

Original Research Article

<https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcmas.2019.807.016>

Does Being A Boy or Girl Matters for Personality Development? Study of Personality of Adolescents from Different Social Classes across Gender

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ABSTRACT

The present study explored difference in the personality of adolescents from four different social classes of families (Class I, Class II, Class III, and Class IV) of G.B Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar, Uttarakhand across their gender. Families falling under social class I of the university had parent(s) working as Professor and Associate Professor in the university; those falling under social class II had parent(s) working as Assistant Professor or equivalent and Doctor in the university; those falling under social class III had parent(s) working as Accountant, Supervisor, Lab Technician and Clerk in the university and those falling under social class IV had parent(s) working as Attendant, Driver, Peon, CRC laborer, Gardner and Sweeper. In the present study, forty adolescents were randomly selected from each social class of which 63 were girls and 97 boys making a total of 160 respondents. Respondents from each social class were split across gender to analyze difference in their personality. Adolescent personality was assessed using Multi-dimensional Assessment of Personality Questionnaire (Sanjay Vohra, 1993). The study revealed significant differences in adolescents' personality with gender under all social classes. Girls from all social classes were seen to have significantly higher guilt proneness, morality, tension, sensitivity, self-control, social warmth, academic achievement and mental health than their counterparts. In contrast, boys from all social classes exhibited significantly more individualism, self-sufficiency, excitability, general ability, enthusiasm and competition than girls. Another observation was that boys and girls from social class I, II and III didn't differ on adaptability, boldness and leadership domain of personality, however, girls from social class IV were seen to be significantly more adaptable than boys and boys were found to be significantly more bold and leading than girls. No gender difference existed on maturity, creativity and innovation domains of personality in adolescents from all social classes.

Keywords

Excitability, Guilt proneness, Innovation, Maturity, Morality

Article Info

Accepted:

04 June 2019

Available Online:

10 July 2019

Introduction

Personality can be defined as a dynamic and organized set of characteristics possessed by a person that uniquely direct his or her

cognition, emotions, interpersonal orientations motivations, and behaviors in various circumstances. The word "personality" begins from the Latin word persona, which means mask. Personality may also refer to the

patterns of opinion, feelings, social regulations, and behaviors consistently shown by an individual over time that strongly influences our expectations, self-perceptions, values and attitudes, and forecasts our reactions to people, problems and stress. Personality is often conceptualized as the degree to which someone displays high or low levels of specific traits. Traits are the reliable patterns of thoughts, feelings, motives, and behaviors that a person exhibits across situations (Fleeson and Gallagher, 2009). That is, someone who scores high on a trait will exhibit psychological states connected to that trait more often and to a greater extent than individuals who score low on that trait.

Adolescence has been known to be a difficult time for most individuals as it is punctuated by various hassle factors. Adolescents counteract a number of unique developmental challenges, including coping with unexpected changes in their bodies, managing their sexual interests, forming newest kinds of relationships, and planning their academic and occupational futures. Since, gender is a vital physiological variable which influences how adolescents manage all of these challenges; it might also act as a determinant of the personality of an individual. Gender differences in personality are often portrayed by adolescents' perceptions, appearance of emotions, and behavior. These differences may to some extent be attributed to the different functions and expectations that adolescents have learned; for example, parents may perceive the use of violent and challenging coping strategies as acceptable for boys but not for girls.

Gender as an intervening variable is of great interest in the field of psychology. It moderates the influence of a number of factors viz., cognitive, biological, social, and environmental that have significant role in influencing the personality of adolescents.

Gender differences do not mean that boy and girl only experience states on opposing ends of the trait spectrum; on the contrary, significant differences can exist along with a high degree of overlap between the distributions of boy and girl (Hyde, 2005). Gender norms are shaped by socio-cultural influences, such that women and men are expected to serve different roles in society and are therefore socialized to behave differently from one another (Wood and Eagly, 2002; Eagly and Wood, 2005). A study by Sahu (2018) reported that male respondents had higher academic achievement, boldness, creativity, enthusiasms, excitability, general ability, individualism, innovation, readership, mental health, self-control, sensitivity and self-sufficiency than females. Whereas, female respondents were found to have higher adaptability, compatibility, guilt proneness, social warmth, maturity, and tension than males. However, no difference was seen among males and females on morality. Rawat and Singh (2017) revealed that boys were more emotionally stable, emotionally progressive, socially adjusting, independent and had adequate personality as compared to girls. Sinha (2014) reported a significant difference among girls and boys in accordance with their emotional maturity. It was perceived that boys were emotionally more superior to girls. Such studies reveal gender differences in personality traits.

Personality is mainly useful in attempting to examine psychological differences between genders. According to Vandermassen (2011), human males and females should have evolved to be psychologically identical is a theoretical impossibility, and, indeed, turns out to be untrue". Prior studies on the subject portray results supporting this idea. Costa *et al.*, (2008) found that adolescent girls were higher than boys in extraversion and openness, whereas Branje *et al.*, (2007) reported that boys tended to be higher extraverted and open

to experience than girls. McCrae and colleagues (2002) found higher levels of agreeableness and neuroticism in girls, whereas Branje *et al.*, (2007) found no sex differences on these two dimensions.

It's quite evident from above that lots of work has already been done in the area of adolescents' personality and it unfailingly varies with gender. Eagly's (1987) social role model argues that gender roles are internalized early in life and are the source of gender differences in personality. Also, personality traits are seen to be age-graded in our culture.

The studies conducted are mostly from foreign land. Secondly, adolescents' personality has not been studied across gender under the umbrella of social classes. Thus, present study has been taken up with the following objectives:

Objective

To statistically analyze significant differences in adolescents' personality across gender

To overview gender differences in adolescents' personality under four social classes of families under study

Materials and Methods

Locale

The present research study was carried out exclusively in G.B Pant University of Agriculture and Technology, Pantnagar. Out of the eight schools running in the university, only five schools viz; Campus School, Government Girls Inter College (GGIC), Pantnagar Inter College (PIC), Balnilyam Junior School, Saraswati Shishu Mandir were purposively selected as a research base for the present study since they provided education up to intermediate.

Sample

Adolescents studying in 7-9 standards of the selected schools were listed and categorized under four groups on the basis of their family social class namely Class I, Class II, Class III, and Class IV. Social class of a family was based on parents' working status in the university namely Social Class I: - Professor and Associate Professor; Social Class II:- Assistant Professor or equivalent, Doctor; Social Class III:-Accountant, Supervisor, Lab Technician, Clerk; Social Class IV:-Attendant, Driver, Peon, CRC labourer, Gardner, Sweeper. In the present study, forty adolescents were randomly selected from each social class of which 63 were girls and 97 boys making a total of 160 respondents.

Research tools

Adolescent personality was assessed using Multi-dimensional Assessment of Personality Questionnaire (1993). MAP is a 147-item questionnaire designed to examine dimensions of adolescent personality like-Adaptability, Academic Achievement, Boldness, Competition, Creativity, Enthusiasm, Excitability, General Ability, Guilt proneness, Individualism, Innovation, Leadership, Maturity, Mental Health, Morality, Self Control, Sensitivity, Self sufficiency, Social Warmth, and Tension.

Data Collection

Prior permission to contact respondents of the present study in the school itself was sought from principals of the selected schools. Thereafter, randomly selected respondents were approached and their consent for participation in the study was obtained.

Respondents were administered research tools assuring confidentiality of their responses and expectation of their honest response on it.

Results and Discussion

Table 1 depicts significant difference in all the domains of adolescent's personality across gender among different social classes except maturity. Girls from all social classes were seen to have significantly higher guilt proneness, morality, tension, sensitivity, self control, social warmth, academic achievement and mental health than their counterparts. In contrast, boys from all social classes exhibited significantly more individualism, self-sufficiency, excitability, general ability, enthusiasm and competition than girls.

Another observation was that boys and girls from social class I, II and III didn't differ on adaptability, boldness and leadership domain of personality, however, girls from social class IV were seen to be significantly more adaptable than boys and boys were found to be significantly more bold and leading than girls. No gender difference existed on maturity, creativity and innovation domains of personality in adolescents from all social classes.

According to Magan *et al.*, (2014) assessment of personality is complex, and a specific assessment is required because of its multifaceted and multidimensional nature. Personality is shaped by the goodness of fit between the child's temperamental qualities and characteristics of the environment (Chess and Thomas, 1999). Heckman (2008) stresses the importance of parental investments in their children for shaping a child's personality. SES largely defines the reserves available to parents for investments in their child. SES is a prime candidate for shaping a child's personality. Social status is representative of wealth, influence and status that a group of individuals have. Individuals from high SES think of social class as their guide to live their life. They make their choices and decisions in life in accordance with their SES. Whereas,

individuals from low social class are less likely to define themselves in terms of their socioeconomic status and have internal locus of control. A study by Ayoub *et al.*, (2018) found evidence for the resource substitution hypothesis, which proposes that personality compensates for background disadvantage. Social stratification structures the environment of individuals and this inequality perpetuates and is manifested greatly in personality differences throughout life. The personalities of individuals from two different social statuses vary because of exposure to different environment including people, institutions, neighborhood and so on. According to a study by Hart *et al.*, (2008) reported that neighborhood poverty is linked to problematic personality patterns in children This in turn leads to significant differences in parenting practices, beliefs and motives, reasoning typical of a particular social group. Stress, depression, and financial struggles in low social status group also lead adolescents to have some form of disengagement with school, education, and academics. The children incorporate personality traits and reasoning which help them justify their motives behind their wrongdoing.

In Indian context, most people especially from lower social status still continue to see boys as an asset and girls a liability. The families also provide better nutrition, education and health care to boys than girls, and indulge in a multitude of other practices that discriminate against girls. A plethora of social, cultural and economic factors adds to this inclination. India's patriarchal society conditions the mindset of girls from a very young age for internalizing covert personality traits. In the present study, girls from social class IV reported significantly more adaptability than their counterparts from social class I, II and III. This is because boys have freedom to exercise their control, autonomy and will in various situations both inside and outside of

home settings. Gender stereotypes often involving attributes of personality that are permitted in one sex and objectionable and proscribed for the other are more strongly seen and practiced in families with low social statuses. In high social class, education paves way for development of more gender neutral environment and opportunities provided irrespective of gender. This to a very great extent affects the self-esteem of the both genders with males growing up to become more assertive, expressive and enthusiastic and more intensely rigid and girls becoming more fluid in their nature. A meta-analysis conducted by Fiengold (1994) indicated that males were found to be more assertive and had slightly higher self-esteem than females. Females were higher in extraversion, anxiety, trust and especially, tender-mindedness (e.g. Nurturance). In families with low social status the gender difference in leadership, enthusiasm is large but in families with high social status this difference is much lower. Excitability which is seen as a combination of immediate temperamental quality, impatient, demanding and hyperactive behavior is found to be characteristic seen significantly more in boys than girls. The probable reason might be social conditioning of men and also their inability to easily adapt to adverse situations and look for alternatives.

Studies (Carbonell, 1984; Fleischer and Chertkoff, 1986) have shown that the personality trait of dominance, often considered a male stereotypic trait, cannot account for gender differences in leader selection. Even when a high-dominance woman is paired with a low-dominance man, the man still is more likely to be selected leader than the woman. According to established gender norms, society typically identifies leadership as stereotypically 'masculine trait. Men are seen to have higher leadership qualities, typically challenging themselves every day. But with time,

leadership is now seen to be associated with compassion, partnership, emotional intellect which are feminine traits. So, it greatly depends on the culture of hierarchical position in a particular family. In families with low social status the gender difference is large but in families with high social status this difference is much lower.

Individualism, which comprises keeping one's views private, and avoiding group action. It is a tendency to act without reference to others, particularly in matters of ideology. The present study reported that irrespective of social class, boys show reported significantly higher individualism and self-sufficiency, and general ability than girls. According to gender norms and socio-cultural factors, girls are reared in accordance with traditional gender roles that they are required to fulfill, which majorly require collectivistic characteristics. On the contrary, competitive job typically requires men to enact individualistic traits, looking for individualistic in priority to collectivistic interest.

Boldness is the tendency to not hesitate in breaking the rules, being ardent in risk-taking despite anticipated dangers. Children, boys in particular, from families with low social status are rarely concerned about accommodating to other person's idea of who they should be and what they should do. Risk-taking, as Lupton (1999) comments, is an integral part of 'gendered performances' whereby people, at an early age, learn to value and adopt socially approved behaviors. According to Jadack *et al.*, (1995) male role is characterized by more active qualities such as chivalrous or heroic helping, a resistance to being influenced by others and a willingness to take risks. On the other hand, status which is mere perception of other people about who and what one is and how one should behave is the major concern for children of both genders from families with high social status.

According to a study by Deckers *et al.*, (2015) children of higher educated parents are significantly more patient and significantly less likely to make risk seeking choices.

Guilt proneness is a personality trait indicative of a predisposition to experience negative feelings about personal wrongdoing. Irrespective of social class, girls are seen to be more guilt prone, probably because they reside too much in their past, thinking of the regrets or mistakes they made. A study by Cohen *et al.*, (2011) suggested that the difference in socialization of boys and girls may impact the threshold of experience guilt. Girls feel more responsibility for another person's well-being so they are more prone to guilt when they feel unable to do so in their capacity. Therefore, they experience higher tension. The findings of the present study revealed that irrespective of their social class, girls were found to exhibit significantly higher sensitivity and social warmth than boys. Sensitivity refers to the tendency of being dependant and impatient. The probable reason might be that the girls are biologically more tender, affectionate, caring, and compassionate by nature. They experience intense emotions and expressions exhibiting more sensitivity and social warmth.

Girls tend to have higher academic achievement in comparison to boys. The probable reason for this might be equal opportunities and resources available to both. According to a study by Houtte (2004) it is demonstrated that boys' culture is less study oriented than girls' culture and that this difference can be held responsible for the gender differences in achievement, at least in general schools. According to a study by Demie (2001) girls tend to be more successful than boys during elementary and secondary education, even in math and science which are traditionally considered to be masculine subjects. However, in low social class, this

gender difference is much higher because parents tend to provide more for their boys because they consider it investment for the secure future for all family members.

On the aspect of competition, the present study reported boys to be more competitive than girls, irrespective of their social class. This is in conformity with the findings of a study by Niederle and Vesterlund (2007) who reported that women shy away from competition while men embrace it. Also, Hogarth *et al.*, (2012) provide evidence for a gender gap in exiting competitive situations. Using data from a TV game-show, they show that women tend to leave competitions at a faster rate than men, resulting in a substantial gap in winnings. Thus, boys exhibit innovation and creativity to strive for excellence.

On the component of morality, the present study reported girls to have higher traits of morality than boys. The probable reason is that the reasoning behind their moral decisions depends upon their orientation towards a situation. The girls biologically tend to have a care orientation and boys have orientation adhering strictly to rules, obligations made and tend to see things in black and white.

The present study reported that irrespective of social class, girls have better mental health than boys. Societal factor put girls at comparatively higher risk of mental health than boys.

However, girls are seen to have better mental health as compared to boys because girls' readiness to talk about their issues and their strong communal associations of friends and family which can help protect their mental health. Boys, on the other hand are socially accustomed to not crib over life's juggles and portray strong image.

The findings of the present study reveal that self-control, which is assessed by having control over emotionality, is reported to be higher in girls than boys. No difference of social class was found in this domain of personality. Previous work has shown that girls score higher on self-regulation and self-control measures than boys in general (Chapple *et al.*, 2010; Jo and Bouffard, 2014). Girls, exercise self-control in social situations resulting in socially appropriate behavior.

No gender difference was seen along the component of maturity. The probable reason for this might be that maturity is a composite of development of innate dispositions and social experiences. Maturity can be defined as a state when an individual develops the ability to comprehend the social environment around oneself and act accordingly to the established social norms. It is ingrained in us that women are psychologically more mature than men because of the gender stereotype which constantly pressurizes women to act more mature. The probable reason for no difference in maturity across social class in the present study might be that the children from higher SES get direction and guidance from their well educated parents who make them realize that values are the most notable quality above everything else. On the other hand, children from low SES grow up to be equally mature because they handle their day to day crisis on their own.

Innovation and creativity domains of personality were seen to be gender neutral. Studies show either no substantive differences, or that in some cases women and girls actually score higher than boys and men on creativity tests (Baer, 2012; Baer and Kaufman, 2008). Earlier, society tended to undermine the potential of girls and acknowledge their competence on creative grounds. But, with education and awareness, opportunities are provided to girls to bring

their work to public consideration. Stereotypical gender roles are being challenged by girls today in all fields involving innovation and creativity.

Girls from all social classes were seen to have significantly higher guilt proneness, morality, tension, sensitivity, self control, social warmth, academic achievement and mental health than their counterparts. In contrast, boys from all social classes exhibited significantly more individualism, self-sufficiency, excitability, general ability, enthusiasm and competition than girls. Another observation was that boys and girls from social class I, II and III didn't differ on adaptability, boldness and leadership domain of personality, however, girls from social class IV were seen to be significantly more adaptable than boys and boys were found to be significantly more bold and leading than girls. It implies that social class mediates the effect on adolescents' personality when seen across gender. Awareness programs and campaigns should be organized to help parents understand the influence of gender which is a complex determinant affecting adolescent's personality so that they can aid in holistic development of adolescents' personality.

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How to cite this article:

Arti Kumari, Ritu Singh, Manisha Mehra and Amit Kr. Mishra. 2019. Does Being A Boy or Girl Matters for Personality Development? Study of Personality of Adolescents from Different Social Classes across Gender. *Int.J.Curr.Microbiol.App.Sci*. 8(07): 122-131.
doi: <https://doi.org/10.20546/ijcmas.2019.807.016>