

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

Association between Parents' Gender Role Attitudes and Cross Gender Behavior of Children

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### **Introduction**

#### **Problem Statement**

Children begin to show behavior and interactions towards something particular during their early childhood, ages two-eight years old. An example can be when children begin to choose specific gender toys, causing children to act differently when they are given the opposite gender toy and then a neutral toy amongst boys and girls. In most studies It has been found that boys are particularly the ones to have an impact in their gender role. Friedrich (1997) found statistics that demonstrated dressing like the opposite sex was found 14% of boys and 10% of girls (Friedrich, 1997;2001). Other researchers have found that as time progresses boys seem to be the ones to have a change in gender behavior within the research study. Causing there to be a negative impact on parents' gender role attitudes towards their children. By researching more about cross gender behavior, we can identify how well children cope with learning to identify with their gender; as well as parents' gender role attitudes when it comes to their child's behavior and how it impacts their life.

The way society and the community portray children at such a young age to respond to their gender affects children who are experiencing cross gender behaviors during their early childhood. Cross gender behaviors can be explained through understanding what is considered "gender appropriate" within their identified gender role. Cross gender behavior is defined by someone who engages in behavior preferred by the opposite sex (Fagot, 1977).

Society paints an image in which children learn to imitate and follow. Boys would usually imitate a male figure and girls a female figure in their life. As read in *Does early sex typing Result from Children's Attempts to match their behavior to Sex Role Stereotypes?* Perry's article mentions how children imitate "same-sex appropriate". Perry (1984) goes on explaining different forms in how a child observes and visualizes people of the same sex acting a certain way as oppose to the opposite sex.

## **Significance of the Study**

Nowadays, due to all the different gender identities presented to the community, it may be harder for children to develop within their gender Perry (1984). Perry explains Children learn through what they perceive around them. Children become pressured by society when viewing gender variance. Gender variance is defined under the online dictionary as noting or relating to a person whose gender identity or gender expression does not conform to socially define male or female gender norms. This usually falls into category when children begin to show interest to opposite sex qualities. An article from Brown University Child and Adolescent Behavior Letter gives examples on how boys have preference for women items as oppose to male items. Even girls can have a preference of wearing boy attire and portraying to act like a boy (Gregory, 2009). The letter is a short but informational article on how it responds to the most common questions presented from parents who are concerned about their child's gender behaviors. The statement of the problem is to determine if children at such an early age in their life experience an impact in their gender behaviors based on what society tells them to be considered appropriate. This proposed research will allow researchers to view how children interact with other children and how they identify themselves as. The research will also show how parents correspond to their children's behavior.

Children are being born into a society that can no longer differentiate what is considered inappropriate gender behavior. Some parents might consider it to be inappropriate to act or play with certain object in order for their child not to have a change in gender or personality at such an early stage in their life. Studies have been done to demonstrate the simplicity of an object is not the ending result for a child having their gender role behavior to change. A questionnaire known as Preschool Activities (PSAI) is a perfect example of what has been done in the past. It

was designed to differentiate between children's sexes and personality in spite of their appearance (Golombok, 2008).

The known causes for this main issue on early childhood gender behavior would be the way society is portraying gender being changed at an early moment in life. Considering a huge movement in the LGBTQ community and many children facing a dramatic change when considering being open about how they truly feel and wanting to be whom they identify with. This leads to the research problem because it allows researchers to study the probability of children actually changing their gender or simply being kids and exploring who they are and being accepted into society.

There have been few research studies on parents' gender attitude and child's cross gender behavior. Understanding the importance of parents' gender role attitudes on children's gender identity and the impact it has amongst their children. The research would indeed be beneficial for the parent to better their understanding of their child's behavior. The children will be able to have the appropriate tools and support from parents in order to express their individuality and gender preference. Parent's gender role attitudes will also be explored through this research to observe how their thoughts are impacted.

### **Literature Review**

The way society portrays a child at such a young stage in their life can impact those who are experiencing certain behaviors during their early childhood. A social work problem that seems to be arising is how many individuals face judgment and criticism from others who do not consider their choice in gender to be accepted into society. Society tends to set a standard for both male and females who are expected to follow such form before a child even enters the world. A basic example of this would be the color pink, pink is associated with girls and the

color blue for boys. The colors are not known to have a specific gender for them to be so specific for girls or boys. If a boy were to have certain preference towards colors or objects that are categorized by society as girly, it would be chaos for a boy to have those preferences. This is demonstrated during an early time period for a child to be signaled out by others for their choices and decisions.

Some studies relate to gender objects while others relate to imitation and how children imitate those individuals, they identify themselves with (Rabelo, 2014). If a child were to lack a father figure or mother figure it can have an alternate effect on their gender behavior. Seeing as how a boy who does not have a fatherly figure may be interested in female traits because it is what he has grown up viewing. This can cause mixed emotions within society and as Fritz mentions children can experience ongoing rejection, criticism and bullying (Gregory, 2009). It is important to make this awareness to the research because during an early childhood stage, the children are learning to identify themselves and become accepted into society. This is not a stage where one is considered to know everything, as one continues to grow their views can change and experience different attractions and preferences.

Sex typing for instance can be another portion of how children begin to tell the difference between girl items or activities and boy items or activities (Fagot, 1977). Perry mentions in their article on how parents and socializing agents play an important part in “shaping” the child early in life (Perry, 1984). Connecting how a child during his early years has the knowledge to perceive what is considered appropriate to their identified sex to Jean Piaget’s cognitive developmental theory. Piaget’s theory specified on children through different stages of learning. Causing an awareness of the different ways a child’s thoughts were to an adult. A child as young as two years old begins to develop motor skills which allows them to learn through their senses.

Having to do with the child's understanding of exploring their own gender through imitation and spending more time with same-sex individuals (Perry, 1984).

The cause of all the misconception would have a lot to do with how society places the ideal image of a boy and girl. As well as how parents are supposed to guide them to becoming and doing things only their gender would be considered as normal. Many individuals consider a child to be improper when he or she prefers to do things the opposite sex might do. Leading them to believe that it is morally done before they can even understand gender difference. The children who struggle at such an early part of their life is confused with trying to identify themselves with others in a word that critics and labels them at a young point in their life. The problem here is not the child itself but it is society and the community who has a generalized idea of what to them might be considered ethically correct. Research have determined a negative outcome towards boys than girls (Sandnabba, 1999). Boys have been categorized as negatively viewed more than girls when they have a change in behavior.

Parent's gender role attitude is an important part for the researchers. It is classified as the independent variable for this study. Perales (2018) defined it as an attitude capturing individual's degree of support for traditional division of paid and domestic work and have been linked to the production and reproduction of gender inequality in different social spheres. In society the viewpoints and acceptance of a parent is essential for a child to know their decisions are supported by their parents. A parent's involvement in a child's life beginnings at the earliest stages of childbirth and is constructed as the child begins to grow. Mark (2009) Explores how parent's time with children demonstrate their gender role attitudes towards how they interact or do family activities differently depending on child gender. If they are boys the father is likely to

rough play, whereas if it's a girl they are more sensitive so their father would be gentler towards them (Mark, 2009).

### **Importance of Further Research**

This research will focus on parent's gender role attitudes and its impact on children's cross gender behavior. Exploring their household situation, family stability, traumatic events or traumas that might have occurred to a child. Focusing on how children who do tend to have attraction towards opposite gender does not intentionally mean that they have preference in change of gender, but rather they are continuing to explore whom they are with the people they are surrounded with. The problem is when individuals consider the children's preference to be an ongoing event in their life that may cause a child to have gender differences. It becomes a phase where a child prefers to explore different areas of their life. A study has shown how parental figures have more support towards first born daughters as oppose to sons (Perales, 2018). Therefore, exploring the association between parent's gender role attitude and children's cross gender behavior is needed for researchers to explore the importance of a paternal figure has towards their children and how important their approval and support is needed for all gender types.

### **Proposed Research Question and Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this research is to assess the influence of parent's gender role attitudes on child's cross gender behavior. The problem in children is not only their gender behavior and what society's input is, but it is with whom they are with that causes them to have a change in behavior. In order to further explore parent's gender role attitudes and children cross gender behavior, the following question is developed: Is there a relationship between parent's gender

role attitudes a child's cross gender behavior? And why does cross-sectional behavior often occur among children and what characteristics of parents affect cross-sectional behavior?

This research is based on children ranging between the ages of two to eight years old. There is no specific ethnicity or race for this research. The observation of children's cross gender behavior within the community and how parents are responding to the children's behavior. By observing our dependent variable, child's behavior can be explored through the child's preference in what they consider their gender behavior. As for the Independent variable we will collect data from questionnaire from parent's gender role attitude towards child's behavior. Here the researcher will understand how this does not necessarily mean the child will end up changing his or her gender preference.

### Methods

#### Variables and Measurements

<u>Conceptualization</u>	<u>Operationalization</u>
<p><b>Cross gender behavior (Dependent Variable)</b> defined as someone who engages in behavior preferred by the opposite sex (Fagot, 1977).</p>	<p>Gender identity Questionnaire for children Using parallel forms reliability as described by Unrau (2016), knowing what the best question is to ask by doing the Chi-square test to see relationship between parents' attitude and child gender behavior. A questionnaire for example will be beneficial especially with short words or even images where children can also participate. The use of these questions will visualize the response of a</p>

	<p>variety of questions relating to children gender behavior.</p> <p>Using <b>Gender Identity Questionnaire for Children (GIQ)</b></p> <p>This test was used in 2004 to measure and collect data from parents who had children ages 2.5-12 years. it had 16 item gender identity questionnaires to present to children who struggled with gender identity development (Johnson, 2004).</p>
<p><b>Parent’s gender role attitude (Independent Variable)</b> defined as attitudes capture individual’s degree of support for traditional division of paid and domestic work and have been linked to the production and reproduction of gender inequality in different social spheres (Perales, 2018). Traits by which male and female are identified in society.</p>	<p><b>Parents’ Gender Role Attitudes Measure</b></p> <p>This test was used in 2013 to assess parent’s beliefs and attitudes towards gender roles Measuring 6 items asking parents personal opinion (Eng, 2013)</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>Control Variable</u></b></p> <p>Age Range: Children ages two to eight years old and parent’s age range between twenty-five and thirty-five years old.</p> <p>Gender: both male and female gender</p>	

Race: nonspecific, open to all races
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**Research Design**

In this research design the researcher will use mixed method-Quantitative methodology (explanatory design) and Quantitative methodology (case study). The researcher will be performing two questionnaires known as Gender Identity Questionnaire for Children (GIQ) for children and Parents' Gender Role Attitudes Measure questionnaire for the parents. Through the study the researcher will be doing interviews and observation on both dependent variables and independent variables. This will allow the proposed research to obtain results from both parts of the study.

**Sampling**

The proposed researcher will be using non-probability sampling. More specific the researcher will be using availability sampling method because it is clear and easy to work with when it comes to working with children. To insure both the parents and children are chosen without difficulty there is no specific race targeted. The sampling will be 100 participants which are broken down into two parts half parents and half children. This is determined by the space setting of a playroom during this study. The children are the first priority to be chosen because one of the specific criteria is that they must be between the ages of two and eight years old. Based on the amount of responds the researcher will determine if it is necessary to break up the children into age categories.

**Data Collection**

For the data collection of this research the proposed research will be focusing on changes from children and parents who participate in this three-month study. Allowing the children to interact amongst themselves. As well as parent's adjusting on how to observe their child as they

have an interaction with other children their age. Researcher will be conducting experiment in a playroom setting to see interaction amongst children and the environment setting. During this time researcher will be collecting data through parent's paper survey. Both parents and children will be observed during these three months and researcher will be doing separate interviews between children and the parents.

Logs are easy to be documented and have a lot of information within them, when doing a qualitative research. The location of when and where the event of the study occurred will be important to note within the logs. These logs also consume less time, which allows the participants to not feel pressure of someone looking over them. Logs can document what is being observed and how parents share their ideas or thoughts on gender behavior. Logs will also be used to document the notes of the children's behavior throughout the study.

One ethical issue for this data collection researchers must keep present would be the ethnic groups they are involving in this research study. Researchers should avoid offending or inappropriately discriminating others for their views. Therefore, it is important to be clear on the wording presented on the paper surveys. Parents should be asked straight forward question and explained if they are unsure of a question. Researchers must also take the time to review the consent form with parents. Each individual involved in the study will receive the same consent specifying the following to ensure they feel they are being respected in a neutral and non-judgmental environment in spite of their customs and beliefs. Including everything the research is entitled to due throughout the specified time frame designated for study.

### **Statistical Analysis**

The researcher is observing and documenting descriptive analysis based on the genders presented in the research. Using the Chi-square test the researcher will get to explore the

relationship between parent's gender role attitudes and child's cross gender behavior. This will allow the researcher to obtain pieces of information for the qualitative method. The researcher will have to include Pearson's correlational analysis to confirm if there is a connection among the variables we are using to study in this population.

### **Limitations**

Along the research study there can be a couple of limitations that would have to be alternated if the researcher plans to expand or reconstruct the study again. Like all successful inventors, there comes a couple of failed trails and researches make no difference. One part of it can be the possibility that those involved in the study can withdraw from it at any given point. Being that it is a critical topic to be studied some parents might feel it to be improper for their children to be in a study at such a young age. The limitations can be the age of the children the researcher consider for the study as well as if the age range in parents varies by a lot. Some parents can have different viewpoints for those who are considered modern parents. Another limitation can be the researcher's population race is not generalized, in which case can impact the results. It can be filled in incorrectly and it can alter the ending result of the study. There are many limitations that can occur, and one just has to be open to the reality that in a study a lot of things can occur.

### **Contribution to Best Practices**

The research will have not only on the participant but also on the family as a whole. This research will allow social workers to develop workshops for parents and children who are going through changes in cross gender behavior. Social workers cannot determine or make other's change their viewpoints but can develop team building projects to strengthen the relationship

between parents and children. The results of the end of the research can also bring out new reflections on how each individual feel and might cause children or even parents to have a better understanding when it comes to being different from others. One can only hope that each participant takes reasonable consideration and respects everyone in a way that is not offensive or disruptive to anyone.

The research will impact future social work research to explore new roots on how to help families who are facing a change in their children's gender behavior. The information can be used for a social worker to construct workshops, making this research more available to other agencies. As well as looking for new resources and programs to seek once the study has been completed. There is no need to simply stop at the end of the research, but one can make new ideas to determine what else can be given as support to children who were part of the study during their early childhood years. Social work practice should consider the opportunity of opening up to society about LGBTQ communities demonstrating there is no difference on how a child chose to grow up but who they are as individuals is what matters. Demonstrating love and compassion to one another in this society is what will provide a safer place for children.

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## **Appendixes**

### **Appendix A**

Support Letter for a Research Study to take place within a Social Work agency. The letter would most likely be from the Executive Director of the agency who has approved the proposal.

**Martinez Children Services: Innovating new generations to identify their gender Behavior amongst others: A Research Proposal**

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Dear Ms. Fernandez,

We are engaged to working with you and your child throughout this experiment.

Attached is our research proposal as a response to your previous request.

We are a small, multi diverse non-profit agency that serves the growth and development of early children within our community. We provide the services necessary for our children and families within our community to expand the resources we have to offer.

With the collaboration of Dr. Lee and Ms. Martinez from the School of Social work at Nyack College in Nyack, New York. I have had the privilege to work with both extraordinary individuals on children development related topics. I have attached documents where we have collaborated on child gender behavior during early childhood, parental opinions and workshops built for families related with this issue.

I believe we can construct and determine practices through new findings on early childhood. The research topic is extensive and can be extended into a variety if branches regarding childhood. All of the obtained information and results will benefit the lives of families in need of answers. If you have any questions, please consider contacting me at your earliest convenience.

Marshall Williams, MSW

Appendix B

Provide a detail description of agency including research study responsibilities and those being a part of it.

**Martinez Children Services: Innovating new generations to identify their gender  
Behavior amongst others: A Research Proposal**

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Dear Ms. Fernandez,

Our agency provides families with early children to attend workshops on parenting and educational programs on a weekly base. We are located in New York; NY and our contact information is (212) 516-8456.

Our project is one of our biggest this year within the agency. If our projects results were what we expect, we would consider expanding our project for further studies. Along with the collaboration of Dr. Lee and Ms. Martinez we will be conducting the test within our facility. Each of us will take part in recording data collection and interacting with individuals involved in the study.

If you have any questions, please consider contacting me at your earliest convenience.

We look forward to receiving a correspondence from you really soon and thank you.

Respectfully,

Marshall Williams, MSW

**Chief Executive Officer**