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**SANITIZING GENDER STEREOTYPES THROUGH GENDER SENSITIZATION: A STUDY  
ON SOCIALIZATION FORCES TRANSMITTING GENDER ROLES STEREOTYPES**

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**ABSTRACT**

Gender stereotypes are socially accepted gender norms about certain characteristic traits, attributes and associated behavior patterns determined or limited to a particular group depending on their sex. This pre-conceived idea of gender role is widely accepted and generalized to perceive different role or behavior as masculine or feminine. Apart from biologically determined role, gender role has social and cultural connotation to perform by different gender as designed and expected by the society. This normalization of gender stereotyping leads to gender discrimination. The prevailing prejudice to consider male is superior to female, affects women and girls in terms of their lower socio-economic position, workplace inequality and individual status in the society. The socialization of gender role stereotypes is transmitted by socialization forces and agents from one generation to other. This paper aims to study the socialization forces which tend to transmit gender role stereotypes. It seeks to analyze how gender role stereotypes are staggering female self-images and esteem, making them vulnerable to extreme sexism and sexual violence. This paper examines the role of gender sensitization in raising awareness about such stereotypes and inequality.

**Keywords:** Gender roles, gender stereotypes, gender discrimination, gender sensitization.

**Introduction**

To uproot gender stereotyping it is essential to change behavior and question the pre-determined gender roles by raising awareness on gender equality. It is hard to decode these deep-rooted normative beliefs which we learn since childhood and practiced unconsciously considering it as obvious truth. This gender role stereotypes are transmitted from generation to generation through socialization process and agents, making it normal and obvious. While parents, teachers and peers are the socialization agents, family, school, college, media, workplaces, religious institution and community are the socialization forces fixing gender identity through their prescribed gender roles.

Sensitization of gender aware us to look the flaws of gender roles and develops a fresh and accurate insights into the socialized gender stereotypes. It helps us to enquiry into the socialized personal beliefs about gender and look into the positive and negative aspects of gender stereotyping. Developing gender sensitivity will enhance our awareness on gender justice and attainment of equality among different gender. It aids to unlearn the abiding conceptions and norms relating to gender and spawning respect for all individuals

irrespective of their sex. Raising sensitivity towards gender will fill the gender gaps and will help to dwindle the gender stereotyping rampant in family, society, educational institutions, workplace and all other spheres of life.

The striking effects of gender stereotyping have heavily on women and girls, resulting lower self-esteem, self-confident and self-image of themselves. They accept the stereotypes and think of themselves as inferior to men. Conforming to a lower status in the society, girls and women accept the given norms by society as true, imparting greater life outcomes.

### Discussion

Gender discrimination starts from the family itself through parents, their roles and their behavior and perceptions towards different sex. Parent preference of sons over daughters lowers a girl's concept of herself as a person. Right from the family, a girl is denied the right to proper food, education and economic independence. Parents transmit gender roles stereotypes to their children and children adopt their parents as the gender ideals according to their gender. Parents treat boys and girls differently, dress them differently and teach different manners to them. Parents treat boys and girls different toys, books, hair style even different colors of clothes. This learning of gender discrimination through parents in family has a lifelong impact on different gender about their social image, role or characteristics determined arbitrarily by the society. Family is the first place and parents are the first teachers to make boys and girls socialized according to dominant gender stereotype in their society. As these behavioral patterns, attitude, images are taught in subtle ways, they seem natural truth, hence goes unquestioned, adopting, conforming and believing in gender stereotyping.

The kind of toys that parents give to their boys indicate their social roles that is car, guns, plane, preparing them to face the outer world. Similarly the kind of toys that parents provide to girls that is dolls, kitchen sets is a clear indication to prepare themselves for domestic space or home-makers. The do's and don'ts for boys and girls are different and implemented in early childhood. Handing over many advantages to boys give them a sense of superiority and power over girls. And imposing many disadvantages and limitation for girls make them less confidence, self-esteem and realization of being inferior to boys.

Apart from parents in family, teachers in the school also play a dominant role in promoting gender stereotypes. Like parents, teachers also teach gender roles stereotypes by assigning different activities, punishments and expectations for boys and girls. Boys are expected to excel in literature. Even if, some colleges and universities offer different subjects for different gender. And girls and boys have different games to play, creating the gender divide. In curriculum and text books, but men are depicted as doctors, postman, farmers, soldiers, providing them much public space and association of power and physical strength. Girls or women role or portrayal is associated with soft jobs and nurturing skills, limited them to domestic spheres. Hence females are expected to be dutiful, dependent and emotional; and in contrast, males are expected to be dominant, independent and less emotional. Children's books are also different for different gender, while for boys there are action fictions, detective fiction; but for girls there is fairy tales. And fairy tales peddle stereotypes by portraying women as 'damsel-in-distress' or witches. Girls are portrayed as beautiful princess waiting for her 'prince charming'. This reinforces the bias about females that they are dependent on male and they can only get social and financial independence through marriage. Lack of strong female characters, less books by female authors, gender biases presented in examples, texts through biased language socialize girls and women as inferior.

Whether in films, advertisement, radio, television, news media or social media, gender stereotyping is visibly present. Media contributes heavily to portray the public image of gender according to their gender roles. Even in video games, cartoons and digital media create gender images for different gender; give the glimpse of how we perceive social realities. Media plays a vital role in influencing the mass. So gender stereotypical portrayal established and confirmed the gender roles to be male and female, force them to perform in a certain manner, personality codes, behavioral patterns and occupational roles as accepted by the society. The typical portrayal of male as stronger sex, the dominant protagonist, economically independent in

the outer world; and women as weaker sex, meek, 'damsel-in-distress', economically dependence, emotionally and physically weak, more often in the domestic space, bring gender discrimination or gap to the forefront.

Though gender stereotyping affects both men and women, but adverse impact on women is huge and horrible. It affects women negatively, resulting in low self-esteem, self-image and task-expectancy. It binds them to four walls of the home as homemaker and caretaker, limiting their ability, talent and creativity only into the domestic sphere. Lack of education, financial freedom, career choices and self-confidence hinders the development of the female gender and equality in the society.

The portrayal of girls or women as sex object in movies, advertisement and media further degrades their position and place in the society. The sexual objectification of women and girls dehumanizes their identity as an individual. The hyper-sexualized images of women in films and particularly advertisement psychologically affect girls and women in bringing negative self-image. The depiction of women as an object of male sexual desire promotes sexism leading to sexual harassment, rape and many other forms of sexual violence.

The 'male gaze' is clearly visible in movies and advertisement with the depiction of woman as over-sexualized, meek, passive, stupid, submissive, evil seductress and femme fatal stereotypes. To quote, Budd Boetticher, "What counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents. She is the one, or else the concern he feels for her, who makes him act the way he does. In herself the woman has the slightest importance." Lack of strong or real women character or biased representation of women images in cinema has negative impact on girls and women, making them vulnerable to various sexual exploitation and violence.

Starting from family, school, college, society and media; gender stereotyping is everywhere, depriving male as well as female to grow naturally, exhibit their talent or creativity to the fullest, experiencing their real human roles. Where the gender roles impacted male positively, but it impacted female negatively, limiting their space, ability, opportunity in life. Gender discrimination is the starting point of suppression and subjugation of women through patriarchy. The patriarchal ideology to have control or power over women by men contributes to the advancement of gender related violence against female. Female infanticide, nutritional deprivation, domestic violence, dowry deaths, sexual harassment, molestation, acid attack, rape, trafficking of girls, forced prostitution, sexual objectification and exploitation all are targeted towards one gender, female; resulted from gender stereotypes and gender discrimination.

From family to school, to workplace women face multidimensional discrimination and limitation due to socially constructed gender roles. The social structure of gender discrimination is a tool in the hand of patriarchy to subordinate women.

"Although official cultural norms uphold the values of equality and tolerance, cultures continued to transmit camouflaged messages of the inferiority of historically subordinated social groups through stereotypes and other imagery. These deeply ingrained schemas commonly structure attitudes, perception and judgment despite the individual's conscious good will (Valian 1998)." (Paul, 7)

The root cause of every kind of violence against women whether its rape, sexual violence, acid attack or domestic violence is gender stereotyping of women as inferior to men. Hence it gives men the power over women and acceptance of uneven gender norms of violence against women as normal. This gender discrimination against women takes away women's self-worth and confidence; the extreme forms of sexism make women vulnerable to various kinds of physical and mental violence; the objectification of women denies women their subjective entity, reducing them to objects only. To ensure gender equality in society, it is essential to know and correct the general attitude towards women, eradicating gender prejudices and giving equal values and rights to women as men. Gender equality is the key to achieve gender equality among genders. And gender sensitization makes people aware about gender stereotypes and inequalities in our society. It is a tool to break all pervasive gender role or stereotypes.

Gender sensitization must start from home; parents should break the chain of transmitting the seeds of gender inequality which is there in their attitude, role and behavior. Every parent must unlearn their gender

biases to make their children learn gender equality. Parents must not bring any kind of discrimination among their male and female child. Educating children about gender equality both in theory and praxis through their actions, thinking and behavior by parents is indispensable to smash the gender stereotypes. As children accept their parents as role models and imitates them, so parent should refrain themselves from gender biases. They should set themselves as examples as gender neutral and should not follow the typical gender role or work division. They should teach their children to pursue their dream and trust their abilities and talents; not merely accept the roles or works which are acceptable by the society. The seeds of equality among gender must be sown by the parents to make their children gender sensitized.

Like parents, teachers too play vital roles to build perceptions, values and influence thought process of children. Because home and educational institutions are the foundations for children's way to life and understanding gender concepts and relations. Educational institutions, teachers, educational policies, educational materials heavily influence students' conception of gender stereotypes. So it is essential to promote teachers about bringing awareness about gender discrimination and imparting gender equality to children. Gender sensitization is needed to minimize the gender gaps and questioning the rationale behind gender stereotyping. Gender-sensitive learning materials must be included into the school curriculum, correcting gender stereotypes portrayals of male and female. Text books mostly include the image, examples and portrayal of women in stereotypical roles of mothers, nurses, teachers; but men as doctors, farmers, postman, pilots; promoting the idea that men have public and women have private spaces. And language used in textbooks and learning materials is not gender inclusive. Hence these kinds of sexist biases in content, images and languages must be removed from the school curriculum. Gender sensitive training programs must be introduced to parents, teachers and children to ensure gender sensitive environment or society.

The idea of men's place in public sphere and women's place in private sphere immensely influence the working atmosphere for women in public sphere. Women are vulnerable to sexual exploitation and violence in workplace. Gender sensitivity programs must be promoted for gender equality in workplace. It will create safe working environment for women and ensuring equal opportunities and participation of women in workplace. Men and women should be treated equally, equal opportunities and distribution of work and pay is essential to achieve gender equality in workplace. Proper addressing of sexual harassments against women in workplace must be immediate and punishable.

As media has immense impact and influence on masses, it should be gender sensitive. Films, advertisement and print or social media is seen to be boosting most gender stereotyping, roles and discriminations, so more conscious efforts to be taken on creating gender equality in the media. From commodification of women in advertisement, gender stereotyping roles in films, gender biased songs, item numbers degrading women, false representations of women and sexuality, film industry, media are biased towards gender and gender roles. The 'male construct' or 'male gaze' in portrayal of women as sex object, as weaker sex must be identified and corrected. More strong women characters, real portrayal of women, women as subjects should be required to gain gender equality in media and films by breaking the institutionalized patriarchal norms. The portrayal of women as passive, submissive and compromising character should be stopped. The completely demeaning item numbers representing women as object or more accurately sex object should be called out. Sexist dialogue, vulgar lyrics, misogynistic ideas of stalking, eve-teasing, molestation as normal are often propagated through films. Domestic abuse, marital rape sexist jokes are common in cinema which needs awareness and correction. To make a gender neutral society as a whole media and media and film industry should gender sensitive in their representation, contents, language and characterization.

## Conclusion

Raising awareness about gender equality should be encouraged and practiced in family, school and institutions for a better society to live in. Gender sensitization encourages male and female as equal individual. It will aid to break the deeply engrained views, values, behavior towards gender. It will aware the socializing agents like parents and teachers about the negative effects of gender stereotyping. All the socializing forces

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like home, school, media, language must be freed from gender biases and stereotyping through gender sensitization. Breaking out the culturally and socially structured gender roles is vital to achieve gender equality in society.

Gender sensitization opens up our rational to question our conception or beliefs which socially accepted as true. Gender sensitization training programs should be the need of the hour for parents, teachers and adolescents to change their gender biased beliefs and developing new and fresh look towards gender and gender roles. Creating gender awareness will positively build attitude, behavior, and belief towards gender equality. Change of perception to treat everyone equally irrespective of gender should be put to practice. It needs conscious efforts to mold our behavior and reflects gender neutrality in our action. Apart from adding gender sensitivity materials for schools; gender sensitivity programs and workshop for teachers, parents and workplace, changing the mindset is the key to gender equality. And a gender neutral society is essential for social and economic development of a country.

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