A Review on Attachment Style and Gender Double Standard

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Abstract. Attachment relationships have a profound effect on individuals' cognition and psychological well-being. The presence of parental gender double standards leads to differences in children's coping strategies and self-perceptions. This paper will discuss the definition of the three main attachment styles in children and adults, then explain the scope of gender double standard. In addition, the reasons why and how parental double gender standard would lead the children to form anxious or avoidant attachment styles will be studied in this paper. In addition, this paper will discuss why and how societal gender double standard will solidify the insecure attachment style for females. Due to there are many factors that can affect the testing, for the study of this paper the author reviewed existing experiments and analysis to study the correlation between parental gender double standard and attachment style. This study also points out some additional testing possibilities for future further studies.

Keywords: Attachment style, Gender double Standard, Children.

1. Introduction

This paper investigates the relationship between gender double standard and attachment style. Parents who have gender double standard value boys more than girls, and this will reflect in how they raise their children. They tend to neglect or suppress their girls' needs, criticize instead of encourage them. They even believe that education and career are not important for them. In this way, girls who were brought up by parents with a gender double standard do not have proper emotional bondage with their primary caregivers. They do not have much confidence unless they get confirmation from their parents. They will either keep looking for confirmation in order to feel loved, or they become emotionally shut down and only trust themselves. Even though sexism is getting better in most areas, however, gender double standard and patriarchy still exist to an extent in many aspects of our lives. The societal gender double standard will reinforce, if not worsen, the attachment style the girls formed since childhood from their primary caregivers. Females are generally expected to get married by a certain age and become the primary caregiver to their children, regardless of their career success. This also weakens females' ego thus they don't have a clear definition of themselves and the purpose of life. They will be clingier to their husbands, and future to their children. This paper aims to shed some light on the relationship between gender double standards and attachment style, for the females who are struggling with their relationships to better understand themselves and possibly find ways to improve their situation.

2. Attachment Style

Attachment theory was brought up by Bowlby, and he suggested that children came into this world biologically pre-programmed to form attachment with their caregivers in order to survive. Attachment refers to an affectionate bond between the child and a primary caregiver. The quality of this bond depends on the attentiveness, responsiveness from the caregiver [1]. There are three main types of attachment style: Secure, anxious and avoidant. In the famous strange situation experiment, the secure children explored the environment and were moderately distressed when their mother left. They also exhibited moderate anxiety when they were approached by a stranger, and sought contact with their mother when she returned. The children who were avoidant type were unconcerned when their mother left the room and showed little interest when their mother returned. The stranger was treated similarly to their mother. The children showed no particular interest in contacting with the stranger. The third

type, insecure children, showed no interest in exploring the environment, and were very clingy to their mother. They were extremely distressed when their mother left, and they were scared by the stranger.

Attachment style can gradually change over time [2], however, people can still be categorized into the same three types [3]. The secure type people are warm. They can depend on their partner and their partner can rely on them as well. They have no problem with intimacy and relatively easy to maintain a stable relationship. People who are anxious attached are often preoccupied. They over-read partner's signal, and look for signs that their partner does not love them back. They fear of abandonment. The avoidant type people want to minimize the intimacy and keep distance from their partner because they view depending on others as loss of freedom.

In Infant-parent attachment: Definition, types, antecedents, measurement and outcome.

It has conducted researches on the relationship between parents' attachment style and their children' attachment style in the Strange Situation [4]. The study drew confusion that children who are secure, avoidant, anxious are likely to have parents who are sensitive, insensitive and rejecting, insensitive and intermittent respectively. It is not hard to connect the dots here that parents who have gender double standard will be insensitive to their daughters' need due to their indifference. The only difference will be they are either inconsistently insensitive or completely reject their daughters' need for bonding.

3. Gender Double Standard

Gender double standard is generally defined as that people evaluate the same behavior of men and women differently. What is acceptable or appropriate for one may not be equally so for the other. There is a massive gender double standard in today's society, even in a country like the United States [5]. Parents with gender double standard would praise boys for one actions and blame girls for the same action. They firmly believe in patriarchy and think boys are born to be better than girls, so no matter what the girls have done they do not think it is good enough. Within the context of premarital sex, gender double standard is largely discussed and studied, and it suggested that permissiveness for premarital sex is different for men and women [6]. Parents would just remind his son on safe sex if they have premarital sex, and some of them are even proud that their son has multiple sex partners. However normally parents would encourage their daughters to limit sex partners and some parents would like their children not having premarital sex. Of course, the difference in attitude about sons and daughters sexuality also based on parental concerns regarding the potential pregnancy. When the daughter has no living means or is still in school, the burden of pregnancy and the future child will fall onto their grandparents.

Gender double standard in parenting style can also mean son preference [7]. For parents who prefer sons more than girls, they typically would value boys more than girls. They would show disappointment when they realize their children' s genders, then carry this disappointment over along with the children's growth. In some countries, this kind of parents will keep having new babies until they have a boy. The girls who were born before the boy are considered as burden to the family and they need to help with the family with the chores like maids. Some families wouldn't consider further education as an option for their female children. Even though people have seen positive changes on gender equality, recent studies still show the persistence of substantial gender differences in key family formation, parenting style over the same period [8]. In China, grandparents giving red packet and putting money inside of it to grandchildren is a tradition during Chinese New Year. It is not rare to see that boys get more money inside the red packets than girls. This kind of discrimination is not something that can be easily understood by the girls, which can cause them get used to discrimination and think they should be treated less than boys. In this way, they will always look for older family members and male figures in order to get direction. This can cause them to have low self-esteem and confidence, which will solidify their anxious attachment style. Another possibility when girls face this kind of discrimination is they are indifferent to how family members treat them. This does not

imply that this kind of girls genuinely don't care how family treats them. This simply is a way to protect their own feelings. Indifference will make it hard for them to form lasting and deep emotional connections with people, which helps them to form an avoidant attachment style.

4. Gender Double Standard and Attachment Style

"Girls cannot drink, boys cannot cry" is the gender double standard hold in many cultures. In the previous paragraphs, the author mentioned that girls are normally educated with more stringent rules in regards of sex life, dating and marriage. A study [8] was done among 1961 birth records from the Detroit Metropolitan area, who were aged 31 years old to understand the difference between male and female on viewing various questions in regards of their children. Questions such as "If a daughter/ son of yours starts dating at 16/12, would that bother you a great deal, some, a little, or not at all?", "If a daughter/son of yours has sexual intercourse at age 20/16, would that bother you a great deal, some, a little, or not at all?", "Suppose that after she/he has grown up she/he decides to live with a man/woman in an intimate relationship without being married to her/him? Would that bother you a great deal, some, a little, or not at all?", and asking about the ideal marriage age, if work before marriage is important, as well as if it is okay for their daughter/ son to have to marriage or no children. The choices for the answers are in a scale from 1 to 4 or 1 to 8 depending on the question, except for the ideal marriage age the respondent needs to come up with an age as the answer. The same questions were asked to each respondent twice, once for male children and once for female children. The respondents were separated into two groups, group one answer the questions toward male children first, and then female children. Group two will answer these questions for female children first, then male children. This random assignment method was designed to monitor how much the respondents would alter their answers by answering the questions in different order. The result is a series of analysis to show the mean, standard deviation, minimum and maximum rating for each questions for male and female children correspondingly. And for each question, it calculated the difference between the rating for female and male children to evaluate the difference. Finally it sliced the data into non-parents and parents in order to consider the different attitudes for different family formation status.

The result of this analysis shows that the attitude of respondents towards dating, sex and cohabitation and the timing of marriage differ significantly by the gender of the child. In general, the respondents are more liberal and permissive toward male children to date, engage in sexual activities and have marriage at an earlier age than female children. Parents are generally more strict with their female children by establishing rules for their daughters, such as "she has to be home before it is dark", "she is not allowed to go out with the boys". Some parents even choose to ground their female children if they ever break these rules. Parents with daughter want to protect, sometimes over-protect their daughter without proper explanation and compromise, which leaves the daughters feel emotionally neglected. However by doing so, the parents want to protect their female children instead of not caring about them. This would make female children feel they have inconsistent love from their parents. Repeated interactions with unresponsive or inconsistent figure result in the rise of developing insecure attachment style [9].

There are still limitation of this analysis, such as eliminating variance in age, place of birth and race to assist in focusing the variance in other key factors such as gender, parenthood and education. It is still important to repeat the same study across different regions and cultures at least in the United States, in order to draw the conclusion to reveal gender double standard.

Another factor people need to take into consideration is the attachment style of the parents. In the Adult Attachment Review, it states that child who are secure, anxious or avoidant have parents who are autonomous, preoccupied and dismissing respectively [10]. Gender double standard is a view that usually runs in several generations of a family. Normally female parents who has gender double standard, were raised in a family that had a gender double standard. Most likely that these female parents are either anxious or avoidant attachment style. By experiencing parent who is anxious or

avoidant, and gender double standard in the family, the children are more likely to become anxious or avoidant.

5. Discussion

In a family which has son preference, female children normally suffer more than regular children. Family members don't appreciate the female child, and criticize everything she does. Some girls choose to prove they are actually very good and worth loving. They would value others' opinions a lot, and keep seeking affirmation. When in relationships, this attitude got carried over. This kind of female generally think if they try hard enough, things will work out and issues can be fixed. They also don't think they deserve to be treated well unless they do something. They will try very hard to show they worth the love by doing a lot of chores, or they would pay close attention to their appearance to look fit and young. Since they value others' opinions, they sense even the slightest change of attitude from their partners. They have this insecurity from their heart that if they stop trying very hard, they would lose this love. Due to the family has taught her about patriarchy, even though they try very hard to prove themselves, some of them still believe they are inferior than men. Because of the views from their family, the biggest goal of their lives is to find the perfect husband in order to have a happy family that people envy about, and become a mom. They lack a sense of self, so they put their lives on their husbands. Once you put all eggs in one basket, you will be over worried that something might go wrong.

There is another type of girl who grew up in gender double standard. They learned at a very young age that parents are not someone that they can depend on. They can only trust their own judgements in order not to be taken advantage of. They also learned how to shut down their feelings in order not to get hurt when they experience discrimination. They have strong sense of ego and learned how to protect it, which is to keep people away from their innermost thoughts and feelings. This kind of people push people away, even choose not to be in a stable relationship. They get used to lock themselves in their own room since teenage, and when they grow up they still need a lot of alone time. This makes it harder for them to maintain an intimate relationship. In addition, they did not learn how to properly love someone from their parents.

6. Conclusion

Based on the previous reviews the author has done, it is common to see a great deal of gender double standard in parental styles nowadays. This could be one key factor to explain why there are still many gender differences in intimate relationships and family formation. The strong relationship between gender double standard and insecure attachment style also reveals how important parental style can affect the future lives of children. Additional researches will be needed to further eliminate other factors that might affect a person's attachment style, such as romantic relationship experience.

Nowadays there are abundant gender double standard exist in society, even in countries such as the US. Different attitudes were observed on male and female having multiple sexual partners. Being assertive for men is considered as firm and successful, for women is being bossy. There is still wage gap for female and male even for Hollywood celebrities. There is still a long way to goal to achieve gender equality. However, the current study still can still serve as a reference to help female understand what caused them to become anxious or avoidant. Once the effect from the original family is understood, it is easier to work on those issues. This study aims to help the females to understand themselves better, find solutions themselves in order to have better mental health.

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