

Children and Gender

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Gender refers to the roles and characteristics that society attributes to people's biological sexes.

In order to distinguish gender from biological sex, we can essentially consider what society's expectations are of our biological sexes, what behaviours society approves or disapproves of, and the impact of these norms (stereotypes) on our perception of our gender.

The fact that our attitudes conforming to the expectations of the public (social acceptance, etc.) are rewarded might lead us to accept such imposed norms without questioning and to repeat them. The foundations of this process begin at the ages of 2–3 when the differences between the sexes start being questioned and gender identities start forming.

The four key resources helping children learn about their own gender roles are parents, schools, peers, and media. When children create semantical frames appropriate for their gender roles, they decide whether behaviours or objects are suitable for their sexes or not and make sense of their sexual identities. We can come up with a couple of questions, either as parents, friends, educators or as individuals who influence the media during this period:

Are we acting differently towards our children on the basis of their sex?

Do you realize that giving feminine nicknames to boys sounds derogatory while giving masculine nicknames to girls sounds more socially acceptable?

Are you aware that the masculine behaviours of girls (e.g., girls being interested in martial arts) are deemed more acceptable than the feminine behaviours of boys (e.g. boys playing house)?

Have you ever noticed that in cartoons and fairy tales, men are often portrayed as "heroes" while women portray "shy and vulnerable" roles?

Is sex something learnt and taught?

Can you think of any stories or movies where girl characters come to the forefront with their intelligence?

Are we able to display a supportive attitude towards girls to gain their independence as we do for boys?

Do we allow boys to express their feelings as much as we support the emotional expressions of girls?

Do we encourage our daughters to participate in outdoor activities, and acquire professions by generating interests as much as we support our sons' interests in the outside world, nature and sportive activities?

How often do we come across men and women sharing personal care of their kids and domestic chores in movies and advertisements?

Could you be influencing the interests of children while choosing toys?

Have you ever thought that you place women in positions of being "in need of protection" and "incapable" by associating men with "power," and women with "weakness" in a child's mind as well as ignoring the need to accept their own feelings when you tell boys "not to cry like a girl?"

Are you aware of the burden created by norms?

What do you think of the identification of your daughter on the base of another man as a mother, sister or wife?

Why Gender Equality?

“The fact remains that if we discredit one's self-esteem to the extent that their relationship with society is disintegrated and we cause them to give up all hope of proving something, make them lose their courage and we eventually observe that they are incapable of doing something at all, we shouldn't claim that we are right in this case; because we have to admit that we are responsible for this individual's miserable situation.” (1)

According to the data for 2019–2020 from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TUIK) (2):

Marriage rates for girls are 2,7%, for boys 0,1.

According to the life satisfaction study, the rate of women feeling insecure when walking in their neighbourhood alone at night is 27.3%, while for men, it is 10.7%.

48.7% of women and 69.9% of men state that they feel safe in their surroundings.

The rate of women feeling insecure when they are alone at home is 6.2%, while this rate for men is 3.4%.

Fraser states that recognition without the economy will not mean anything or happen at all (3). Öztürk emphasizes that while women's domestic labor contributes to the economy, it is considered worthless and has no monetary value. Öztürk defines this unrequited labor as exploitation and states that patriarchal construction is possible when domestic chores are adopted as a natural task of women (4).

"The woman who has only been taught to please will soon find that her charms are oblique sunbeams and that they cannot have much effect on her husband's heart when they are seen every day when the summer is passed and gone. Will she then have sufficient native energy to look into herself for comfort, and cultivate her dormant faculties?" (5)

Society's emphasis on men being powerful, and being taught to implicitly or consciously hide their feelings bring certain problems with itself. Just as Kaufman expresses, anxiety, insecurity, fear of meeting expectations and being unsuccessful lead to anger and aggression towards themselves and others and ultimately to using violence (6). Mansley underlines that a majority of men who learn from an early age not to express their feelings have trouble in their relationships when they are unable to meet women's demands regarding emotional attachment (7). As Atay states,

“From the ‘functionality’ of his sexual organ to the success of the team he supports, at home, at work, on the street, in traffic, in the bar, at the stadium, in the field, in bed... A man's manhood is constantly under test and threat. This threat comes mainly from other men. In that sense, it wouldn't be wrong to say 'A man is a wolf to another man.'” (8)

What Can We Do?

1

Be a role model to your children! Prefer fair division with your partner when providing the child's personal care needs and house chores. Do not forget that the most important source of knowledge for children is their parents. Even though in our society the responsibility of housework and childcare is attributed to women, in families where the father shares childcare with his partner, positive improvement is seen in the child's curiosity, self-confidence, stress handling and cognitive abilities, in their secure attachment, school performance, empathy skills, psycho-social adaptation, internalisation of equality and justice values, also their behavioural problems and attitude towards gender roles decrease. An increase in marriage satisfaction between husband and wife and fathers' sense of self-efficiency can be observed (9).

2

Give your children in-house responsibilities at an early age. This will help your child understand that every person has some kind of duty in mutual living spaces regardless of gender. It will also help them improve their sense of responsibility.

3

As individuals who grew up with certain norms, we all can showcase gender-related prejudice consciously or unconsciously. It is our job to be aware of these prejudices, question them and challenge the cliches that our children encounter in the media, streets, or their school.

4

If possible, inform your children, who encounter sexist discourses in the outside world even if not in the house, at the moment of the incident by also involving the person who says or does something sexist. If not possible, educate your child about this situation afterwards.

5

The objects which encourage violence such as hand grenades and guns are not toys! You could avoid having them in your house and prefer schools that care about gender equality while making a choice on kindergartens and daycares.

6

When your child begins noticing and getting curious about their own biological sex, your support in this curiosity and teaching them the right names of their intimate areas would contribute to your child's development of positive body image. Allow your children to ask questions and discover their own bodies. (10)

7

The best way to learn is by allowing the child to process the knowledge through small but frequent talks rather than one long speech. To be able to inform the child about their sexuality and sexual identity, you can pick the opportunities of the outside world and the moments where they start asking questions.

8

Your child's curiosity about sexuality and gender features is an essential process that will navigate in various stages at every age. Strengthening this curiosity will enable your child to get curious, ask questions, and research other topics as well. Your comfortable and eager state while answering these questions can stop your child from getting exploited by learning it from the correct source, as well as ensuring trust towards their family. (To explain good and bad touch to your child, you can view the contents of [Child Power Against Abuse](#).)



The most important responsibility in keeping track of what your child should or should not watch, their book choices, and the video games they play, falls upon the family. Be absolutely aware of which websites they spend time on and before they are exposed to a media feed, try to examine it. Despite this, it is still possible for them to be exposed to sexist discourses. At this point, you can make the necessary explanations by telling your child that not everything they see on screen reflects reality. To keep other children away from this kind of media, inform people around you about the discourses that caught your eye. You can benefit from the power of social media here. Within the existence of certain expressions and images that may require you to get legal support;

You can consult 176, Ministry of Culture and Tourism Complaint Line for storybooks, ihbarweb.org.tr for the online releases of the publishing houses where printing is performed, RTÜK and CİMER for cartoons, commercials, and other forms of media that your child may be exposed to.

10

Do not forget that the ones who form society are us, individuals. In order to leave a better future for our children, do not stay silent about violence, othering, and gender prejudices that you encounter.

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