



Study of effect of Gender Stereotyping leads to Misrecognition of One's Own Identity

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ABSTRACT

The paper titled 'Gender stereotyping leads to misrecognition of one's own identity' is based on a Youtube series named 'Man's World' by Y-Films Original, presented by The Global Goals For Sustainable Development (United Nations) having a tie-up with India's most reputed production house, Yash Raj Films. The series 'Man's World' "is a what if story. It is a story about walking in the shoes of women, in that world. The series supports Goal Five of the UN's Global Goals for Sustainable Development which is about achieving Gender Equality and empowering all girls and women, everywhere." The aim of this paper is not about achieving the goal of gender equality but to show that gender stereotyping often leads to misrecognition of one's own identity, that is, it leads to a sense of identity which is not one's own but assigned by the society. One can argue that in the very first place, identity is never one's own, instead we get a sense of our identity, our "self" by looking at the other. True, but there is also the idea of self-realization of our identity, when we recognize our true 'self' and not the one which is assigned to us by the society, not how society looks at us as just male or female particularly, but how we look at ourselves as an individual.

Keywords: Gender Stereotyping, Identity, Self, Equality, Recognition, Unequal Distribution, Gender Differences.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender as a part of one's identity is a socially constructed attribute, very different from the biological sex. This is because the gender of a person which helps him/her to form a social identity which is not what we are born with, that is, our biological sex of being a male or female is different from being categorized into a gender by the society. The difference between gender and sex being is that not all individuals identify with the gender assigned to them, like if a person is male by birth, society might consider him to be male gendered but the person might identify himself as transgender, though not biologically being one. Therefore I meant to say that gender is a socially constructed attribute.

Sandra Lee Bartky in her essay tells about the way a woman is supposed to behave in society, walk, talk, eat, sit in a certain way to conform to the societal norms of feminine attributes. A woman is taught from childhood these feminine codes and she does not have the liberty to even do what she wants in life, her life is not hers but everyone else around her. The identity of a woman thus is constructed by the society and not her own, for her own identity is the inner 'self' which wants to do things as it wants without any restriction or order from the society. This is basically because of the gender bias in society which is also constructed, like gender itself, unlike sex of an individual which is biological.

2. OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH

The objective of this paper is to study the effects of Gender Stereotyping through contemporary lens in the present world vis-a-vis new media, and to present an understanding of gender stereotypes leading to misrecognition of one's own identity. This paper aims to present the gender stereotypes prevalent in the society and how it affects one's idea of their 'self,' which in turn leads to gendering of various aspects of the society such as workspace, public spaces and one's behavior towards the other gender.

3. FULL TEXT

Looking from the perspective of contemporary society, gender stereotyping affects the mind of a person from his/her childhood only. A child is born a male or a female but how a boy or a girl behaves is taught by the society. A small child is not able to identify himself/herself as a male or female until and unless the society associates some work that is to be done by only a boy or a

girl, which the society thinks is appropriate for them to do. Gender stereotyping starts from this very point. Now bringing in the series, Man's World, "Kiran believes that the world is unfair to men" as women always get the upper hand under the flag of gender equality and feminism in contemporary society. But if we look at it from a neutral perspective, women are not wrong in wanting gender equality because of the injustice of their recognition as a weaker sex in a male-dominated world like contemporary Indian society. There are stereotypical notions of how a man or a woman should behave which are constructed by society only. Kiran, the lead role in the series in the very first episode gets drunk with his best friend and in the conversation between the two, they themselves talk about some stereotypes associated with a man or a woman.

Vikram Gupta, the Writer-Director of the series, through the words of his actor notes that "girls want equality" and the character goes on to say "why do we always open doors for them; why do we always pick up heavy objects; why are works requiring muscle power are supposed to be done by men only; if a girl abuses a guy, she is feminist and if a boy does so, he is an asshole; they have occupied a weaker sex's label and on the name of feminism and, women hit men by calling them chauvinist." He goes on to say that "it is a war between chest and breast, and breast will always win" (Man's World, Episode 1). He says this maybe because of the present scenario where women want upper hand over men and not just equality which is wrong in a way, but this paper is not supposed to deal with these but identity. So taking into account, what is the interest of this paper, women are given a weaker sex's label by the gender stereotyping in society. A girl or woman is not supposed to do heavy jobs as she is considered and also nurtured in a way to be weak and delicate in front of a man's muscle power. This nurturing leads to women considering themselves as weaker before men even if they are stronger than them, recognizing themselves as a weaker section in the society even if they are not. A known example is the association of crying with a girl and not a boy. According to Indian society, a girl always cries on small little things, even if she gets injured, but a boy is not supposed to cry in situations like this and even if a boy gets injured he is told not to cry like a girl as he is strong and powerful. This stereotyping gets rooted in the mind of a person and so he or she starts recognizing himself or herself as strong or weak respectively. This association of stronger and weaker sex with men and women affects their identity and imposes recognition of their 'self' of what they might not be. The example of this misrecognition of 'self' would be of men associated with feminine characters like men who cry or who are not strong enough to do heavy jobs or who always stays at home working in the kitchen. These traits are generally associated with women and considered to be feminine and men with any of or every trait like these are considered to be 'feminine' and it eventually affects their identity of not being a man manly enough. Quoting from Nancy Fraser's essay, "Social Justice in the Age of Identity Politics: Redistribution, Recognition, and Participation : a major feature of gender injustice is an institutionalized pattern of cultural value that privileges traits associated with masculinity, while devaluing everything coded as 'feminine' paradigmatically-but not only-women" (Fraser 20).

Certainly this leads to devaluing and demeaning of a person's identity as being feminine, be it a man or a woman, by associating traits of femininity. These traits associated to masculinity and femininity lead to gender stereotyping resulting in misrecognition of one's own self.

The first episode of the series, Man's World, supports Kiran's argument that a man's share in a child's upbringing goes unnoticed because it is always the mother's motherhood which is thought to be the nurturing seed of a child, which is certain kind of a stereotype, certainly challenged through the words of Kiran. But then Kiran thinks that women always go on singing about gender equality in a man's world which according to him gets beneficial for them; example can be seen in the passing of the budget for women's picnic by his boss and not for his project.

After getting drunk and conversing with his friend, Kiran reaches home fed up and "wishes to God for the world to flip and men and women to interchange places. As they say, be careful what you wish for."

The twist in the story comes and the world really gets flipped. The world becomes a female dominated world as opposed to the contemporary Indian society. But the idea of the body of men and women not changing and the genitals being changed seems problematic; evidence can be seen in the portrayal of menstrual period happening to Kiran and girls shown peeing on walls.

Whatever be the reason for this problem, the world has certainly changed and now onwards the coming episodes picture that there are some stereotypical notions that not only applies to women in the present world but also to men in the flipped world, as in that world men become the weaker, inferior ones. It kind of breaks some stereotypical notions towards females by showing them applying to men too, despite them being men because they are being dominated by women in the flipped world, proving that whoever is weaker, they always gets dominated by the opposite gender.

The society always forms some stereotypical notions about the gender being dominated and in the way of living in a society imposes those notions upon them. One of the examples is women using their sexuality at the workplace to rise up in their career, especially in a corporate world. The second episode of the series sharply breaks this notion by projecting one of Kiran's male

colleagues in the light of using his sexuality in the flipped world, which is not really the case and just rumors formed by other female colleagues. Kiran gets to know that his friend is not really using his sexuality but has worked hard on a project which was almost screwed up by another woman to whom it was handed before, and that he got promotion for his hard work by saving the project and not by wearing see through shirts to use his sexuality to impress the female boss. The notion that a cute face cannot be intelligent and women cannot be hard working gets shattered. Also when Kiran is chosen for the post of a Marketing Manager and is sexually harassed by the female boss when called to personally meet her shows that the same situation can take place with a man in a female dominated world, however strong he might be, which takes place with a woman in the present world.

The issue of unequal distribution of the economy also comes up in this episode when Kiran is just offered thirty percent high salary instead of forty five percent given to a woman in the same post earlier, as the boss thinks a man cannot do work outside late at night like a woman in that flipped world. Again according to Nancy Fraser in her essay, this kind of unequal distribution in pay “results in an economic structure that generates gender-specific forms of distributive injustice including gender-based exploitation, economic marginalization and deprivation” (Fraser 20).

This unequal distribution not only affects the economic structure or the class of independent women but also their status as inferior to men and, also affecting their identity eventually portraying them as inferior groups and kind of demeaning their identity as independent women not treated as equal as men.

Some other stereotypical notions also get shattered in front of Kiran’s eyes in the third episode of the series as he also faces the same situations which a woman has to face in this world. Notions like only a woman is supposed to do the household work like cooking; a woman is not supposed to travel late at night for the fear of being raped; a woman should be kept in house only for if she will get outside she will go out of parent’s control, all these gets shattered as these situations takes place with Kiran also in the flipped world. The breaking up of these notions attached to women only shows that whichever sex becomes dominant over the other, the dominated ones are always looked down upon and are associated with these kind of stereotypes which portrays them to be more weaker than they are (in case of Kiran being a man in a woman's world) and it gets imposed upon them affecting their psyche to accept such notions and rules and thus leading to misrecognition of themselves as weak.

In the third episode, Kiran gets followed by two women, whom he calls potential rapists, late at night coming back from club alone and he feels the danger upon which probably a woman feels in the present world. He could not do anything about his situation except going to a police station at the right time, but there he also gets assaulted and a girl whom he met at the club saved him. Being a man, he was unable to help himself in a world where women are dominating. The girl wonders if the world was inverted and Kiran realizes his mistake, and again wishes for the world to get flipped which of course does not happen. The story progresses with Kiran bereft of his freedom to go outside as he is seen with a strange girl late at night and is forced to marry a girl whom his mother will choose.

Now the final episode of the series comes as a shock to the viewers as Kiran’s words get used over him only. The striking thing is the concept of marital rape, another stereotype formed by the society. People think how can marital rape take place when two persons are married to each other and this was the point of view of Kiran himself before the world got flipped. But now when he gets married to a girl, who is herself a doctor and then also forces Kiran to have sex on the first night of their marriage and marital rape is done to Kiran, he realizes what was wrong in his belief system and in the world before it was flipped. This stereotype that if there is a marriage then marital rape cannot take place affects the mind of both the genders. The man thinks himself to be powerful and the woman to be powerless which shows the inequality in a marriage affecting the couple’s identity as dominant and submissive partners. As the story progresses Kiran is shown to be pregnant meanwhile living the life of a house husband unhappy in marriage, and eventually gives birth to a baby boy who is not wanted in the female world and is also planned to be killed by his in-laws. But the child is saved as Kiran tells his wife that their kid will be no less than a girl. The scene changes to his wife watching a television program in which a lady is shown to utter these words, “Naturally there are no differences between the two genders” (Man’s World, Episode 4). Meanwhile Kiran is shown talking to his baby, telling him that this world is inverted and he used to live in a different world, this world is like this because of him and people have no fault in this. What Kiran says after this might be the author’s own words, "the mistake is not just theirs or ours; you will not listen to what others will say; why do we feel every man or woman to be the same; we don’t have to flip or unflip this world but we have to try to make it a better world; do not listen to people, use your own mind" (Episode 4). Kiran basically conveys the message that we should not think about flipping the world or interchanging the genders but to bring change little by little to make the world better, and remove stereotypes about any gender. One is not weak or inferior by birth but made so by the stereotypical notion.

The story ends with Kiran’s wife realizing these things and the lady in the television program throwing the punch line when she is asked "is a world like this possible?" and she replies, "Of course it is, but first the question is, can you imagine a world like this?" (Episode 4)

4. CONCLUSION

This brings us to the end of this paper by trying to show that if a world where there is no gender discrimination can be imagined, then automatically there will be no gender stereotyping. Therefore, the absence of gender inequality can lead to a world where everyone, either male or female or a person of any gender can have a better sense of their own 'self' in relation to others who are all equal. Everyone can have a better recognition of their own identity, of who they are without being under the umbrella of gender stereotypes.

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