

GENDER AND PARENTING: THE POSSIBILITIES IN GENDER-NEUTRAL UPBRINGING

Chandel, M. * Shanwal, VK. * *

Introduction

Traditional parenting frequently unintentionally reinforces gender stereotypes that prevent kids from embracing their true selves since it is ingrained in cultural and societal contexts (Jalovaara & Fasang, 2015). Gender-neutral parenting is an idea that challenges this convention and aims to give kids a platform where they can develop their identities without being constrained by gender norms (Rahilly, 2015).

Martinez (2022) and Oe & Yamaoka (2023) have looked into gender-neutral parenting strategies and their effects on kids' development as an initial goal. The need to foster an inclusive atmosphere that permits kids to explore their identities beyond traditional gender norms is emphasised in Martinez's PhD dissertation, "Gender Neutral Parenting: Raising a Generation Outside the Gender Binary." In their investigation of the toy-buying habits of UK Millennials, Oe & Yamaoka (2023) show how a socio-cultural shift is transforming views towards gender-neutral perceptions and having an effect on children's exposure to non-stereotypical toys.

Children's perceptions of gender roles and identities are greatly influenced by gender socialisation practises. The practices of parents of preschoolers are examined by Dhabhai, Tiwari & Jain (2023), who also shed light on how parenting practices unintentionally promote gender stereotypes. This emphasises how difficult it is to parent completely gender neutrally because even well-intentioned parents might unintentionally uphold cultural conventions. Conversely, Evertsson, Kirsch & Geerts (2021) focus on how same-sex parent families disrupt conventional family sociology ideas by sharing labour and care obligations. They also examine family dynamics and gender roles. This ambiguity in parenting responsibilities calls into question the efficacy of gender-neutral parenting and raises the possibility that non-binary parenting styles may be more prevalent in diverse family configurations.

Gender-neutral parenting is seen from a distinctive angle thanks to the experiences of trans and/or non-binary parents. In Bower-Brown (2022), the issues these parents

* Ph.D. Scholar, Department of Education and Training, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida (U.P.)

* * Associate Professor, Department of Education and Training, Gautam Buddha University, Greater Noida (U.P.)

encounter in the UK and the presumptions regarding parental responsibilities are examined. Their experiences highlight the need for inclusive parenting strategies beyond traditional gender standards. Additionally, media greatly influences children's conceptions of gender. Taking a deep dive into how viewers perceive gendered characters, Hentges (2020) emphasises how media, such as children's programming, can unintentionally promote binary gender stereotypes. This emphasises how difficult it is to practise gender-neutral parenting in a culture where the media significantly influences how kids learn to interact with others.

Parental leave policies that take into account gender also help to promote gender-neutral parenting. The advantages of such measures for gender equality and family well-being are covered by Hart (2020). These laws subvert gender norms and promote a more balanced upbringing for kids by allowing both parents to actively participate in child care. Mothers are frequently emphasised in traditional gender roles as the primary carers. Altenburger & Schoppe-Sullivan (2020), however, focus on the level of parenting that new fathers demonstrate. Their study sheds light on the personal, social, and child-related aspects that affect dads' engagement in childcare, potentially changing the conventional roles of men and women in parenting.

In order to support children's identity development free from social limitations, this study is aimed at exploring the idea of gender-neutral parenting and its ability to challenge conventional gender norms. The main purpose of this study shall be to address the following objectives in this regard:

- F To investigate the viability of gender-neutral parenting.
- F To analyse challenges in breaking ingrained gender stereotypes in parenting.
- F To examine the effects of gender-neutral parenting on children's development.
- F To explore societal implications, suggest greater awareness and education, and advocate for gender-neutral discourse in education materials.

Methods

Sources for the systematic review were carefully chosen, resulting in the inclusion of reliable and important information. There were several clear steps in the procedure. A timeline from 2013 to 2023 was created to examine the development of the gender-neutral parenting discourse thoroughly. Finding pertinent material required extensive keyword research. The terminology that was used, such as "gender-neutral parenting," "child development," and "gender stereotypes," covered the confluence of parental dynamics and gender in great detail. Examining abstracts and content summaries as part of the selection process allowed the removal of items that did not directly relate to gender-neutral parenting. The selected

references were improved by full-text analysis, matching them with the study's main goals. This systematic methodology guarantees the review's dependability and applicability, providing a solid framework for thorough insights into gender-neutral parenting.

3. Literature Reveiw

3.1 Concept of Gender-Neutral Parenting

Gender-neutral parenting could be effectively described as the situation in which the children are born and brought up without being taught about the difference between a male and a female, thereby letting them know the difference between the genders on their own time (Shutts et al., 2017). It could be defined as a situation in which the children play together, dress, and effectively express themselves without fearing gender confinements. The gender-diverse parenting lets children choose what they want regardless of gender (The Indian Express, 2019). In the generic scenario, gender-neutral parenting is seen as harmful by the parents of the children, who think it limits the growth of a boy or a girl. The practice of gender neutrality also poses significance effectively. The parents who effectively practice gender-neutral parenting let their children choose what they want, providing them with the necessary freedom.

The gender-neutral guardians respect their children's viewpoints and desires and further help them achieve their aims in life. It is against the parents who do not practice gender neutrality as they act forcefully with their children and don't let them do things, ultimately making them rebellious (Halperin-Kaddari & Freeman, 2016). Gender neutrality lets the children do what they want and wear what they like without thinking about what others think of it. However, such things offer drawbacks and limitations as well. Parents support their children effectively in doing what they like and choose any profession they love, irrespective of gender (Shi, 2018). There are no such barriers to a girl who can't be a doctor or an engineer for the parents whose mentality is based on gender neutrality. There have been situations where parents have rejected sex/gender-based assignments from birth and have worked hard to protect the gender self-determination of their children effectively. Doing such effectively ensures their children's ability to self-express and contributes to the possibility that their children may even claim to have no fixed gender (Rahilly, 2022). Every parent shall have a mindset about their children, which should let them be free.

Gender neutrality runs on the policy to ensure that the children determine their identities and express themselves freely. The same also helps the children to be free from gender-based discrimination and inequalities. There have been clashes identified between the gender-neutral children and the normal children. There have been cases of ragging and teasing in schools and colleges (Kumari & Singh, 2022). But gender-neutral parenting is

also proven to be one of the easiest practices to opt for in those schools and colleges that have a keen interest in the adaptation of the same. Some of the major examples that could be taken to boost gender-neutral parenting are not focusing on the gender of a new child during their birth. Rather, the parents should be more aware of the baby's health conditions. A unisex nursery could be built for gender-neutral children. There shall be no specific products like toys distinguished for males and females; instead, both genders shall play together.

3.2 Factors that Influence Gender-Neutral Parenting

Gender-neutral parenting is a process that boosts the motives of the parents in effectively raising their wards in a way that is against discrimination based on gender or sex and instead stands for equality irrespective of gender. Gender-neutral parenting is based on certain important factors as well. The categorization and division of activities, like games, toys, or kinds, on the basis of the gender of the children pose challenges to the motive of gender-neutral parenting (Moran & Koslowski, 2019). The children shall be given the freedom to play what they want and what they like to do. For example, a game like cricket or football is played by both males and females in the present generation, which shows the aspect of gender equality among all. There have been situations where the girls are restricted from wearing the clothes of their choice. The parents restrict them from expressing their choice and likeness based on the clothes. Gender-neutral parenting is based on the equality and provision of freedom for all, irrespective of gender.

There have been cases where the boys are taught to be strong and emotionless. Such situations may make them rude and arrogant. The use of gender-neutral parenting helps the male child to be emotionally strong as well (Alligood, 2020). Like the female children, they would also have a say in expressing their emotions freely. Doing such makes them strong in building healthy emotional intelligence as well. The children shall foster and watch their favourite movies or television programs. The TV show, for example, Barbie, is known to be a program that the female witnesses, but the males who are excited about watching the same shall be allowed to watch and shall not be seen as shameful. A similar thing goes for the female, who may watch the male-based TV shows or programs if they want too without being ashamed of it.

The guardians are the main motivators of their children. In the cases of Gender-neutral families, the parents don't force their children to work on or build their future on their terms. Instead, the parents support their children, irrespective of their gender, to opt for the things they like (Brussoni et al., 2020). For example, a male child may have an interest in cooking and opt for being a chef in the future. The parents of the gender-neutral children are

foreseen to effectively engage in conversations in groups. The group consists of girls and boys, and the type of conversation is open in such situations. It helps them grow as a person, learning about their identities effectively. In such scenarios, the boys and the girls learn to respect their gender differences, which is a must in the current generation (Mesman & Groeneveld, 2018). These are some of the main factors that effectively influence gender-neutral parenting practices.

3.3 Pros and Cons of Gender-Neutral Parenting

Gender-neutral parenting has become a popular strategy as parenting paradigms change to reflect contemporary ideas. This approach focuses on establishing a setting where children can pursue their interests without being constrained by conventional gender standards (Choosing Therapy, 2023). But like any fresh trend, gender-neutral parenting has positive and negative aspects.

Pros

F Freedom of Gender Expression: Adopting a gender-neutral parenting approach encourages a climate in which kids can genuinely explore their preferences, fostering their capacity for independent thought and self-discovery. This strategy fosters an atmosphere that enables kids to express themselves in accordance with their true identities (Endendijk & Portengen, 2022).

F Focus on Internal Qualities: Gender-neutral parenting empowers kids to develop relationships based on sincere connections and shared ideals by changing the emphasis from external attributes to internal qualities. More profound and lasting interactions are fostered through their lives thanks to the emphasis on inner qualities (Bindu Raichura, 2021).

F Increased Compassion: Children's capacity to empathize with others is improved when they are encouraged to express themselves in ways that are true to their uniqueness. Greater tolerance and compassion for people with different identities may result from this increased knowledge of and acceptance of different expressions (Thomassin, Seddon & Vaughn-Coaxum, 2019).

F Respect for Others Who Are Different: Children's distinct differences should be respected, and adults should give them the freedom to express themselves uniquely. Children who grow up in a respectful and accepting atmosphere are more inclined to treat others with the same courtesy, regardless of their differences (Kunst, 2016).

F More Diverse Interests: Gender-neutral Parenting encourages kids to engage in various hobbies and pursuits. When exposed to a variety of experiences, youngsters are

better equipped to diversify their interests and access a wider range of opportunities than those limited to gender-specific activities (Saguy, Williams & Rees, 2020).

F Greater inclusion: Gender-neutral parenting promotes inclusion by cultivating a culture that celebrates each person's individuality. Diversity-loving parenting increases kids' likelihood of forming friendships that cross traditional gender lines and advance social peace (Shi, 2018).

Cons

F Increased Bullying Risk: Children who do not conform to traditional gender stereotypes may experience bullying or jeers from their peers. Additionally, cyberbullying poses a risk. Parents who practice gender-neutral parenting should be on the lookout for potential bullying warning signals and offer the necessary support (Disha Roy Choudhury, 2019).

F Difficulties Finding Gender-Neutral Terms: Finding Gender-Neutral Terminology is difficult due to society's historical focus on gender as a defining factor; gender-neutral terminology is difficult. To solve this problem, it could be necessary to depart from conventional linguistic conventions (Alligood, 2020).

F External Barriers: It may be difficult to find clothes that match a child's favoured hues or fashion trends while adhering to gender-neutral preferences. Similar to this, it could take more time and effort to locate affinity groups that are truly gender-neutral.

F Harder Time Fitting In: Children who defy gender expectations through their looks may grow to have a strong sense of self, but they may still have difficulties fitting in with bigger peer groups. Such dynamics can call for more assistance and comprehension (Rahilly, 2022).

4. Research Gap

A major research gap is revealed after thoroughly analyzing numerous elements and concerns in the available literature. While previous academics have thoroughly examined the complexities of gender-neutral parenting, their study frameworks have not effectively covered certain important issues. The evaluated literature explores the advantages and difficulties of gender-neutral parenting and its effects on kids' development and societal repercussions. However, the nuanced experiences and viewpoints of the children raised using this strategy have received little attention (Else et al., 2022). There is a lack of thorough knowledge of their everyday interactions, difficulties, and emotional reactions. A lack of long-term research that follows the development of gender-neutral kids as they grow up and provides insights into their long-term well-being and ability to navigate a gender-diverse world is another issue. The need for more research into the actual experiences of

gender-neutral kids and the long-term effects of this parenting approach is what causes the research gap.

5. Discussion

The idea of gender-neutral parenting offers a distinctive viewpoint on child upbringing that opposes established standards and promotes a more accepting and inclusive approach. Gender-neutral parenting includes a variety of behaviour, from refraining from assigning children traditional gender roles to promoting a culture of unrestricted gender expression, as was shown in the earlier sections (Bindu Raichura, 2021).

The benefits of gender-neutral parenting highlight its capacity to promote holistic growth. Parents can foster autonomous thought and sincere self-expression in their children by allowing them the opportunity to pursue their interests without being constrained by gender norms. This encourages greater inclusivity, acceptance, and compassion. Deeper connections and relationships that transcend surface prejudices are made possible by emphasizing internal rather than exterior features more. Additionally, gender-neutral parenting subverts prevalent gender norms and promotes a climate where kids can engage in a wider range of pursuits. This is especially important in the modern world when the distinctions between gender roles change quickly.

The strategy, meanwhile, is not without its share of difficulties. Concerning factors include the potential for increased bullying and challenges in locating proper gender-neutral terminology (Kunst, 2016). In order to overcome the external obstacles, such as finding gender-neutral clothing or locating affinity groups that support this strategy, more time and money may be needed. While gender-neutral parenting attempts to foster a supportive environment, there is a chance that some kids will have trouble blending in with bigger peer groups, especially if they stand out due to their choices or appearance. The idea of gender-neutral parenting must contend with the reality of a society that frequently adheres to traditional gender standards, even though it is anchored in the quest for equality.

The causes of gender-neutral parenting also affect the results. The choice to raise children gender-neutral is motivated by the need to eliminate the constraints and biases that gender conventions place on society. Parents want to equip their kids with the ability to make decisions and a sense of autonomy, so they let them choose their hobbies, styles, and play activities without forcing them to fit in with cultural norms. This method strives to prepare children for a varied and inclusive society and aligns with current understandings of identity.

Gender-neutral parenting may have a number of outcomes for children. Although it encourages creativity and self-expression, it may also surface difficulties in social situations,

specifically in environments in which traditional gender standards are dominant (Shi, 2018). It is critical to carefully determine the effects on playtime, social interactions, and future identity formation. This demonstrates how vital it is to balance encouraging individual choices and educating children about the realities of the world they will have to navigate.

A pressing requirement is for thorough studies into the long-term impacts of gender-neutral parenting on a child's psychological, social, and emotional health as this parenting style gains recognition. Studies that follow gender-neutral children into adulthood and track their resilience, self-confidence, and aptitude in various gender contexts may provide valuable information (Rahilly, 2022). It is crucial to assess the method's effectiveness across cultures. Additionally, given these kids' difficulties in traditional education, it is critical to look into how educational institutions may create inclusive environments for them. For complex insights into the real-world effects of this parenting paradigm, qualitative research that captures the experiences of gender-neutral children is crucial.

In finite terms, gender-neutral parenting is a complex strategy that necessitates thoroughly comprehending its advantages, disadvantages, and ramifications. It upends social conventions, promotes uniqueness, and creates a more welcoming environment. However, it also faces operational difficulties and potential societal issues. By embracing gender-neutral parenting, people help the world move toward a place where kids can express themselves genuinely and value others for who they are, free from the constraints of conventional gender norms. This method provides evidence of how parenting techniques are constantly changing and how they significantly influence future generations' growth.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

The investigation into gender-neutral parenting has shown a vibrant and stimulating environment. This review article has dug into the complex interplay between parenting styles and gender, illuminating the difficulties and opportunities of creating an atmosphere where kids may embrace their true selves regardless of conventional gender stereotypes. It is clear from a thorough study of the literature from the previous two decades that gender-neutral parenting has important ramifications for kids' overall development. The ingrained gender standards and stereotypes in our society impact how parents raise their children, frequently influencing their self-concept and aspirations from an early age. The goal of gender-neutral parenting, however, presents a viable route to combat these effects and provide kids with the freedom to develop their identities and skills without restraints.

A couple of recommendations come from the insights gained from this review. First and foremost, educational programmes are crucial for educating parents about the benefits of gender-neutral parenting and the significance of giving their kids a space free from gender

preconceptions. In order to encourage a more complete awareness of gender dynamics from a young age, officials should also think about incorporating concepts of gender-neutral parenting into curricula. Additionally, encouraging supportive communities and networks can give parents access to tools, direction, and comfort while they travel through the uncharted waters of gender-neutral parenting. Supporting ongoing research in this area is important since it will reveal new trends, difficulties, and best practices that will enlighten policymakers, educators, and parents alike.

7. Limitations of the study and future Research Direction :

Gender neutrality is one of the most influential aspects that parents inherit to raise their children to be successful as human beings, irrespective of their gender differences. The study has proved to be important in getting the know-how of whether gender-neutral upbringing is possible and effective. Gender and parenting are two different aspects that, when linked together, carry a lot of importance. Most families in today's generation do not know what a gender-neutral condition is. The study holds importance in letting them know how important gender neutrality is and what values it holds. The study holds limitations based on assessing the best practices being effectively practiced in schools and colleges after 2022, which positively boosts gender neutrality. The researcher also has come up with limitations throughout the conduction of his study. Further research is recommended for the same and the scope holds value in working to investigate the link between gender and parenting more extensively effectively.

References :

1. Alligood, B. (2020). The Relationships Between Gender-Neutral Parenting Attitudes, Negative Dimensions of Sexual Orientation Identity, And Child Outcomes Among Lesbian Mothers. [online] Available at:
2. Bindu Raichura (2021). Gender Neutral Parenting: Pros & Cons. [online] Being the Parent. Available at: <https://www.beingtheparent.com/gender-neutral-parenting-pros-cons/>.
3. Bower-Brown, S. (2022). Beyond Mum and Dad: gendered assumptions about parenting and the experiences of trans and/or non-binary parents in the UK. *LGBTQ+ Family: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 18(3), 223-240. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/27703371.2022.2083040>
4. Choosing Therapy. (2023). Gender-Neutral Parenting: What It Is, Pros, & Cons. [online] Available at: <https://www.choosingtherapy.com/gender-neutral-parenting/>.
5. Dhabhai, R., Tiwari, G., & Jain, S. (2023). Gender socialization practices among the

- parents of preschoolers. <https://www.thepharmajournal.com/archives/2023/vol12issue6S/PartC/S-12-6-4-473.pdf>
6. Disha Roy Choudhury (2019). 'Gender-neutral parenting will help children develop higher emotional intelligence'. [online] The Indian Express. Available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/parenting/family/gender-neutral-parenting-will-help-children-develop-higher-emotional-intelligence-6163595/>.
 7. Endendijk, J.J., & Portengen, C.M. (2022). Children's Views About Their Future Career and Family Involvement: Associations with Children's Gender Schemas and Parents' Involvement in Work and Family Roles. *Frontiers in Psychology*, [online] 12. doi:<https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.789764>.
 8. Halperin-Kaddari, R., & Freeman, M. A. (2016). Backlash goes global: Men's groups, patriarchal family policy, and the false promise of gender-neutral laws. *Canadian Journal of Women and the Law*, 28(1), 182-210. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cjwl.28.1.182>
 9. Hentges, B. (2020). Viewer Perceptions of Gendered Characters: Parent and Child Reports on Gender Stereotypical and Gender Counter-Stereotypical Behaviors on iCarly. *American Communication Journal*, 22(1). <http://www.ac-journal.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Viewer-Perceptions-of-Gendered-Characters-Parent-and-Child-Reports-on-Gender-Stereotypical-and-Gender-Counter-Stereotypical-Behaviors-on-iCarly.pdf>
 10. https://thescholarship.ecu.edu/bitstream/handle/10342/8626/Thesis_Brittany-Alligood.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=n.
 11. Kumari, S., & Singh, R. (2022). Prevention of Child Bullying in India: A Study. *International Journal of Law Management & Humanities*. <https://www.ijlmh.com/paper/prevention-of-child-bullying-in-india-a-study/#>
 12. Kunst, M.-L. (2016). The Pros and Cons of Gender Neutrality in Upbringing and Education - American Women's Club of Berlin e.V. [online] American Women's Club of Berlin e.V. Available at: <https://www.awcberlin.org/711-2/>.
 13. Martinez, T. (2022). Gender Neutral Parenting: Raising a Generation Outside the Gender Binary (Doctoral dissertation, University of Arkansas). <https://search.proquest.com/openview/77cd82820264a20974deb61994fb7887/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750&diss=y>
 14. Mesman, J., & Groeneveld, M. G. (2018). Gendered parenting in early childhood: Subtle but unmistakable if you know where to look. *Child Development Perspectives*, 12(1), 22-27. <https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12250>

15. Moran, J., & Koslowski, A. (2019). Making use of work-family balance entitlements: How to support fathers with combining employment and caregiving. *Community, Work & Family*, 22(1), 111-128. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2018.1470966>
16. Rahilly, E. (2022). 'Well Duh, That's How You Raise a Kid': Gender-Open Parenting in a (Non)Binary World. *LGBTQ+ Family: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, pp.1-19. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1080/27703371.2022.2089309>.
17. Saguy, A.C., Williams, J.A., & Rees, M. (2020). Reassessing Gender Neutrality. *Law & Society Review*, 54(1), pp.7-32. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1111/lasr.12454>.
18. Shi, R. (2018, June 8). What Is Gender-Neutral Parenting? *Parenting Science*. <https://parentingscience.today/what-is-gender-neutral-parenting/>.
19. Thomassin, K., Seddon, J.A., & Vaughn-Coaxum, R.A. (2019). Development and Validation of the Parents' Gendered Emotion Beliefs Scale. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, [online] 29(3), pp.855-866. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-019-01591-6>.