
The Causes For Gender Stereotypes

Social norms have created stereotypes for male and female that have a significant influence on health outcome. Men are expected to be brave, tough, resistant to pain and not showing their emotions. Women, on the other hand, are very emotional, sensitive and in need of protection. Men will not seek help immediately if they feel tired, overworked and stressed or if they feel pain. Social norms of masculinity encourage them to overlook their symptoms and perceive them as unthreatening. Consequently, they will delay any treatment necessary to deal immediately with a potential disease and increase their chances of healing successfully. It is not manly to go to the doctor for any minor injury or pain.

I have personally seen how gender stereotypes can affect our opinions and behaviors. I was raised believing that men are strong, brave, resilient and almost invulnerable. That's the way I used to see my father for example. He never complained about anything; he was tough and refused to go to the doctor for little pains. When my brother had his first depression, I was in shock and didn't know how to react. I used to think that depression was a woman illness. For me, being depressed meant being weak and I believed that my brother was physically and mentally strong. When I asked my brother why he didn't share his feelings with me from the beginning, he confessed that he felt ashamed and feared my reaction. I saw distress and isolation in his eyes because I understood that he didn't consider himself a "man" anymore and he felt exposed emotionally. Women longevity is more extended than men, but yet men suicide rates are higher than women (Ogden, 2017). Those differences may find their sources in gender stereotypes and behaviors such as a man doesn't share his emotions and mental issues.

With my mentality, I was convinced that with my support and a lot of talking, I could heal him without going to the doctor. I must confess that I felt ashamed and tried to conceal this situation to the rest of the family and our friends. In brief, we delayed help-seeking, we delayed medical treatment, and my brother suffered bravely for six months because of our beliefs.

This experience with my brother's depression made me aware of my own biases, and I had to reset my way of thinking to help him. The first time I saw him cry, I understood that a man could be sensible and cry without losing his manhood. Getting rid of all those prejudgments are essential to counteract those biases. We have to rethink man and women characteristics and beliefs. The first step is to be aware and accept that we have biases, pay attention to the way we speak to avoid passing them on our children. We wouldn't want our boys to be raised to the sound of "boys don't cry," "boys are tough," and other similar statements, so we have to talk about those stereotypes at home and break them (Shafer, 2018).

References

1. Ogden, J. (2017). The psychology of health and illness: An open access course. The psychology of health illness.
2. Schaffer, L. (2018). How parents and caregivers can work to counter stereotyping and discrimination — starting in early childhood. Harvard Graduate School of Education. Retrieved from <https://www.gse.harvard.edu/news/uk/18/11/preventing-gender-bias>

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