boy,'" given stereotypical boy toys, and shown stereotypical boy media. Some nonverbal female messages recounted were, "my mom would tap my stomach to non verbally tell me to suck it in, which she would not do to little boys or men," and "Whenever I was to speak loudly she would give me a stern look and tap my knee or shoulder signaling for me to be quieter but that's usually as far as she takes it." These quotes display the differences between the memorable messages given to boys and girls.

My second research question was do these differences in communication, if they exist, reportedly affect children's behavior and identity? If so, how? The answer found in short is, yes. This question was answered by survey questions 14, 15, 17, 19, 46, and 48. As I mentored earlier, 12/16 participants said the messages affected them greatly. The words, uncomfortable, guilty, and self doubt were consistently reported through the survey responses when participants were asked how these messages made them feel. Some responses from female participants on how these messages made them feel were, "This has made me feel powerless, hopeless and disgusted with myself. I have felt much more responsible for the actions of men in my life than I should have. Regarding sexual harassment and assault, this self blame usually made me feel dirty," "I didn't question it when I was younger, but now that I am an adult with sexual preferences, it makes me feel both angry, yet sometimes guilty," "It made me much more

submissive which has deeply affected my ability to stand up for myself," "frustrated and a little helpless -- like I'm prisoner to the expectations of my sex/gender," "I struggle a lot with being self-conscious and feeling like I don't look feminine enough...I also apologize way too much," "it's made my relationships incredibly difficult – I've dated men who generally are cold and indifferent to me and I dismiss their problematic behavior."

Responses from male participants on how these memorable messages made them feel, impacted them were, "they have probably created an unconscious sense of women being fragile or more delicate than men," "often inadequate, since I didn't look like a superhero or play basketball like Michael Jordan, not sure how, but almost certainly affected- hard to not carry lifelong impact from childhood messages," I didn't like violence outside of sports." In regard to present day many of the women surveyed expressed how these messages still affect the, present day, "I choose careers that are generally more feminine," "I think it will just continue to affect the way I view my outside image to the world, "I will no longer allow it to affect me in the future or my future decisions, "I think I will continue to struggle with asserting myself and speaking up as well as my romantic relationships," "I will continue to feel slightly guilty, and I don't believe I will be able to get my guardian to understand my views on gender, and "I hope they stop affecting me."

All of the men surveyed answered that the memorable messages they received maybe or did not affect them today. This is an interesting difference. It causes me to wonder if the reason men recount not remembering the messages is due to the nature of messages they relied on, emphasizing not being emotional and mental strength and toughness. Another theory could simply be that the memorable messages women receive are more poignant and long—lasting due to the female's oppression and are placed as less important/influential than men in society. Most

survey participants who had siblings of the opposite gender than them reposted receiving different messages. This suggests that the parents' messages toward their children were gender based not just a bias of the parent/guardian.

Discussion

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There was an interesting juxtaposition found in the data between the messages participants recall being told by their parents and what they wish they were told as well as what types of messages regarding gender they wish to impart on their children going forward. "I wish my parents had expressed it is ok to stray from gender norms, "I wish I was more empowered," "I wish there was less emphasis on it," "Wish I was told I could do anything being a girl," "the difference between gender and sex," "Wish my parents didn't make me feel weird about boys."

Several quotes listed from how participants wish to impact their children, not the topic of gender, "I'd like to let them know that they can express their gender identity in any way they please," "I think I wouldn't push anything onto them. Rather, I would give them options of what they want to do. Like presenting two different styles or dress, activities, or practices that may be gender stereotyped so they can decide for themselves,``"I know I will raise my children differently than my parents, I think many people feel that way. I know I will be very open with allowing my children to identify as they wish and educating them when the time comes on the different ways they could identity," "that their gender identity is utterly their own to mold and nobody can tell them otherwise," and "Differences between gender and sex, freedom to grow and change without invalidating anything, love and support regardless of gender identity." I think these results show great promise in the hope that future generations will be able to come to terms with their gender identity in loving and safe environments. This is huge because once kids are

raised without negative connotations, proscriptions or restrictions on what each gender can and cannot do, maybe society can start to break down the gender norms that have been continually reinforced through conscious and unconscious teaching from parent to child.

The parent's motive would be an interesting avenue to research further as to why parents give memorable messages that are harmful to their children. Do they occur due to the messages that adults received as children and so now they pass those on to their children? Are the messages a way to try to get children to conform in order to maintain the status quo, or are the messages a form of tough love to try to help children to fit in in a society where it has been shown that being a minority or going against the grain can make life "harder" and perpetuate a desire to protect your child from being outcast?

Limitations of my study include the size of it. I had 38 survey respondents, and not all of them answered every question. Due to this it was nearly impossible to gain insight on intersectionalities that could have affected memorable messages participants received in addition to their gender, such as race, religion, and nationality among others. One insight we found recur several times were memorable messages surrounding the theme of purity given to women of Asian nationality. I think it would have also been beneficial to get more male responses as there were more female responses so it was easier to get data for the female gender than male. Limitations of my study also include recall error, meaning that due to surveying young adults on childhood experiences, what memorable messages reported could be part-truths or one person's memory that has been altered with the passage of time. Limitations to my research could also be sample size, not getting a high enough total response rate, or achieving sufficient diversity of samples.

Conclusion

Gender is one of the most influential identifiers. It has been shown that parents play a large role in how their children view their own gender identity and in turn take on what gender and gender roles mean to them. The findings of this paper highlight the effects that parents' verbal and nonverbal communication has on shaping children's gender identity in the current world and paint a picture of the steps that could be taken to make the formation of children's gender identity positive and inclusive. With such antiquated and recurrent messages found in the survey it begs the question of will things change and individuals gender identity become more inclusive and respected or is history doomed to repeat itself and if so, why?

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