



Parenting Styles and Parents' Attitudes towards Children's Gender Nonconformity: Moderating Role of Parents' Education

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Abstract

Parents are concerned about how gender identity may affect their child's views and behaviors, given the surge in the number of children and young adults who are willing to defy normal gender expression these days. However, due to the subject's sensitivity, few studies on this topic have been conducted in Malaysia. As a result, the focus of this study was on parenting practices and parents' attitudes toward a child's gender nonconformity, with parental educational levels serving as a moderating factor. This study sought to educate and inform parents by providing them with a greater understanding of the techniques they choose as their parenting styles and attitudes, as well as how those styles and attitudes affect how they know, reflect on, and interpret their children's gender behaviors. This study included 300 parents from Klang Valley, Malaysia. As instruments, the Attitude Toward Woman Scale (AWS), Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ), and Gender Identity Questionnaire (GIQC) were used. According to the findings of this study, attitude plays a substantial role on children's gender nonconformity. Furthermore, the study's findings demonstrated that parental education considerably moderates the relation between parents' attitudes and authoritative parenting style and children's gender nonconformity. Finally, higher degrees of education minimize gender nonconformity in children with the same level of parental attitude. Higher levels of education, on the other hand, increase children's non-conformity among children with the same amount of authoritative parenting style. In other words, higher levels of education increase the negative influence of parents' authoritative parenting style on non-conformity behavior in children.

Keywords: Gender Nonconformity; Parents' Attitudes; Parents' Education; Parenting Styles

Introduction

Many parents in the Western world recognize that their children may not necessarily choose to identify as male or female; however, this is not the case for all parents in the Eastern world. People use the term "gender" based on their prior understanding of cultural standards and anticipated behaviors (Jacobs, Thomas, and Lang, 1997). Gender identification refers to an individual's specific sense of likeness to a recognized gender, while gender role refers to how they express such actions to society (Stryker, 2008; Diamond, 2013). A child whose sex is female, for example, may identify as a boy and

play the roles of a boy, demonstrating how inborn and environmental influences are intricately intertwined in the development of gender identity (Diamond, 2013).

Most children fall into the normal gender norm group because they conform to cultural norms in terms of their choices for the types of toys or activities they participate in, as well as how they dress. However, there are exceptions, such as males who like to play with dolls and girls who prefer to play with cars, which is known as gender nonconformity (Diamond, 2013).

As a result, when it comes to gender nonconformity, it is vital for parents, to respond in a certain way, as this has a big impact on a child's psychological adjustment (Rosario, 2015). Most children have heterosexual parents, and gender nonconformity is likely to be frowned upon because it violates their attitudes and beliefs. Especially if they anticipate their children to be heterosexual like them (Katz-Wise, Rosario, & Tsappis, 2016). After all, a parent's attitude is widely recognized as the most crucial sociodemographic predictor (Bornstein, Bradley, 2014). Because of their challenging living situations (low socioeconomic status), which is typically accompanied by lower levels of education, parents are presumed to practice autorotative parenting approaches with their children (Ispa *et al.*, 2004) which influences the child's levels of psychological anguish as they grow older, particularly with autorotative parenting, generating more psychological distress for the child (et al., 2010). According to another study, egalitarian parents allow their children to have a larger range of interests and activities than traditional parents. Younger parents, parents with less education, and fathers held more traditional gender roles than older parents, more educated parents, and mothers (Kollmayer *et al.*, 2018).

In summary, the goal of this study was to examine parenting styles and parents' attitudes toward a child's gender nonconformity, with the parents' educational levels acting as a moderator. As a result, the purpose of this study was to enlighten and educate parents by providing them with a better understanding of the method they choose as their parenting styles and attitudes, as well as how those styles and attitudes affect how they know, reflect on, and interpret their children's gender behaviors.

Literature Review

In general, most children engage in and conform to same-sex-type behaviors, with just a few exceptions deviating from the norms and identifying more strongly with a different gender identity. According to a study conducted by Beijsterveldt, Hudziak, and Boomsma (2006), the majority of children engage in and conform to same-sex-type activities, with just a tiny number straying from the norms and identifying more strongly with a different gender identity. Furthermore, nongender conforming children, regardless of gender, had high levels of internalizing and externalizing problems. This is consistent with prior research findings (Bailey, Dunne, & Martin, 2000; Alanko *et al.*, 2010).

According to Skidmore, Linsenmeier, and Bailey (2006) and Martin (2009), when a boy exhibits gender nonconformity traits, his parents and classmates are more uncomfortable and less supportive than if it were a girl, exposing boys to a higher risk of mistreatment. Boys are also more affected in this aspect in terms of their relationships with their parents since fathers are less accepting of their sons' gender-nonconforming behavior (Freund & Blanchard, 1983; Kahn, 2009). Fathers are more likely to encourage their children to engage in more conforming sexual behaviors than mothers. As they appear to have a lower tolerance for gender nonconforming behaviors displayed by their children than mothers. This is especially evident when it comes to their sons. Hence, because moms do not intrude or intervene as much as fathers do, the mother-son relationship is not as negatively impacted as the father-son relationship (Langlois & Downs, 1980; Bradley & Gobbart, 1989; Lytton & Romney, 1991). The stigmatization of males is too strong, and there is only one form of gender masculinity, which is heterosexuality, which is paired with dominant features such as aggression and minimal amounts of emotions, and it is culturally glorified among all others. This is why fathers are less accepting of their sons' gender nonconformity (Connell, 2018).

Studies have linked nongender conforming children to anxiety symptoms, low self-esteem issues, depression, body dissatisfaction, and suicidality as they grow into adulthood (Strong, Singh, & Randall, 2000; Landolt *et al.*, 2004; Skidmore, Linsenmeier, & Bailey, 2006; Plöderl & Fartacek, 2007).

The Minority Stress Theory is a theory that explains the negative psychosocial implications of being a gender nonconforming child (Meyer, 2003). It states that individuals who belong to a minority group, with a focus on gender nonconforming individuals and the LGBTQ community, tend to experience high levels of discrimination and harassment. This harms their mental and physical health because societies struggle with homophobia and transphobia (Testa *et al.*, 2015).

Traditional parents highlight a female's need for caring and a male's desire to develop leadership abilities, whereas egalitarian parents decrease differences and promote more equality in the family regardless of gender (Perrone-McGovern *et al.* 2014). It has also been suggested that when a parent has a more traditional attitude toward gender roles, their child is more likely to mimic that attitude and practice a more traditional mindset, whereas children who have more flexibility in their gender role attitudes are more likely to have parents who have more egalitarian values (Epstein & Ward, 2011; Fulcher, Sutfin, & Patterson, 2007).

Research Methodology

The components of this study were investigated using a quantitative approach, which included parenting styles, parents' attitudes toward gender nonconformity in children, and the moderating effects of parents' education. A nonprobability sampling approach, namely convenience sampling, was employed for this study. In this research, 300 parents over the age of 19 with children under the age of 15 were recruited among the researcher's acquaintances, relatives, and connections in the Klang Valley, Malaysia.

The ages of the participants were chosen based on the fact that 18 years old is the legal marriage age in Malaysia under civil law (National Registration Department, 2019), and the child must be under 15 years old because the gender characteristic questions in the Gender Identity Questionnaire (GIQC) are more relatable for children in their preschool to preadolescent stages as co-eds (Johnson *et al.*, 2004). With a population of 1.8 million individuals in Kuala Lumpur (United Nations, 2019), a sample size of 300 people was recruited for this study. Gay (1996) contended that if a community surpasses 5000 individuals, population size becomes essentially immaterial, and a sample size of 300 people is more than adequate. With a sample size of 300 and a degree of confidence of 95 percent, the power of analysis in this study was calculated to be around 97 percent.

The Klang Valley was chosen for this study because it contains a population of 7.2 million people and a diverse ethnic mix of Malays, Chinese, and Indians, as well as other cultures, according to the Malaysian Department of Statistics Malaysia (2019). It is also said to have a roughly equal mix of urban and rural lifestyle habits, resulting in a diverse variety of educational levels, socioeconomic situations, and individual personalities, making it appropriate for this research.

Instrumentation

A self-administered online survey method was employed to collect data for this investigation. The three measures used in this study were the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) (Buri, 1991), the Attitude toward Woman Scale (AWS) (Spence & Helmreich, 1978), and the Gender Identity Questionnaire (GIQC) (Elizabeth and Green, 1984 as quoted by Johnson *et al.*, 2004).

Parental Authority Questionnaire

To find out how parents felt about their parenting techniques, researchers employed the Parental Authority Questionnaire (PAQ) (Buri, 1991). It has 30 items grouped into three parenting style categories (authoritative, authoritarian, and permissive), each with ten items and measured on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Attitudes towards Women Scale

The Attitude toward Woman Scale (AWS) (Spence & Helmreich, 1978) was used to assess parents' attitudes on gender roles. It consisted of 15 items (short version) on 4 Likert rating scales ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. This scale was created to assess an individual's

attitudes toward gender roles, whether it be towards a man or a woman, and to determine whether they hold a traditional or egalitarian viewpoint.

The Gender Identity Questionnaire

To get information from parents on how often their child engages in gender nonconformity behaviors, the revised version of the Gender Identity Questionnaire (GIQC) (Elizabeth and Green, 1984 as cited by Johnson *et al.*, 2004) was used. It consists of 16 items that cover a variety of sex-typed behaviors that identify themselves with the structure of the core phenomenology of gender identity disorder (GID), with 5 Likert scale ratings used for each item to determine the frequency of occurrence.

Results

Demographic Information

A total of 300 parents, ranging in age from 28 to 60, with children ranging in age from 1 to 14, engaged in this study. Table 1 shows the mean scores for the parents' demographic information, which includes their age, relationship to the child, educational levels, marital status, and their child's age and gender.

Table 1: Participant's Demographic Profile (n=300)

Variables	n	%
Age of Respondents		
<40	197	65.67
≥40	103	34.33
Mean	39.06	
SD	5.71	
Min.	28	
Max.	60	
Relationship to Child		
Father	115	38.3
Mother	185	61.7
Educational Level		
PMR/SPM	8	2.7
Diploma/Certificate	104	34.7
Bachelor's Degree	136	45.3
Postgraduate Level	52	17.3
Marital Status		
Married	229	76.3
Divorced	36	12.0
Separated	17	5.7
Prefer not to say	18	6.0
Age of child		
<10	223	74.33
≥10	77	25.67
Mean	7.21	
SD	2.98	
Min.	1	
Max.	14	
Gender of child		
Male	150	50
Female	150	50

The measured means and standard deviations for all of the variables utilized in this investigation are listed in Table 2. A total of 300 parents took part in the study, with 46 belonging to an authoritarian parenting style (M = 27.39, SD = 6.82), 49 to a permissive parenting style (M = 29.32, SD = 6.35), and 205 to an authoritative parenting style (M = 39.03, SD = 6.27). In terms of parental attitudes, the total score was (M = 32.90, SD = 7.57), with 249 parents categorized as having an egalitarian/pro-feminist attitude, accounting for 83% of the total score, and 51 parents categorised as having a traditional/conservative attitude, accounting for the remaining 17 percent.

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Scores on Parenting Styles, Attitudes and Gender Nonconformity (n=300)

	Mean	Sd.
Parenting Styles		
(1) Permissive	29.32	6.35
(2) Authoritarian	27.39	6.82
(3) Authoritative	39.03	6.27
Attitudes towards gender roles	32.90	7.57
Gender Nonconformity		
“Female typical behavior”	14.13	4.22
“Male typical behavior “	13.09	3.56
“Cross-gender behavior”	19.21	2.21

Table 3: Hierarchal Regression Analysis

Variable	Step 1			Step 2			Step 3		
	Beta	t	P	Beta	t	P	Beta	t	P
Age	-0.13	-2.19	.029	-0.13	-2.10	.037	-0.14	-2.21	.028
Gender	0.09	1.46	.146	0.13	2.16	.032	0.12	1.92	.055
Parents' attitudes				0.22	2.98	.003	0.88	2.69	.008
Permissive parenting style				-0.11	-1.77	.077	-0.01	-0.03	.978
Authoritarian parenting style				-0.05	-0.66	.510	0.18	0.66	.511
Authoritative parenting style				-0.09	-1.50	.136	-0.81	-2.64	.009
Attitude* Parents' Education							-0.98	-2.06	.040
Permissive*Parents' Education							-0.14	-0.43	.664
Authoritarian*Parents' Education							-0.28	-0.91	.362
Authoritative*Parents' Education							1.18	2.39	.018
F	4.55			4.20			3.16		
p-value	0.011			0.001			0.001		

Discussion

The majority of the participants in this study were categorized as having an authoritative parenting style. The results of this study showed that attitude significantly contributed to children's gender nonconformity. Another result of this study revealed that parents' education significantly moderates the relationship between parents' attitudes and authoritative parenting style and children's nonconformity. The educational levels of parents acted as a moderator between authoritative parenting

and children's nonconformity. The authoritative parenting style is more likely to be the dominant parenting style of a parent with a higher degree of education. Dornbusch *et al.* (1987) found comparable results, claiming that parents with better educational backgrounds are more authoritative by nature, providing not only warmth but also enough assistance to their children when needed.

Conclusion

It's important to remember that a parent's educational level has an impact, as people with higher educational backgrounds are more capable of being 'flexible' with their thoughts. They are more aware of current events, whereas people with lower educational backgrounds are more capable of being 'inflexible' because they are likely lacking in awareness. Certain ramifications and circumstances were also discussed, and it is critical for parents these days to attempt to be emancipated because failing to do so might have a significant impact on their child's mental health. Few studies have found that parents with higher educational levels are more accepting of their children's ideas (Ispa *et al.*, 2004; Alanko *et al.*, 2010; Kollmayer, Schultes, Schober, Hodosi, & Spiel, 2018).

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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