Parental Double Standards for Teenage Males and Females

Amanda Nocton, Amanda Smitley, Bekah Wilson

Psy 344 – Winter ‘08

Hanover College
Differential treatment by parents of male and female adolescents was measured in a random sample of 167 adults. Participants completed a questionnaire that examined differences with regards to freedom, chores, academic standards, and punishment. Compared to female participants, male participants as adolescents were expected to do outdoor chores that included taking out the trash, mowing the lawn, shoveling snow, and raking leaves; whereas females were expected to make dinner. There were also differences in regards to punishment such that males received physical punishment more than females and females received loss of privileges more commonly than males.
Parental Double Standards for Teenage Males and Females

Classic television shows such as “Leave it to Beaver” depict life in the 1950’s and 1960’s where the husband comes home to his wife who is in the kitchen making dinner and doing the laundry while he goes to mow the lawn and finish up the yard work. This is a classic example of the gendered division of chores that has prevailed throughout history; however today it is not unheard of to have stay at home fathers and a more equal division of labor within the home. However, even in our modern culture, food preparation and housekeeping are primarily tasks assigned to females, whereas much of the yard work still remains a predominantly male activity (Peters, 1994). This study was designed to evaluate whether the gender differences in chores, as well as privileges, punishments, rules, and expectations have begun to change. Additionally, this study is to establish whether parents are more permissive with male adolescence than with female adolescence.

Adults look to the chores they were assigned as a child when dividing the labor within their own households (Peters, 1994; Thrall, 1978). The implications of this are that those same gendered division of chores present in the 1950’s and 1960’s are still prevalent today. Furthermore, children learn gender roles, rights and responsibilities through the assignment of household chores (Leaper & Friedman, 2007). This is manifested in such a way that females are taught that they should be dependent, fragile, unaggressive, sensitive, nurturing, and resistant to taking risks, whereas males are taught to be strong, confident, independent, and daring (Bumpus, Crouter, & McHale, 2001; Peters, 1994).

A study found that females were 15 times as likely to do the chores within the home; while males were 36 times more likely to have chores outside of the household (Peters, 1994). Often, the gender of the child determines exactly how much time will be devoted to chores and
more specifically how much time will be devoted to which specific types of chores. This is such that girls spend more time doing chores defined as feminine and boys spending more time doing chores that are defined as masculine (Antill, Goodnow, Russell & Cotton, 1996; Peters, 1994; Thrall, 1978). Feminine typed chores are defined as cooking, setting the table, washing dishes, doing laundry, cleaning the house, taking care of young children, taking care of older family members, and shopping for groceries, whereas masculine typed chores were defined as yard work such as mowing the grass, shoveling the snow, taking care of the car and maintenance around the house in addition to taking out the trash (Gager, Cooney, & Call, 1999; Antill et al., 1996). As a result of these studies, our first hypothesis is that the chores given to males will be related to housework outside of the house such as mowing the lawn or taking out the trash, whereas the chores given to females will be indoor chores such as cooking dinner or setting the table.

According to Gager et al. (1999), once chores become gender specific, most of the household tasks are defined as female and are done daily or several times a day, whereas many of the chores defined as masculine are related to yard work and may only need to be done once or twice a week. Therefore, females spend significantly more time doing chores than do males, so much so that in 9th grade, males spent 87% as much time on chores as did females, but by 12th grade the amount of time had dropped to 68% as much time spent on chores as females (Gager et al., 1999; Peters, 1994). This is also supported by White and Brinkerhoff (1981) who found that in the 14 – 17 year-old age range males spent an average of 3.6 hours on chores per week while females spent an average of 5.7 hours per week. This creates a situation where males have more time that is not taken up by chores to devote to activities of their choice such as spending time with friends. However, it was also found that 84 percent of adolescent females hold a job
outside of the house, while the percentage of males to hold a job was only 79 (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). This is not an extreme difference, and was not significant within the study, but it is still notable because it takes more time away from girls.

In addition to performing more chores around the house, females were also granted fewer privileges. This is partly related to what was discussed earlier with females spending more time doing chores, thereby reducing the amount of free time they have to do extra activities. The unequal allotment of chores is especially prevalent for older adolescent females (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). The unequal allotment of chores coupled with the lack of privileges relates to the fact that females are expected to maintain more impulse control than are males, and this is done by giving females more responsibilities (Arnett, 1995). This is such that society is generally seen as more protective of females and generally more permissive of males (Peters, 1994). As a result of Gager et al.’s (1999) study showing that females spend more time on homework than do males, as well as the research by Arnett (1995) indicating that females are given more responsibilities as well as being expected to maintain higher impulse control; our second hypothesis is that girls will be expected to maintain a higher level of academic standards than will their male counterparts.

In addition to expecting daughters to maintain more impulse control, parents also tend to monitor their daughters more than their sons. Parents were less likely to allow their adolescent daughters to remain home alone than their adolescent sons, moreover, as females grow older, their chances of being left home alone in comparison to their male counterparts dwindled significantly. The reason for these decreased chances at being left home alone is that parents keep a closer watch on females than they do on males until a later age (Bulcroft, Carmody, & Bulcroft, 1996; Longmore, Manning, & Giordano, 2001; Peters, 1994). Additionally, Bulcroft et
al. (1996) study found that parents were more likely to initiate household rules that limited the adolescent’s behavior within the home for females than they were for males. This can also be manifested in such a way that in an activity judged to be gender neutral, such as a sleepover, males were given more autonomy and judged as being allowed to go more often than were females (Killen, Park, Lee-Kim, & Shin, 2005). Given that parents seem to monitoring their daughters more closely than their sons, it seems evident that there is less autonomy and independence being given to daughters.

Another form of independence and autonomy giving is the time at which a child’s curfew is set; however, there is conflicting research relating to curfew. Some research indicates that females are more likely to be given a later curfew throughout adolescence than are males (Bulcroft et al., 1996), however in a differing study it was found that females had earlier curfew than did their male counterparts (Peters, 1994). There was also mixed data about which gender was given more access to the family car. Peters (1994) found that 59 percent of participants believed that access to the car was gender neutral; however, in the remaining 41 percent, 30 percent believed that the sons had greater access to the family car. Due to this research, and also the study by Killen et al. (2005) indicating that males were given more autonomy than were females, our third hypothesis is that parents will be more lenient with males. This will manifest itself in that males will generally be given a later curfew, be allowed to borrow the car more often as well as being allowed to date at an earlier age.

There is a saying that with greater freedom comes greater responsibility, and so it would seem that since the males had so much more freedom, the rules they did have would be of greater importance. Therefore, in addition to receiving greater freedoms, it seems that males also receive a greater degree of physical punishments than do females as a result of having possibly
broken rules of a greater importance. In a study conducted by Sorbring, Rödholm-Funnemark, and Palmérus (2003), it was found that both genders perceived that males received physical punishment more often than females, and also that parents would reason more with daughters than with sons. Additionally, both males and females perceived that males were dealt with more harshly for the same transgressions than were females. This is supported by another article that found that parents tend to use more coercive methods of persuasion with males than with females (Longmore et al., 2001). Thus, as a result, our fourth hypothesis is that males will recall being more likely to receive physical punishment than females whereas females will recall having lost privileges more often than will males.

Method

Participants

A total of 192 participants took part in the study. Twenty-five participants' data was deleted because more than five answers were blank (N = 17), there was a duplicate response (N = 1) or participants were under the age of 18 (N = 7). A duplicate response was identified because the survey was completed in a close time sequence and had the same answers to the survey and demographics section. Twenty-one percent of the participants were males (N = 35) and 79 percent of the participants were female (N = 132). The participants' average age was 23-years-old. The participants ranged by ethnicity including: Caucasian (N = 136), African American (N = 14), Asian (N = 6), Hispanic (N = 4) and other (N = 6), one participant did not specify an ethnicity.

Materials

A questionnaire was created which consisted of four main sections including: Demographics, General Rules, Chores, and Expectations/Punishments. The demographics
looked at the participants' sex, birth order, ethnicity, and how many siblings they had. The general rules section, which consisted of seven questions, referred to curfew, allowance, the age at which the participant was allowed to stay home alone and date, and also the most common form of punishment (either physical, reprimand, or removal of privileges) received by the participant. The questions on the general rules section were more open ended. In the chores section, which consisted of nine different chores, the participants rated on a five point Likert scale (1- strongly disagree, 5- strongly agree) how often they were asked by their parents to perform such chores as setting the table, raking the leaves, vacuuming, and mowing the lawn. Finally, in the Expectations/Punishments section, which consisted of 14 questions, participants rated their parents’ expectations about jobs and grades, as well as their parents' reactions if their grades slipped or if they were caught having sex, using drugs, or drinking alcohol. The ratings for the Expectations/Punishment sections also used the five point Likert scale. Overall there were 30 questions plus 5 Demographics questions, and it took participants about 10-15 minutes to complete.

Procedure

The study was conducted online at a popular website for conducting online research (Krantz, 2008). The participants were shown an Informed Consent form in which they were told that the study was designed to investigate common rules given to children by their parents during adolescence. After clicking on the accept button indicating their informed consent, they then proceeded to the questionnaire. After completing the questionnaire and submitting their responses, a debriefing form was presented.

Results
**Chores**

To examine which chores belonged predominantly to which gender, a series of independent t-tests were conducted. The first sets of results are those chores that were specifically for males, which included taking out the trash, mowing the lawn, shoveling the snow, and raking the leaves. There were not as many chores that were specifically for females. In fact, only one chore was significant for females, which was making dinner. To see the means, df, $t$, and $p$ values for each chore please refer to Table 1.

*Table 1.*

Significant Gender Stereotypic Chores for Males and Females

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chore</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taking out the trash</td>
<td>4.03</td>
<td>2.22</td>
<td>74.83</td>
<td>-9.35</td>
<td>&gt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mowing the lawn</td>
<td>3.79</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
<td>&gt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shoveling the snow</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>1.97</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>-5.18</td>
<td>&gt;.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raking the leaves</td>
<td>2.91</td>
<td>2.17</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>-3.01</td>
<td>0.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making dinner</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>2.02</td>
<td>69.98</td>
<td>2.69</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Chores were rated on a five point Likert scale for how often participants had to complete each with 1-strongly disagree, and 5-strongly agree. Degrees of freedom vary based on whether or not Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances was significant.

**Academic Standards**

An independent t-test was run to examine which gender was punished the most for receiving bad grades. It was found that males ($M = 3.71$) were punished significantly more for receiving a bad grade than were females ($M = 2.9$), $t(77.93) = -3.99$, $p < .01$.

**Autonomy Granting**

The first items examined were the autonomy granting statements, which included leniency, allowed to borrow the car, expected to have a job outside the home, parents’ reactions to sex, curfew, and allowed to date. The first to be specific looked at was parental leniency. By using an independent $t$-test it was found that males ($M = 3.40$) felt their parents were
significantly more lenient than their female counterparts ($M = 2.83$), $t(165) = -2.32, p = .02$. An interesting finding was that females ($M = 3.80$) were allowed to borrow the car significantly more than males ($M = 3.29$), $t(165) = 2.10, p = .037$. Another statistically significant finding in our study relating to gender was that males ($M = 3.51$) were expected to have a job significantly more than females ($M = 2.87$), $t(164) = -2.53, p = .012$. Not surprisingly we also found that females' parents ($M = 3.95$) reacted more harshly if they found out they were having sex than males parents ($M = 3.17$), $t(164) = 3.30, p = .001$. However, it was found that adolescent females had a later curfew entering high school and at 16 than their male counterparts, but at 18 males had a later curfew than females. These findings were not significant but they were meaningfully different. There were no significant gender differences in the age at which participants were allowed to date.

**Punishment**

The participants were also asked what form of punishment they most commonly received as an adolescent and chose one among physical punishment, reprimand or removal of privilege. This data was analyzed using a Pearson’s Chi Square test. Females reported receiving removal of privileges most at 58.5% followed by verbal reprimand at 38.2% and finally, physical punishment at 3.3%. Males reported receiving removal of privileges most at 45.5%, followed by verbal reprimand at 36.4%, and finally, physical punishment at 18.2%, these percentages were found to be significant at $p = .007$. These findings were reported as percentages due to the disproportionate numbers of males and females.

**Discussion**

**Chores**
In this study, the researchers set out to examine the stereotypes between adolescent males and females with regards to chores, rules, and punishments given by their parents. Males were significantly more likely to do the outside chores such as mowing the grass, raking the leaves, and shoveling the snow from the sidewalk and driveway, which correlated with the studies done by Gager, et al. (1999), as well as Antill, et al. (1996), which stated that males performed predominantly outside chores. Furthermore, it was found that females were more likely to do chores inside the home; however, the only one that was significant was making dinner.

**Academic Standards**

The second hypothesis predicted that females would be expected to maintain higher academic standards than would their male counterparts. Even though it was found that females spend more time on homework (Gager, et al. (1999), this did not translate into the parents pushing females to maintain higher academic standards, thus disconfirming the second hypothesis. In fact, it was found that males would be more likely to get punished for receiving a bad grade than females, although the researchers did not determine what constituted a bad grade or what grades the participants received, so what could be a bad grade for males may not necessarily be the same standard for females and vice versa. Also, it was found that there was no significant difference between males and females with regards to being expected to maintain good grades or being punished for receiving a C.

**Autonomy**

Along with expecting that females would be pushed to maintain higher academic standards, it was hypothesized that males would rate the rules given by their parents as more lenient than their female counterparts. This relates very closely to the idea of autonomy and several studies that showed that males were given more autonomy both in and outside of the house, including
have a later curfew, be allowed to date at an earlier age, stay home alone at an earlier age, and be able to borrow their parents’ car more often than would females (Bulcroft, et al., 1996; Killen, et al., 2005; Peters, 1994). It was, in fact, found that males did report their parents as being more lenient than females. This partially confirmed the third hypothesis.

However, contrary to part of the third hypothesis, when females began high school and when they were 16 years of age, they reported having a later curfew than males; however this finding was not significant. Males did report having a later curfew at the age of 18. Also, contrary to what was originally hypothesized, females reported being allowed to borrow their parents’ car more often than males. According to Bumpus, et al. (2001), the fact that females reported having a later curfew than males and being allowed to borrow the car more often could be due to females maturing earlier than males and thus making them easier to trust. Another reason is that males have higher levels of problem behavior than females making parents more restrictive and anticipating their son’s behavior when entering adolescence (Bumpus, et al., 2001). With this in mind, it seems to be contradictory that females rate their parents as more restrictive than males do even though they appear to be given with more freedom. This finding goes against previous research that indicates that parents give more autonomy to males than females (Bulcroft, et al., 1996). The findings in this study could indicate that times are changing and the stereotypes for what is appropriate for males and females are beginning to balance out.

An interesting finding regarding the hypothesis that parents will be more lenient with males than females is that females reported that their parents would have reacted harshly to finding out that they had sex significantly more than did males. This is understandable given that females face the risk of pregnancy whereas males do not.
Contrary to previous research that indicates that a higher percentage of girls hold jobs than males (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981), our study found that males felt they were expected to hold a job significantly more than females did. The researchers thought that these results were found because males want to form independence from their parents during adolescence. Also, it could be a result of changing times since White and Brinkerhoff did their research 27 years ago.

**Punishment**

Finally, the fourth hypothesis predicted that males were more likely to receive physical punishment whereas females were more likely to be verbally reprimanded. There was evidence in the results that partially confirmed this; it was indeed found that males were more likely to receive physical punishment than females, and females more often lost privileges than males. However there was no significant difference between males and females with regards to verbal reprimand. This finding was supported by a study conducted by Sorbring, et al. (2003) that indicated that both genders perceived their parents as being more likely to physically punish males, and reason with females.

**Limitations**

There were a number of limitations involved with this study. First of all, there was a large discrepancy between male \((N=35)\) and female \((N=132)\) participants. Males’ results are less representative and less stable than those from females; especially in relation to punishment where percentages were considered in lieu of statistics. Additionally, the participants were also predominantly Caucasian (81.9%). This could be a limitation because the parenting styles and rules given may be different for other ethnic groups (Killen et al., 2005).

Another limitation that may have been present during the study was a lack of open-ended questions for the participants to elaborate. They may have had experiences during their
adolescence that they felt the researchers should have known about when analyzing the data. This may help when wondering whether the categories used for various questions were too limited or unrepresentative such as with chores. The participants’ may have had to perform chores that the researchers had not previously considered. This could have been especially helpful if participants were able to elaborate on chores because the researchers did not control for gender of the participants’ siblings. Sibling’s gender would become important if, for example, a participant had only brothers; possibly making it more likely that they may have done chores that were typically assigned to females.

Furthermore, there was a reliance on retrospective reporting. The average age of the participants was 23 which make it unlikely that retrospective distortions were a big problem; however, in order to obtain informed consent, all the participants were required to be above the age of 18 which made retrospective reporting inescapable. The participants had to reflect on their adolescence and make generalizations from their memory about the rules and punishments they received. With this in mind, it would be interesting to see this same study done with adolescents. This would take out the element of retrospective reporting.

**Future Directions**

There is the question of how stable gender roles are over time. In order to test how well these stereotypes withstand time, this same study could be conducted in 20 years to see if anything has changed in the way of males’ chores versus females’ chores. Additionally, when doing a similar study in the future, questions should be asked regarding which parent assigned which chores and rules, and also to which gender of the child so that it could be determined if mothers or fathers were more likely to perpetuate gender roles. In conclusion, it was found that there was mixed support for the general hypothesis that parents were more permissive with male
adolescence than female adolescence. Furthermore, the discrepancies were not as significant as originally thought which could be a sign that the inconsistencies are becoming smaller as time progresses.
References


at http://psych.hanover.edu/research/exponnet.html.


