

Blurring the Lines of Traditional Gender Roles among Qatar Young Generations

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Abstract

How is traditional gender roles and values related to the young generations in the State of Qatar? In the last few decades, rapid socioeconomic development in Qatar has brought dramatic changes regarding the gender roles assigned to men and women. Research shows that geographical settings, economic status, and social and cultural structures are factors that might have great implications for attitudinal shifts among individuals, which can contribute, to the women empowerment process. We use nationally representative survey data from Qatari nationals to explore the relationship between gender stereotypes and young generation in Qatar. Findings indicate that the young Qatari generation is able to play an outstanding role in changing gender role stereotypes through their educational and cultural strength.

Keywords: gender roles, women empowerment, young generations, education, Qatar

Introduction

The conversation about gender has become increasingly louder with every passing year as people question traditional ideas pertaining to gender roles. Many have rejected the restraints posed by gender stereotypes while embracing the freedom to act and be themselves. The modern-day society no longer expects men to hunt and women to gather as conventionally done. Studies are increasingly showing that unlike in the past generations, gender is no longer used to define identity in the modern day. As such, the younger generations are no longer interested in adhering to the gender roles that were traditionally assigned to them instead they prefer to make personal interpretations of what gender means to them. Perhaps this is because they grew up at a time when both their mothers and fathers too almost equal responsibility in raising them up and therefore fostering an attitude that there are no inherently female or male roles in the society.

Qatar government has established several programs in education, health, employment and leadership to ensure greater gender equality and women's empowerment. These initiatives has greatly improved Qatari women's lives in many aspects and has slightly developed the gender discourse in Qatar society. Based on the developments taking place in the gender discourse, it is hard to deny the fact that the aspect of gender is indeed a social construct and not a subject of innate biological characteristics as traditionally claimed (Lindsey, 2015). Today, gender fluidity and androgyny have become the norm as gender stereotypes are regarded as outdated. Now the view regarding roles and responsibilities is more balanced and will continue

to be shaped by the current and coming generations. In this regard, the current paper supports the argument that the lines of traditional gender roles are blurring among young generations.

The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. Relevant strands of literature are discussed, including studies in gender roles and feminism. However, the analysis concerns the changing attitudes towards traditional gender roles in the case of Qatar; which is discussed in some detail. The data and methods section describes the measurement of importance concepts and subsequent analysis. The findings demonstrate that results related to age demonstrate that traditional gender roles are blurred and that women empowerment is strongly supported by young and middle-aged adults.

Literature Review

In the homes, men and women are now embracing new gender roles which have done away with philosophies dictating what roles are meant for which person. Men and women are now sharing responsibilities in a manner that completely ignores the roles and behaviors that were established traditionally. Studies by the US Census Bureau show that during the time period 1989 to 2012, the number of dads who were stay-at-home, rose to 2 million up from about 1.1 million and projections showed that the numbers would continue to increase (Friedman, 2017). Lewis (2018) adds that results of a benchmark survey including 3, 5000 Americans show that women aged 29 and below are likely to demand jobs with greater responsibility just as much as men. A similar survey carried out in 1992 showed that at the time, while 80 percent of men aged below 29 wanted jobs with greater responsibility, only 72 percent of women of a similar age wanted those jobs. When a similar survey was done in 2008, women who claimed they did not increase responsibility cited reasons such as high pressure from work, high-level jobs and the concern of not being flexible enough to balance work and home responsibilities. The study also established that in 2008, young mothers did not mind taking jobs with more responsibility, unlike young women who did not have children. This further emphasizes the fact that unlike in the past when women had to stay at home to take care of their children until they got to the school-going age motherhood does not dim ambition for today's younger generation. While most women prefer to balance both work and family, some women have even given priority to their careers opting not to get married or bear children so that they can chase their dreams (Olah et al., 2014). This trend also shows that the career ambitions and expectations of millennial women are the same as those of their male counterparts and this is expected to continue in the coming years.

Apart from this, we have so many millennials today who prefer to be single moms juggling between work and acting as both mother and father for their children. In the past generations, single mothers were viewed as outcasts in society but today society has become more accepting of single mothers and even appreciates and praises them for their effort. Furthermore, while it was unheard of in the past for men to participate in childcare care and house chores, the young generation of men today are more willing to actively participate in childcare and house chores as their wives also work to supplement household income and more so in the past three decades. According to a 2013 study, just 1 out of 8 people still held the view that

there should be a separation of gender roles so that the traditional roles can prevail. Today, we see many stays at home dads who prefer to take on the paternal role staying at home full time as their partner works to pay the bills (Abrams, 2018). This is something that would never happen in the 1980s thus showing a total that has brought about major transformations in parenting.

Parents now have to adopt a genderless approach to parenting. The concept of gender-neutrality can be seen from the way babies' rooms are decorated in that parents prefer to use neutral colors. This is a deep contrast to the way it was done traditionally whereby girls' rooms were painted in pink while boys' rooms were painted in blue. Many parents are also buying their children gender-neutral toys. Even in the shopping malls, the pink and blue toy aisles are getting increasingly characterized by imminent obsolescence and one does not need to go to a girls' or boys' section to find toys instead they can find everything they need in the same section (Glasgow, 2015). This reflects the shift that society is taking towards blurring the gender lines and achieving gender equity. Many parents are now more open-minded to child rearing as they prefer to raise their children as individuals rather than as boys or girls hence totally ignoring the gender stereotypes. It is important to note that most people that grew up in the past generations who form today's older generation had their lives defined by the labels associated with being boy or girl (Abrams, 2010). Having been subjected to the same, perhaps this is what most parents are trying to avoid by ensuring that their children are not forced into the labeled boxes of boy and girl. Manufacturers have responded to these changes by modifying and innovating new products that more unisex in nature and responding in ways that would not have been dreamed of in the past. Unlike in the past generations when some names were meant for boys and others for girls, today baby naming is neutral.

In education, the number of women getting enrolled in higher education has been increasing over the years. Traditionally, women were raised to believe that their place was in the home and therefore parents only invested their resources in educating the boy child. The fact that today both men and women are given equal educational and income opportunities shows that older generations are becoming more accepting of the blurring lines of traditional gender roles for the young generations (Abrams, 2010). While the G1 generation which was civically oriented is best remembered for their efforts in ensuring that men and women got an equal opportunity to go through high school, the millennial generation today is at the forefront of ensuring that women not only attend but also graduate from college and professional schools in greater numbers than men (Olah et al., 2014). Statistics indicate that as of 2006, 58 percent of the total number of students in college was women. More recently in 2016, projections indicate that women earned approximately 64% of the associate degrees, 60 percent of the bachelors', 63% earned Masters Degrees and 56 percent doctorate degrees. In all these categories, it is clear that more women than men are going through college to join the workforce. With these achievements, the resultant new generation of women is full of self-confidence and unlike their mothers and grandmothers who lived in the boomer generation, they do not regard their achievements as a competitive edge over men that may cause conflict rather as an opportunity to exploit their full potential (Lewis, 2018).

In the workplaces, many organizations that can be considered to be forward-thinking are now setting the stage for gender equality to prevail. As women become empowered and family needs get prioritized, the gender pay gaps are also becoming narrower. Men and women are now entering the workforce on an equal footing. Jobs that were traditionally male-dominated or female dominated are now characterized by gender neutrality (Andersen, 2014). The workforce now has more female pilots, doctors, lawyers and even military women which were originally meant for men. Similarly, there are many male nurses, caregivers, chefs and others working in the hospitality industries as well as other areas that traditionally meant for women. As young generations become the dominant force in the workforce, the need for economic self-reliance and sustenance has forced men to take careers that were traditionally meant for women like teaching and nursing. According to Winograd and Micahel (2013), most of the millennial women today are not willing to accept any form of restrictions emanating from the basis of gender telling them what they can do or how much they can achieve. Currently, the disparities that were previously very wide in the pay received by men and women are reducing. Data from the office of national statistics show that while the pay gap during the baby boomers generation was at 16 %, it is just 5% with the millennials and expected to continue reducing. These major developments in compensation can be attributed to the fact that the young generations are able to openly and confidently speak about pay and review data regarding their salaries online to establish if they are being compensated fairly (Andersen, 2014). Unlike for the older generations for whom it was considered a taboo to discuss their pay at work, young generations have done away with and totally disregard these norms.

The Case of Qatar

Qatar has experienced a boom in gas and oil in the 1950s, and this led to new socio-cultural and physical perspectives. The geographical and political climate in Qatar favours the advancement of women. The state needs to take advantage of the potential of all its citizens both male and female to build a stronger economy based on knowledge. The Qatar National Vision 2030 (QVN 2030) is a national document formulated by the leadership in Qatar. This document is a roadmap to social, human, environmental and political development of Qatar. The QVN 2030 advocates for a narrative that promotes modernization based on the traditions. Therefore, all government-sponsored initiatives and reforms will be sued to mold and design public spaces.

This document also provides the extent to which gender roles are being re-established. The goals documents in the QVN 2030 include providing women with new vistas. Advancement in education has led to increased participation of women in the job market. Qatar women's employment and education has been prioritized and they were approved a constitution that allowed them to hold public offices, vote and have equal rights as other citizens in Qatar. Women in Qatar have the highest rise in educational achievement and are attaining better education compared to the men (Stasz et al. 2007). There is an increase in the rate of employment among women of up to 36% (Al-Tamimi, 2016). Notably, this is the highest rate in the Gulf region, but it does reflect on the 88% of women in Qatar who attain higher education. Notably, 44% of the

women who have attained higher education but do not work have cited cultural reasons as an obstacle in engaging in professional development.

Additionally, women in Qatar are secluded to specific segments in the job market. Women in Qatar continue to occupy specific employments that are traditionally considered as female-oriented such as teaching or high-valued jobs such as medicine. Some occupations are considered to be less desirable or inappropriate for women. A large number of women study chemical engineering, and they choose to become professionals in their field because it is male-dominated and the work description requires many visits to work and the site. In addition, there are more female than male students pursuing political science but very few women occupy significant political positions (Al-Tamimi, 2016).

Therefore, the blurred lines of traditional gender roles are evident in Qatar society whereby women's engagement in the society can be perceived based on the mobility needs of women in the present day; this represents contemporary patterns in gender relation in the Islamic state. Individuals are now aware of the different ways through which categorization of gender is associated with a binary structure that is oppressive and bound to affect them later in life. This is a sharp contrast with the older generations where boys and girls, men and woman used to completely follow the gender roles.

Data and Methods

This paper uses a nationally representative survey data collected by the Social and Economic Survey Research Institute (SESRI) at Qatar University in 2018. The survey sampled Qataris, white-collar expatriates, and blue-collar laborers residing in camps. Analysis was restricted to Qataris as the theory deals primarily with citizens. Such restrictions are allowable given the sampling method. Sampling plays a critical part in any survey process since the ability to make any valid inference to the population, which is the target of the investigation, relies upon a rigorous sampling design. As previously mentioned, many studies have examined the activity without accounting for how may differ or otherwise. This study has the methodological advantage of examining key variables in a population-based sample that represents Qatari nationals as a whole.

The questionnaire was designed to collect all necessary information related to the study. The survey was programmed into a CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) system using BLAISE software. After the data collection, all individual interviews were merged and saved in a single BLAISE data file. This dataset was then cleaned, coded and saved in STATA formats for analysis of the data, including the ordered logistic regressions, marginal effects, and predicted probabilities discussed in the following section. The following discussion provides univariate descriptive statistics for variables used in the analysis.

The dependent variable is captured by responses to the statement, "it is a man's duty to exercise guardianship over his female relatives", on a one to five scale where 1 is strongly agree and 5 is strongly disagree. This particular dependent variable was selected for both theoretical and practical reasons.

Theoretically, this question captures support for men's authority over his female relatives. It implies that woman must have a male guardian, normally a father or husband, a brother or even a son. Thus, it evaluates male's power to make a range of critical decisions on female relatives' behalf to which they are traditionally relegated.

The positive framing of the question is not very desirable, as it does not reduce satisficing behavior in which respondents disproportionately agree with whatever statement is read by the interviewer out of a desire to please him or her. This behavior is a common problem in surveys around the world and has been shown to exist in Qatar (Gengler et al. 2016). In order to indicate that attitude towards gender role and decision-making has changed, respondents had to disagree with the statement given by the interviewer. Thus there is a danger of detecting falsely inflated levels of support for male's guardianship, since respondents who strongly disagreed (5) with the statement are considered most feminist.

The main independent variables used in the analysis were: gender, education, employment, marital status, number of children, and age. These variables have been cross-tabbed with the dependent variable to show how effective they are in relation to gender roles. Analysis showed that this measure correlates with other measures in the model in the expected direction and thus it is included in the final models reported below. Notably, the findings confirm that education contributes to women empowerment and lower dependency levels, so patriarchal notions such as women relying on men become somewhat outdated once women can also attend to their own needs and those of close relatives.

The survey also asked respondents several statements, which are related to making decisions in the home, male engagement in caring for children or other domestic work, violence against women, and women's freedom to access social media. Since these assertions are a clear reflection of a patriarchal or male-dominated society's mode of thinking, which is currently rejected by much of the world's population. The theoretical argument is concerned with the way in which new gender roles can serve as a bridge to the outside world for women who otherwise have limited options for involvement in the public. As such, any of these statements asked in the survey, could serve the fact that the lines of traditional gender roles are actively blurred. In fact, the following results are robust to measures the level of support of these traditional roles.

Results and Discussion

The findings assesses that, in the perspective of public discourse, social norms in Qatar society promote gender inequality, such as those that encourage males to maintain control over the behavior of their female relatives. However, a new perspective about Qatar women is portrayed, as there is a dynamic change in the nature of female space in the household, controlled by several independent variables, as previously mentioned. Notably, three statements has been positively framed to capture participants' attitudes towards taking decisions in the home setting, male's guardianship over female relatives and boys' responsibility towards their sisters.

Evidently, male respondents expressed more agreement than females to statement that “a man should have the final word about decisions in the home” (69% and 59%, respectively). This was quite surprising, especially regarding the women, since this assertion is a clear reflection of a patriarchal or male-dominated society’s mode of thinking, which is rejected by much of the world’s population. Unsurprisingly, that most respondents agreed with the statement “it is a man’s duty to exercise guardianship over his female relatives.” This result is quite consistent across genders, and a positive correlation was found with the participants’ education levels. Respondents that are more educated are more likely to disagree about men exercising guardianship over their female relatives. Those with undergraduate or higher degrees are less likely to agree with the statement (67%) compared to those who have vocational, high school, or other diplomas (75%) and who had not completed high school (83%). The opposite (i.e., disagreement) is also true (17%, 25%, and 33%, respectively). Guardianship includes several critical decisions in women’s lives but the findings confirm that education contributes to empowerment and lower dependency levels, so patriarchal notions such as women relying on men become somewhat outdated once women can also attend to their own needs and those of close relatives.

Similarly, to the previous statement, the results were consistent with the statement that “boys are responsible for their sisters’ behavior, even if they are younger than their sisters.” The intensity of agreement increased with the individuals’ levels of education, and the degree of disagreement rose with a decrease in the respondents’ education ranging from less than high school, to vocational, high school or other diplomas to undergraduate degrees (77%, 57%, and 48% for agreement, respectively, and 23%, 43%, and 52% for disagreement).

Another area where the gender lines are blurring is in men’s involvement in household chores. The statement was negatively framed as follows “I think it is shameful when men engage in caring for children or other domestic work.” The data show that a statistically significant connection exists between the participants’ level of agreement with this assertion and their marital status, regardless of their age, gender, or education. Respondents who had never been married make up the majority of participants who disagreed with the statement (84%). However, a significant number of married participants also disagreed (81%). Divorced and separated respondents were more likely to reject male engagement in caring for children or other domestic work — (65%) disagreed compared with those who agreed (35%).

The exact causes of this tendency are quite difficult to identify given that the percentage of participants who were married or had never married and did not support this assertion is higher than that of those who agreed. Although the respondents come from a patriarchal society in which such notions are not widely accepted, the results have not been influenced by this notion. This shows increased receptivity to these changes as men spouses support their wives by helping with the chores at home and raising the kids when the wives are working by ensuring that their work schedules do not clash. Findings indicate that Qatar society is moving towards new gender roles where the two sexes are demanded for an ability to increasingly

blend work with other responsibilities and pleasures in life. Furthermore, governmental organizations should also take steps to provide a paid paternity leave for non-primary caregivers and to give them an opportunity to bond with their children when they are newly born and assist the mothers of those children through the recovery period when they are so delicate. Employees should put pressure on the government to implement programs on paid paternity and maternity leave across all the sectors to avoid favoring just one of the sexes.

Conclusion

Conclusively, Qatar society is male-dominated but it is clear that the lines of traditional gender roles are indeed blurring. This is evident in the workforce, in the homes, in schools as such; employers that hope to survive in the highly competitive modern day business environment know that they have no choice but to attract top talent from among the younger generations. This, therefore, means that they have to accommodate the demands made by today's younger generations whether it is in terms of doing away with the pay gaps, providing paid maternity and paternity leaves and creating opportunities that enhance blending of work and life spheres. Politicians who desire to win votes from the younger generations will have to be seen supporting policies aimed at achieving gender equity and eliminating the lines of traditional gender roles for them to get a positive reception from this group of voters.

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