



Men's and women's position in the family in the context of social gender roles^{1 2}

Berivan Vargün³

Abstract

Men's and Women's positions in traditional families differ in the context of social gender roles. Identifying and analyzing the socio-cultural values concerning gender roles transmitted down to individuals through teaching is important in that they demonstrate the status of traditional values and unwritten rules which are alive in societies today.

The study was conducted in the central quarters of Şanlıurfa and Batman cities. Firstly, men's and women's duties in a family, women's position in a family, the way participants got married, and families' value judgements on families' role in the formation of conjugal union were investigated in this research. The method of field research was employed in this study. The questions in the interview form were prepared as open-ended questions so as to be able to understand participants' attitudes towards and thoughts about the issue and to go into details during face-to-face interviews.

The interviews with women which started as individual interviews later turned into group interviews especially in some quarters due to the fact that the women invited their friends living in their neighborhood into the interviews, and spontaneous conversations occurred. The women listened to each other and then responded to the questions but by defending their views.

Keywords: Family, social gender, traditions, values, culture

Introduction

Traditions, customs, conventions, folkways, value judgements and rules in a society are the fundamental factors determining individuals' behaviors. Every culture has its own rules, and it possesses the ways to pass the rules from generation to generation. In human societies, each generation re-learns its culture. Thus, learning process itself has vital importance for culture to survive. Culture functions as a guide in teaching children, who are the members of the community in which they live, the behaviors expected of them. Effective communication and education is the warranty of the existence and continuation of culture (Haviland, Prins, Walrath, Mebridge, 2008: 207-208).

¹ This article presented at 5th International Conference on Education / South East European University Skopje Macedonia between the dates of 26-28 May 2016, is improved from the same named presentation.

² The data were used in the PHD thesis prepared under the advisory of Prof.Dr.Zafer İlbars

³ Ph.D., Social Anthropologist, berivanvargun@yahoo.com

Transmission of gender identity into individuals is influenced by cultural expectations and stereotypical judgements in different ways (Gander, Gardiner, 1993: 418). Families are the most important transmitters of culture, and the main factors determining individuals' lives are learnt and passed down to the next generations in families. Individuals acquire their cultural codes, religious duties and tasks, moral virtues, and traditions and customs from the family (Vargün and Tekin, 2012: 102). Families play the leading role not only in individuals' recognizing their own gender, but also in gaining the psychological and cultural properties necessitated by the gender. Every family has its rules as to what is right and what is wrong in terms of gender roles concerning masculinity and femininity education in anthropological sense continues from birth all through life in the society into which an individual is born.

It has been demonstrated in anthropological studies that cultural forces determine women's and men's behavioral elasticity, that the roles they take on are shaped by culture, and that the forces have definitions changing from culture to culture (Reiter, 2014: 20).

Social gender roles are the duties and activities that cultures attribute to both genders. Gender differences are biological but social gender is a more comprehensive concept containing all properties a culture attributes to and instills in men and women (Kottak, 2014: 405). In other words, male-female difference is extensively dependent on cultural conditioning, not on gender.

Gender stereotypes are similar in various cultures of the world. It was found that similar properties were attributed to men and women in 25 countries in America, Europe, Asia and Australia (Cited from Best and Williams in Dökmen, 2004: 111). The following characteristics are generally attributed to men and women. Men: active, strong, dominance, autonomy, aggressiveness, success, etc. Women: dependence, respect, benevolence, caregiving, friendship, etc. It was shown by Best and Williams in their research conducted in 25 countries with 5 and 8 year old children that children attributed such properties as strong, aggressive, rude, adventurous, independent, dominant, self-confident and rational to men while they attributed properties such as weak, pleased, soft hearted, emotive, polite, excited, emotional, dependent, and talkative to women (Dökmen, 2004: 111-112).

Köknel draws attention to the fact that men are referred to with such qualities as regulator, leader, protective, hero, brave, warrior, authorized, manager in many societies as well as in our society within the framework of traditional value judgements (Köknel, 1996: 46).

Atay points out that male stereotype common in many of today's societies as well as in Turkish society is toughness, aggressiveness, violence, anger, and most important of all- disagreement; and the characteristics listed for women are softness, tenderness, constructiveness, and most important of all- agreement (Atay, 2012: 16).

According to the definition in which Brannon analyses manliness in four categories, the qualities that a man should have are as in the following: avoiding all womanish behaviors and properties, gaining success status and competence to earn his life, strength, confidence and independence, aggressiveness, violence and courage (Cited from Edley and Wetherell in Atay, 2012: 16).

In Research on Social Change Tendencies in South Eastern Anatolia Project (GAP Project), when participants were asked questions about women's place in the family and their position in front of men, only 9.2% said that they saw their husband as their lifelong friend whereas 85% - the great majority - brought women's traditional role and status into prominence in the statements. 43.5% of husbands labelled women as the person doing housework and all household jobs and 13.8%

restricted women's function to being a mother, giving birth to children and raising them (Research on Social Change Tendencies in South Eastern Anatolia Project II, 1992-1993 322-323).

The analysis of socio-cultural values concerning gender roles which are taught to individuals is important in that it displays the status of traditional values and unwritten rules living in societies today. Answers are sought to the following questions:

- 1-What are women's and men's duties in a family?
- 2-How did the participants get married?
- 3-Who makes the important decisions in the family?
- 4-Who is the decision-maker?

Method

This study uses the field research method. Answers were sought to the research questions by using face-to-face interview technique. The research was performed in the central quarters of Şanlıurfa and Batman provinces. The interview form included open-ended questions. The interviews with women which started as individual interviews later turned into group interviews especially in some quarters due to the fact that the women invited their friends living in their neighborhood into the interviews, and spontaneous conversations occurred. The women listened to each other and then responded to the questions but by defending their views. The data obtained from the open-ended questions at the phase of data analysis were encoded, and shown in frequency tables. Besides, participants' comments on the issue and the examples they gave were also quoted.

Findings and Interpretations

Table-1: Distributions of Participants according to Gender

Gender	Number	Percentage	
Male	114	40.6	
Female	167	59.4	
Total	281	100	

40.6% of the participants were male while 59.4% of them were female.

Table-2: Where the participants lived

Residence	Number	Percentage	
Şanlıurfa	151	53.7	
Batman	130	46.3	
Total	281	100	

53.7% of the participants lived in Şanlıurfa whereas 46.3% lived in Batman.

Table-3: Women's Duties in the Family

Women's duties	Number	%
Unanswered	3	1.0
Looking after their husband, home and children, being a good	263	94.0
No distinction should be made between men's and women's	14	5.0
Total	281	100

94% of the participants described women's duties as looking after their husband, home and children well. The statements made by the participants were as in the following: doing husband-related jobs, doing the housework, pleasing their husband and giving birth to children, looking

after their children, save their self-honor, cooking and doing the housework, respecting their home, be careful not to bring discredit to their husband's name, knowing how to protect themselves and how to keep their children clean, being loyal to their husband, obeying their husband's rules and not violating them, listening to what their husband says and avoiding doing what he tells them not to do. Only 5% of the participants said that no distinction should be made between men's duties and women's duties. 1.1% refused to answer the question. As is evident from the above statements, women's role in their family is restricted to their spouse, home and children. The views stated by some participants in this respect are as in the following:

-“Women are typically shy and well-mannered, they do not do indecent actions, they do not cause such sentences as ‘she is such a bad woman’ behind them while they are walking in the streets” a woman 53/Bahçelievler/ a housewife.

-“Women typically pay attention to what their husband says, they bear their name with honor for themselves and for their husband” a woman 28/Yenişehir/a housewife.

-“Women are typically loyal to their husband, a good wife and a good mother. They should avoid behaviours which would damage their honour. Women always have respect for religious values and they also fulfill their religious duties” a man 21/ a technician/Veysel Karani.

-“A woman should take special care with everything from the way she dresses up to the way she smiles. A woman with purity does not sit and talk to a man who is a complete stranger and does not tantalise men” a woman 40/ housewife/Kültür.

Table-4: Men's Duties /Position in the Family

Men's Duties	Number	Percentages
Unanswered	3	1.1
Support their family. Head of the family	258	91,8
Should help their wife	14	5,0
Head of the family	5	1,8
Loyalty to wife	1	0,4
Total	281	100

91.8% of the participants said that men's duty was to support their children and family and to function as the head of the family while 5% said that life was shared and therefore they should help their wife. 1.8% said that men's duty was to act as the head of the family, 0.4% said it was to be loyal to the wife. As is clear, men take on such duties as supporting the family and protecting their children's and wife's honour. Culture approves men's presence in the public sphere, and thus men are labelled as the head of the family. The argument that “a man should look out for and protect his wife” indicates men's and women's position in the culture.

In relation to this, a participant said: “the duties of a man in charge of a family are the same as those of a cowboy in charge of a herd. A woman, on the other hand, is the person to keep the home alive” a man 34/a business manager/culture.

Table-5: Qualities of a Girl to Get Married to

Qualities required	Number	Percentages
Unanswered	7	2.5
Ethical, ladylike, well-behaved, honored	105	37.4
House wife with Dignity and honesty	13	4.6

Honest, respectful, can stand on her own legs	45	16.0
Diligent, clean, able to look after her husband and children	25	8.9
Qualified to be a housewife, religious	55	19.6
She should be a girl just like my son wants, and that's enough	26	9.3
Educated, respectful, religious, wearing a head scarf	1	0.4
Honored, honest, able to manage a house	4	1.4
Total	281	100

37.4% of the participants said that a girl to get married to should be honored and well-behaved while 19.6% said that she should be qualified to be a housewife, 16% said she should be able to stand on her two legs, be honest and respectful, 8.9% said she should be diligent and be able to look after her husband and children, 4.6% said she should be a housewife with dignity. 9.3% said that she should be a girl just like their son wants, 2.5%, however, left the question unanswered. Here also, as in the duties of women in the family, we see roles attributed to women in the family.

Table-6: Qualities of a Man to Get Married to

Qualities required	Number	Percentages
Unanswered	6	2.1
Clean cut man, honest, employed, reliable	171	60.9
Has hot a job, cultured, educated, religious	77	27.4
A man just like my daughter wants, and that's enough, we won't interfere	17	6.0
Rich and understanding	4	1.4
Performing his religious duties, pious	3	1.1
Working in a high position	1	0.4
Someone who can protect his house and children	2	0.7
Total	281	100

60.9% of the participants stressed that a man to get married to should be reliable, honest and employed while 27.4% said he should be educated, have a job and be religious. 6% said they would not interfere with anything after their son got married. 1.4% said a man to get married to should be pious, 0.4% said he should be loyal to his house and children and protective, 0.4% said he should be working in a high position. On the other hand, 2.1% of the participants refused to answer the question. In consequence we see that the quality that is at the top of all for a man to get married to is the expectation that he should have a job to support his family.

Table-7: How the Participants Got Married

The way participants got married	Number	Percentages
Unanswered	3	1.1
By deciding together	61	21.7
Marriage arranged by families	206	73.3
By eloping	2	0.7
Without seeing each other before		
Total	281	100

According to the Table, 73.3% of the participants had arranged marriage. The proportion of participants getting married by deciding together was on third (21.7%) of those who had arranged marriage. Arranged marriage is the commonest type of marriage in our country. 0.7% of the participants eloped and got married without their families' consent. 3.2% said that they had not

seen their spouse before marriage. In relation to arranged marriage, a participant said: “we arrange marriages for our sons or daughters with someone we know even if the prospective bride or groom is useless or poor rather than with someone we do not know even if he or she is rich” a woman 36/a housewife/ Yenişehir.

Table-8: Whether or not the Participants Got Married to Someone Their Parents Approved of

Whether or not marriage is approved by families	Number	Percentages
Unanswered	6	2.1
Yes	260	
No	15	5.3
Total	281	100

Accordingly, 92.5% of the participants got married with their parents' consent. The interviews made it clear that the authority to approve of the marriage was the father, the elder brother, uncle or grandfather to replace the father if the father is dead. The participants said that they asked for their elder relatives' opinions in relation to their children's marriage, and those whose children were too young to get married said they would have asked for their elder relatives' opinions if their children had been at the age of marriage. An analysis of the way they got married showed that 73.3% had their marriage arranged by their parents. The two findings were in parallel. The findings also demonstrated that only 5.3% of the participants had marriage without their parents' consent, and that 2.1% did not answer the question.

Table -9: The People Making the Important Decisions in the Family

People making the important decisions	Number	Percentages
Unanswered	8	2.8
Primarily my husband, mostly together	6	2.1
My husband makes all decisions	75	26.7
I make the decisions (men)	54	19.2
My father or elder brother (head of the family) decides	20	7.1
I make the decisions (women)	12	4.3
Total	281	100

26.7% of the participants said that their husband made the decisions whereas 7.1% said their father or elder brother made the decisions, and 2.1% said primarily their husband made the decisions. 19.2% of the men said they made the decisions in the family but 37.7% said they made the decisions together. 2.8% did not answer the question. The table makes it clear that 59.5% of the important decisions in the family are made by men. Consequently, the authority or the decision-maker in the families are men within the framework of social gender roles.

Conclusions and Evaluation

40.6% of the participants were male and 59.4 were female. Of them, 53.7% lived in Şanlıurfa and 46.3% lived in Batman.

The great majority of the participants described women's duties as looking after their husband, home and children. According to the statements under this category, women's duties in the family included doing jobs related to the husband or home, pleasing the husband and looking after children, protecting their own honor, cooking and doing the housework, respecting the family home, causing no discredit to the family's and husband's name, knowing how to protect the self and to keep the children clean, being loyal to the husband, and not violating the husband's rules.

The great majority (91.8%) described men's duties in the family as supporting their family, protecting their wife and act as the head of the family. As is clear, men take on roles such as supporting the family, protecting the wife's and children's honor and being the authority. Culture approves of men's presence in the public sphere, and men represent the authority in economic and social spheres with the function of the head of the family.

An analysis of the comments on the qualities of a girl to get married to showed that the qualities included being honored, well-behaved, having the quality of being a housewife, having diligence to look after her husband and her children – just like the roles attributed to women in the family.

On examining the qualities of a man to get married to, it was found that most of the participants (60.9%) stressed that a man should be reliable, honest and employed. 27.4% emphasised that he should be educated, have a job and be pious. 6%, on the other hand, they would not interfere with anything after marriage. Other qualities that participants listed included being rich and understanding by 1.4%, being religious by 0.4%, and being employed in a high position by 0.4%. As to traditional roles attributed to men and women in the family, having a job to support the family was the quality mentioned in most of the statements.

An evaluation of the way individuals got married showed that 73.3% of the participants had their marriage arranged by their family. The proportion of those who had decided to get married with their prospective spouse was on third of arranged marriages (namely, 21.7%). Arranged marriage is the most common type of marriage in Turkey. 0.7% eloped with their spouse to get married without their parents' consent and 3.2% had not seen their prospective spouse before their marriage. Traditionally, individuals are expected to obtain their parents' consent to get married to someone. 92.5% of the participants said that they received their parents' consent before marriage.

When the participants asked who made the important decision in their family, the majority (59.5%) said that it was men who made the decisions in the family. As a result, men stand out as the authority in the family within the framework of social gender roles – as was stated before.

We see that values taught to men and women as a cultural doctrine gain meanings within the framework of social gender roles. Women are considered as individuals who are loyal to their husband, who do the housework, who take on the duty of giving birth to their children and are a good mother. Women's prestige in the society is directly proportional to their acting in harmony with their traditional roles. Traditionally, a woman is a good wife, a good mother and is honored. Men are assigned the duty of supporting their family, and they are the authority in the family.

References

- Dökmen, Zehra Yaşın, (2006). *Toplumsal Cinsiyet Sosyal Psikolojik Açıklamalar*, 2. Baskı, İstanbul, Sistem Yayıncılık,
- Atay, Tayfun (2012), *Çin İşi Japon İşi Cinsiyet ve Cinsellik Üzerine Antropolojik Değerlendirmeler*, 1. Baskı, İstanbul, İletişim Yayınları.
- GAP Bölgesinde Toplumsal Değişim Eğilimleri Araştırması II*, 1992-1993. Alan Araştırması ve Bulgular, Ankara, TC. Başbakanlık GAP Bölge Kalkınma Dairesi Başk. Yay..
- Gander, M.J., Gardiner, H.W., (1993) *Çocuk ve Ergen Gelişimi*, Bekir Onur (ed.), I. Baskı, Ankara, İmge Kitabevi Yayınları,
- Haviland, W.A., McBride, B., Prins, H.E.L., Walrath, D., (2008). *Kültürel Antropoloji*, 1. Basım, İstanbul, Kaknüs Yayınları,

Kottak, *Antropoloji İnsan Çeşitliliğinin Önemi*, (2014), 15. Baskı, Ankara, De ki Basım Yayım.

Reiter, R.Rayna, (2014). *Kadın Antropolojisi*. 1.Baskı, Ankara, Dıpnot Yayınları, (Çev: Bürge Abiral)

Köknel, Özcan, (1996). *Bireysel ve Toplumsal Şiddet*, 1. Basım, İstanbul, İtın Kitaplar Yayınevi,

Vargün, B., Tekin, Ü., (2012), “*Aile Kurumu Çerçevesinde Töre ve Namus Cinayetleri*” Muhafazakar Düşünce Dergisi, Yıl:8, Sayı :31, S:101-117