

Summary

The Content Analysis of Mother-Adolescent Pairs' Gender Role Perception

Hatice Işık-Baş
Social Sciences University of
Ankara

Başak Şahin-Acar
Middle East Technical
University

Ayça Özen-Çıplak
TOBB University of Economics
and Technology

Adolescence is defined as a conflicting process, which is dominated by identity formation and role confusion (Erikson, 1963). In this period, adolescents frequently turn to their personal backgrounds and overview their experiences in their close environment in the past (Fivush, Marin, McWilliams, & Bohanek, 2009). Gender identity development is an important part of identity formation. Adolescents benefit from values and expectations that the environment and culture offer. The effect of family on adolescents' attitudes about gender roles is undeniable (see Gümüş, 2006; Updegraff et. al. 2014). Considering the fact that children spend more time with their mothers (Tennenbaum & Leaper, 2002), they have an important effect on their children's learning about gender roles in their cultural context.

The current study aimed to investigate adolescent-mother pairs' future projections about adolescents' gender role, by specifically asking what kind of a woman or a man would they want the adolescent to be in the future- both to mothers and adolescents. For this reason, participants in mid-adolescence, for whom gender roles become salient, were recruited.

Method

Participant

For the current study, 61 mother-adolescent pairs were recruited. The mean age of the mothers was 44.24 ($SD = 5.34$) and the mean age of the adolescents was 14.70 ($SD = 1.08$; $N_{boys} = 30$).

Procedure and Data Analysis

After participants were informed about the study, mothers and adolescents were interviewed individually. In the interviews, adolescents were asked what kind of a woman or a man they would want to be in the future, and their mothers were asked what kind of a woman or a man they would want their daughter or son to be in the

future. All answers were audio-recorded and transcribed, and their meaningful statements were determined. Similar statements were combined in order to create thematic units. In addition, frequency of each meaningful statement under the thematic units was reported. Finally, those thematic units were combined to construct more comprehensive categories (femininity, masculinity, neutral; Bem, 1974; 1981; 1983) in terms of their semantic relations. For the %20 of the data, the inter-rater reliability score was found as 88.7%.

Finally, participants' answers were analyzed with a non-parametric statistical test (chi-square) in order to compare the frequency of categories that is used by a) mother-adolescent pairs b) girls-boys c) girls' mothers-boys' mothers.

Results

The Results of the Content Analysis

Femininity

When mothers were asked what kind of a woman or a man they would want their child to be in the future, mothers of boys ($n = 30$) reported 46 feminine characteristics in total. The most commonly used feminine characteristics for boys by mothers are *becoming affectionate/loving* (7/30, 23.3 %, $f = 12$) and, *quite* (5/30, 16.66%, $f = 7$). When the same question was asked to their sons ($n = 30$), they reported 25 feminine characteristics in total for themselves as a future projection. Some of the most commonly used feminine characteristics boys used for themselves were *becoming quite* (4/30, 13.33%, $f = 8$) and, *tactful/sensitive* (3/30, 10%, $f = 5$).

When mothers were asked what kind of a woman they would want their daughters to be in the future, mothers of girls ($n = 31$) reported 12 feminine characteristics in total. Mothers emphasized that they would want to view their daughters as *well-groomed* (2/31, 6.45%, $f = 3$), *understanding* (2/31, 6.45%, $f = 2$), and *affectionate/*

loving (2/31, 6.45%, $f = 2$). On the other hand, girls ($n = 31$) used 26 feminine characteristics for themselves in the future, including being *well-groomed* (7/31, 22.58%, $f = 13$) and *someone who would take care of everything about her child* (4/31, 12.90%, $f = 6$; see Table 1).

Masculinity

After mothers of boys were asked what kind of a man they would want their sons to be in the future, they ($n = 30$) used 122 masculine characteristics. Some of those characteristics were *being strong* (8/30, 36.66%, $f = 21$), *being influential* (6/30, 20%, $f = 19$), and *taking the responsibility of the family* (6/30, 20%, $f = 16$). When the same question was asked to their sons ($n = 30$), they used 59 masculine characteristics for themselves. Being *muscular* (6/30, 20%, $f = 6$), *becoming independent/someone making their own decision* (5/30, 16.66%, $f = 12$), and *being strong* (5/30, 16.66%, $f = 6$) were some of the most commonly used masculine characteristics among boys.

Mothers of girls ($n = 31$) used 110 masculine characteristic in total for their daughters while answering the same question. They stated that they would want to view their daughters as *self-sustained* (20/31, 64.51%, $f = 45$), *self-confident* (11/31, 35.48%, $f = 15$), and *strong* (10/31, 32.25%, $f = 26$) in the future. Additionally, girls ($n = 31$) stated 71 masculine characteristics for themselves as a future projection. *Becoming independent* (10/31, 32.25%, $f = 23$), *being strong* (7/31, 22.58%, $f = 10$), and *self-sustained* (6/31, 19.35%, $f = 6$) are the most commonly used masculine characteristics among daughters (See Table 2).

Neutral / Irrelevant to Gender

In the current study, mothers and adolescents also used some neutral characteristics for their children and for themselves, respectively. Mothers of sons ($n = 31$) used 185 neutral characteristics for their sons. *Being fond of his family* (15/30, 50%, $f = 27$), *being happy* (12/30, 40%, $f = 25$) and *becoming an honest/well-behaved* (10/30, 3.33%, $f = 28$) were among the most used neutral characteristics stated by mothers. On the hand, boys ($n = 30$) used 139 neutral characteristics for themselves as a future projection. They stated that they would want to *become educated* (12/30, 40%, $f = 13$), to *have a good family* (9/30, 30%, $f = 17$) and, to *be fond of their family* (7/30, 23.33%, $f = 14$).

Finally, 182 neutral characteristics were used by mothers of girls ($n = 31$). *Being happy* (20/31, 64.51%, $f = 38$) and, *having a good family* (12/31, 38.70%, $f = 15$) are among the most used neutral characteristics by mothers. In a similar with mothers, girls ($n = 31$) used 111 neutral characteristics for themselves. They wanted to be *edu-*

cated (17/31, 54.83%, $f = 28$), *happy* (7/31, 54.83%, $f = 13$), *social* (7/31, 22.58%, $f = 13$) and *successful* (7/31, 22.58%, $f = 11$) in the future. (see Table 3).

The Results of Chi-Square Analyses

Comparison of Mother-Adolescent Pairs' Evaluations

For the femininity, it was found that mothers of boys used significantly more feminine characteristics for their sons compared the boys used for themselves, $\chi^2(1, n = 60) = 6.211, p = .013$. On the contrary, girls stated significantly more feminine characteristics compared to mothers used for their daughters, $\chi^2(1, n = 62) = 5.158, p = .023$. In addition, both mothers of boys and mothers of girls used significantly more masculine characteristics for their sons and daughters compared to boys and girls used for themselves ($\chi^2(1, n = 60) = 22.756, p < .001$; $\chi^2(1, n = 62) = 8.403, p = .004$; respectively). Finally, mothers of sons used more neutral characteristics for their sons compared to boys used for themselves ($\chi^2(1, n = 60) = 6.531, p = .011$); while no difference was found between mothers of girls and girls, on the same issue ($\chi^2(1, n = 62) = 2.163, p = .141$).

Comparison of Mothers' Evaluations for Sons and Daughters

While there is no significant difference between mothers of girls and mothers of boys on masculine and neutral characteristics ($\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 0.621, p = .431$; $\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 0.025, p = .876$; respectively), it was found that mothers of boys used significantly more feminine traits for their sons compared to that of mothers of girls used for their daughters. $\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 19.931, p < .001$.

Comparison of Girls' and Boys' Self-Evaluations

No significant differences were found between girls and boys on feminine, masculine, or neutral characteristics that they used for themselves ($\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 0.02, p = .889$; $\chi^2(1, n = 61) = 1.31, p = .252$; $\chi^2(1, n = 61) = .871, p = .351$; respectively).

Discussion

This study examined male and female adolescents' and their mothers' future projections about what kind of a woman or a man those adolescents would be and used content analysis as the main research method. Results showed important and converging understanding about gender socialization of mothers and their adolescent children. When the category of *femininity* was investigated more closely, it was found that being *affectionate/loving* is the most wanted characteristic that the mothers used for their sons and being *well-groomed* is the most wanted characteristic that the mothers used for their daughters.

Similarly, the most commonly used feminine characteristic by boys and girls were *being quite* and *being well-groomed*, respectively. Due to these findings, one could conclude that while mothers of boys and boys emphasized *relatedness* dimension of femininity, mothers of girls and girls clearly put more emphasis on *physical appearance* dimension. We speculate that, while mothers attributed feminine characteristics that require more cognitive ability to their sons more frequently, boys also mentioned those characteristics more frequently for themselves than girls did for themselves.

There was almost perfect harmony between girls and boys and mother-adolescent pairs for the category of masculinity. *Being strong and independent* is one of the most salient traits that adolescents belonging to both gender categories wanted to have, and their mothers wanted their children to have that trait in the future regardless of adolescent's gender. The results were consistent with the previous findings. For example, in a study it was found that single mothers and/or working mothers wanted their children to become self-confident and self-sufficient regardless of their children's gender (Brannon, 2011; Slavkin & Straight, 2000).

For the category of neutral (not tapping onto either feminine or masculine), both girls and boys reported to be *educated* as a future projection. While mothers of boys wanted their sons to be *honest/well-behaved* and mothers of girls wanted their daughters be *happy* in the future. Interestingly, even in this category, mothers of boys expected personality traits (*honest/well-behaved*) for their sons, whereas mothers of daughters emphasized emotional traits (such as *being happy*) as a future trait for their daughters in the future. This finding was also consistent with the expectations of more collectivistic cultures, including Turkey (Kağıtçıbaşı, 2007; Tennenbaum & Leaper, 2002).

Finally, the results of non-parametrical statistical analysis indicated that mothers of boys used more feminine characteristics, more masculine characteristics and more neutral characteristics than their sons used for themselves. In the light of this finding, one could conclude that mothers had more expectations for their sons for three different categories. However, mothers of girls used less feminine and more masculine characteristics than their daughters did for themselves. Mothers might have thought that having less feminine traits and more masculine traits might bring social advantage to their daughters, regarding existing gender roles in the society. When we compared mothers of females and males, it was found that mothers of boys used significantly more feminine characteristics than the mothers of girls did for their daughters. As it was mentioned before, in the category of femininity, *relatedness* and *physical appearance*

dimensions were emphasized more frequently, for boys and girls, respectively. We speculate that that mothers of boys might have thought that *relatedness* would predict success in their sons' social life. This finding seems not to be in harmony with traditional gender roles, but it can be interpreted, as they wanted their boys to be more *successful* in the future.

Taken all together, this study made an important contribution into the existing literature in terms of investigating differences and similarities both in mothers and their adolescent children's future projections about being a woman or a man. Future research should focus on the content of gender roles through semi-structured interviews, and evaluate not only mothers but also fathers, in terms of examining the effect of family on gender development.