

Opinions of University Students on Ideal Man

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Abstract

Gender stereotypes that exist in the society make their presence felt even before individuals are born. The present study aims to deeply analyze the opinions of female and male students in Turkey on how an idealized man should be. In this study, a questionnaire including socio-demographic information and an open-ended question “How do you think an idealized man should be?” was administered. The questionnaire was administered to 100 male and 118 female students. The answers given to the open-ended question were analyzed by the content analysis. The themes on the answers to the question “How should an ideal man be?” include “Should be well-behaved” (n=95, 21.59%); “Respectful and warmhearted/ affectionate and protective” (n=73, 16.59%); “Has a job, successful career and money” (n=59, 13.41%). The themes on the answers given by women to this question includes /should be fair (n=138, 36.3%), respectful (n=55, 14.4%), tolerant/kind (n=41, 10.7%).

Keywords: Masculinity, gender, ideal man, university student.

1. Introduction

Given the studies conducted in the field of gender studies, it is usually seen that “oppression” caused by gender is described on women. However, gender roles oppress men as well. In general, exceptional importance is attributed to men and masculinity, and masculinity is idealized. The men who adopt and defend the gender role are also under the pressure of this role without being aware of it. Endeavoring to fulfill the requirements of gender roles, men are put to the test proving their “masculinity” that the society expects from them every day without being aware of it. Being in a constant struggle to prove themselves leaves an adverse impact on men as well. For example, men may have difficulty in establishing social relationships as they are expected to show their feelings less. There are studies showing that young women feel less lonely as they develop better social relationships and express themselves better compared to men (Taylor, etc., 1994; Le Roux & Connors, 2001). It would be useful to define such adverse effects that affect young men and to understand how they are echoed in daily life. Connell (1998) underlines the need to understand not only women who constitute “less privileged” segment but also men who constitute “privileged” segment to comprehend gender inequalities. Having a baby boy in Turkey is considered as an advantage by many social segments and their birth is expected more eagerly. Although it seems more advantageous to be a man compared to be a woman, as Atay (2012) states, “masculinity oppresses men the most”. What is in question here is “not oppression by an identity on another identity, but by an identity on a personality”. In overall, society presents a hierarchically superior position to men. However, there are some costs of having this position. According to Goldberg, man pays high costs for their masculinity privileges and powers. Men become isolated from their emotions and bodies. Men may harm themselves emotionally, psychologically and physically to “play the game by its rules”. Given the gender roles, masculinity is a concept for which men struggle and deserve. The characteristics attributed to being a good man and the traditional and social expectations from men put a heavy burden on men’s shoulders. The masculinity which is achieved by struggling with a series of rituals and challenges needs to be strengthened all the time. Otherwise, man faces the risk of losing his masculinity. This is a serious stress driver for men (Oktan, 2008). According to Real (2004), masculinity is given to the opposite of femininity. As it is something granted, it can be retrieved. According to Kandiyoti (1995), manhood is hardly achieved status and it is always in the danger of being lost. Because of the changing circumstances of patriarchal society in the flow of historical events, there is a perdurable uncertainty and an effort for proving manhood. Manhood is an ideal that is difficult to attain and preserve from childhood to death (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996).

According to Ok (2011), masculinity in the sense of gender is not a biological identity men bring along with them when they are born but a never-ending construction process that starts in the family and continues in the street, school and workplace. According to Kramer (2010), it is expected from the individual to shape his/her identity based on gender roles; therefore to see herself/himself as 'masculine' or 'feminine', and to learn gender-specific stereotyped roles. While Connell (1998) associates the sustainability of large-scale patriarchal power with the establishment of an over-masculine ideal regarding toughness and domination, he highlights that the physical masculinity image created by this ideal does not resemble the real body shape of many men. Therefore, "masculinity" means a fantasy beyond a physical existence. At this point, hegemonic masculinity is a form of identity rather than a gender and women can also undertake a masculine role. Patriarchy creates an idealized masculinity that requires submissiveness, and proof of what a man has gained from the society. Idealized manhood requires violence and aggression to prove the power (Hearn, 1987; Bourdieu, 2002). Patriarchy is defined as social system in which men are privileged in all area of the society with the right to rule and control others- women and children. In this system, men have certain mechanisms. Using the male privilege, serves the system to sustain (Kandiyoti, 1999).

Sancar (2013) draws attention to the crisis that men fall into as a result of the changing social and familial structures. Accordingly, how socio-economical structures force masculinity into a transformation from patriarchal family to modern family and conventional masculinity becomes fragile and is in crises against this transformation. However, masculinity continues in a somehow transitivity from fathers to sons with some differences in various social levels. The masculinity of various patriarchal social practices is regenerated in the environments such as military service, male friendships, coffee houses, workplaces, etc. Given all the things stated above, how the masculinity concept is perceived by young men with all these different aspects is an object of interest. Ok (2011) states understanding that analyzing masculinity with all its aspects is not a very positive and useful position "for everybody" and nothing to boast about as frequently done is of great importance. According to Zeybekoğlu (2013), how the masculinity concept was built, how it is adopted and internalized by new generations; what roles women play in this internalization; how masculinity fantasy differs from one society to another and from one period to another; and what attitudes men show towards the changing roles are the questions waiting to be answered.

In the literature review, it is understood that masculinity studies started in late 1970s. Kimmel (2008) states that masculinity studies started as a discipline in the late 1970s and early 1980 as a positive reaction to women studies and feminism. Turkey started masculinity analyses in the context of gender on similar dates. According to Zeybekoğlu (2013), it started to be accepted that men are oppressed and under pressure like women in eighties; however the oppression does not come from women but the role of masculinity. Yet critical masculinity movement is quite a challenging arena compared to women's movement. "This is because there is a shared gain quest bringing women together in the women's movement, while there is an effort to destroy "existing gain or advantage" in the critical masculinity movement instead of a shared gain" (Akça&Tönel 2011). Nevertheless, the increase in the scientific research in this field in the recent years and the interest in masculinity studies are at a pleasing level. In this regard, the present study aims to deeply analyze the opinions of the young people studying at university on the ideal man. To this end, the men who are undergraduate and graduate students in the capital city of Turkey, Ankara, were asked the question "How do you think an ideal man should be?".

2. Method

2.1. Participants of Study

The participants of the study were reached by random sampling and snowball sampling methods (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). A questionnaire form containing socio-demographic information and an open-ended question was organized and primarily, data was collected randomly from 100 male students in the campuses of different universities in Ankara. The ages of the male students who participated in the study ranged from 19-31. It was found that 5 (5%) participants lived "in a village" for the most of their lives; 11 (11%) participants lived "in a county" for the most of their lives; 23 (23%) participants lived "in a city" for the most of their lives; 61 (61%) participants lived "in a metropolitan city" for the most of their lives. 79 (79%) participants stated that they did not work, while 21 (21%) participants stated that they worked. Information on the relationship status of the participants is as follows; 52 (52%) participants said they did not have any boy/girlfriends, while 48 (48%) of the participants stated that they had boy/girlfriends. In addition, the questionnaire was also administered to female students studying in different universities in Turkey and each female student was asked to administer the questionnaire to one of her female friends. With this method, data from a total of 118 female students was collected. Thus, both male and female students' opinions on "ideal man" were taken. The ages of the female students who participated in the study ranged from 18-32. It was found that 18 (15.2%) participants lived "in a village" for the most of their lives; 10 (8.5%) participants lived "in a county" for the most of their lives; 24 (20.4%) participants lived "in a city" for the most of their lives; 66 (55.9%) participants lived "in a metropolitan city" for the most of their lives. Participants are studying at different universities and in different parts of Turkey. 106 (89.8%) participants stated that they did not work, while 12 (10.2%) participants stated that they worked. Information on the relationship status of the participants is as follows; 87 (73.7%) participants said they did not have any boy/girlfriends, while 31 (26.3%) of the participants stated that they had boy/girlfriends.

2.2. Data Analysis

The answers given by the participants to the open-ended question "How do you think ideal man should be" were analyzed using content analysis which is a qualitative research method. Data was tried to be defined through content analysis, and the facts that may be hidden in the data were tried to be revealed (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2013). Each statement obtained from the answers obtained from open-ended questions consisted of the analysis unit of the study. Dataset was read by each researcher and an independent coding was performed.

Based on the codes, the themes which can explain the data in an overall level and group the codes under specific categories were designated and the findings were interpreted. (Yıldırım&Şimşek, 2013). After reading and coding the dataset independently in this way, the data set evaluated separately by each of the two researchers in order to ensure consistency is reviewed by each researcher and the codes and themes were re-evaluated, and the agreed changes were made. After all these processes, each of the answers given by the participants to these questions determined the frequency of each theme.

3. Findings

The findings in this chapter are discussed in two parts. First of all, opinions of men on ideal man, and then those of women on ideal man are presented in themes.

3.1. Opinions of male university students on ideal man

Opinions of university male students on ideal man were examined using the content analysis and the emerging themes are presented in Table 1 with frequencies and percentages.

Table 1. Opinions of Male Students on Ideal Man

Themes	n	%
Well-behaved (virtuous, honest, reliable)	95	21.59
Respectful and warm-hearted/affectionate and protective	73	16.59
Has a job, career and money	59	13.41
Sense of responsibility	45	10.23
Critical point of view, sophisticated/knowledgeable	40	9.09
Believes in gender equality	39	8.87
Charismatic, serious, dignified	36	8.18
Physical superiority (muscular, handsome, etc.)	21	4.77
Emotional/ability to control his feelings	17	3.86
There is no such a thing as an ideal man	15	3.41

Total440100.00

As can be seen in Table 1, most of the male students answered the question “How should an ideal man be?” saying that he should be well-behaved. In the theme of being well-behaved, the characteristics such as being virtuous, honest, trustworthy, loyal, thoughtful the gentleman were observed to be frequently repeated. The second theme of an ideal man is the theme that includes the expressions of being respectful, warm-hearted, affectionate and protective for a man. In this theme, some of the expressions encountered highlight the protective role of a man. Men are expected to protect women around them and to be always on the alert against dangers. The third theme for an ideal man highlights the need for having a job, career and money for men. Male students appear to have an attitude to sustain the traditional understanding that men should have money and earn a living for the family. Relatively less students stated that men should be responsible, see from a critical point of view, should be sophisticated-knowledgeable, believe in gender equality, be charismatic, serious, dignified; physically superior and emotional and control his feelings. The fact that 3.41% of the students who participated in the study responded “There is no such a thing as ideal man” to is one of the significant findings of this study. The fact that even if just a small percentage of men rejected to define ideal man points out the breakdown in the gender stereotypes.

3.2. Opinions of Female Students on Ideal Man

Opinions of university female students on ideal man were examined using the content analysis and the emerging themes are presented in Table 2 with frequencies and percentages.

Table 2. Opinions of Female Students on Ideal Man

Themes	n	%
Equal/fair	138	36.3
Respectful	55	14.4
Tolerant/kind	41	10.7
Self-sufficient	32	8.4
Reliable/honest	24	6.4
Considerate	20	5.3
Ability to develop empathy	19	5.0
Protective	16	4.3
Strong family bonds	14	3.6
Sense of responsibility	12	3.2
Has a job	9	2.4

Total380100.00

Table 2 includes the opinions of female students on “How should an ideal man be?”. According to the women who participated in the study, “the ideal man”, respectively should be equal/fair (138; 36.3%), respectful (55; 14.4%), tolerant/kind (41;10.7), self-sufficient (32; 8.4%), reliable / honest (24; 6.4%), considerate (20; 5.3%), have the ability to develop empathy (19; 5.0%), be protective (16; 4.3%), have strong family bonds (14; 3.6%), be responsible (12; 3.2%) and have a job (9; 2.4%). Apart from these, some participants stated that it is not possible to mention an ideal man or woman as everyone should be equally important and respectful of each other.

Given the themes discussed in this study; the statements highlighting that men should not differentiate between men and women, should not see women inferior to them and men and women have the equal rights without any gender discrimination were found in the theme “being equal/fair”.

The theme “being respectful” includes statements highlighting that men should be understanding and respectful, should respect women and women rights and their opinions. The theme “being tolerant/kind” includes statements highlighting that a man should be kind and tolerant and polite and helpful. Another theme “being self-sufficient” includes statements highlighting that a man can stand on his own legs without needing anybody and should have self-confidence. In the theme “being reliable/honest”, it is emphasized that men should be honest, keep their promises and man of his words. In another theme “being considerate”, it is stated that an ideal man should consider people around him, pay attention not to hurt his spouse and children and act rationally. A group of students said that an ideal man should “develop empathy”. This theme includes statements highlighting that an ideal man should develop empathy, have the ability to empathy and put himself in other’s shoes. The theme “being protective” includes statements highlighting that men should be able to protect himself and people around him, his spouse and family and should be brave. Another theme “having strong family bonds” includes statements that an ideal man should be loyal to his home, his spouse and think about his family at every opportunity. A small number of participants expect an ideal man to “be responsible”. This theme includes the statements such as being responsible, fulfilling his duties and responsibilities and being aware of his responsibilities. In the study, the last theme is “having a job”. This theme includes the statements highlighting that a man should have a permanent job to earn a living for himself and he should have a good job.

4. Discussion, Conclusion and Suggestions

The current study, is a qualitative research to explore about ‘being an ideal men’ in Turkish culture. Results of the study indicate that the male and female students participating in this study expect an ideal man to be well-behaved, respectful and fair. The differences between the opinions of men and women on ideal man are striking. In the answers given by men, having a job is the 3rd most popular answer, while this is one of the last answers given by women on ideal man. Being well-behaved and respectful is among the most popular answers given both by men and women on ideal man. In addition, it seems that ideal man is substantially associated with having responsibilities by men. This implicates that men are aware of the expectations of the society from their own gender. However, the answers imply that people may reflect the current lacks in their answers. For instance, the responsibilities expected from men are relatively less than those expected from women in general to about domestic tasks or child-care from early ages in the Turkish culture. The fact that men are generally taking fewer responsibilities might have led to such answers. Unlike their fellows, participants may regard a man who is taking responsibilities as more superior and ideal.

Manhood is an ideal that is challenging to attain and preserve from childhood to death (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1996). Boys and young adults feel the pressure of becoming ‘a real man’. ‘Being a real men’ indicates the ‘ideal men’. According to Eisler, Skidmore and Ward (1988) confining the nature of gender and gender roles can be restrictive and stressful for men. According to O’Neil (2008), gender role restrictions happen when confining others or oneself to stereotypic norms of masculinity ideology. Masculine ideology indicates some norms about being tough because being emotional in front of others damages the idealized image of a man (Thompson & Pleck, 1986). That’s why, a threat to tough image occurs in situations where significant others might condemn a man who displays woman-like or feminine behaviors such as showing affection or being open about emotions. Therefore, it can be considered tough image occurs as the opposite of feminine behaviors (Connell, 1995). According to Bourdieu (2002), manliness must be certified by recognition of membership of the group of ‘real men’. Vandello and his colleagues (2008) in their study, reached the conclusion of American people’s idea of being women and men. In their study, people accepted the idea that being a man requires social achievements and is more difficult than being a woman. Participants claimed that manhood is easy to lose when its’ requirements are not fulfilled. For example, participants attributed “no longer being a man” means losing social status while “no longer being a woman” meant changing biological sex or losing a woman body part.

Stiles, Gibbons, and Schnellmann (1987), in their studies, showed what ninth grade students think of the ideal men. Participants ranked ten qualities of the ideal person and drew a picture of the ideal person doing something. Girls depicted the ideal man as "the chivalrous football player" (kind and honest, fun loving, smiling, and bringing flowers). Boys depicted the ideal man as "the frowning football player" (fun loving, frowning, and engaged in sports). This study shows, young boys even in their early ages, thinks ideal men have to be strict, have to be into sports and have to have fun.

O-O’Beaglaioich, Morrison, Nielsen and Ryan (2015), in their study, examine the gender role conflict among boys and found similar idealizations about being men. Boys feel that they have to be tough, not caring, and physically strong. The current study, investigated not only men’s opinion but also women’s opinion about the subject. Because men try to meet the masculine expectations of women and men. In this research, participants initially indicated otherwise in some topics. Collectivist Turkish culture (Kagitcibasi, 1997) requires being kind, reliable and considerate. It is understood from this study that the stereotypes about ideal man are protected and sustained by young people as well. It is also understood that masculinity is idealized and tried to be stereotyped. Nevertheless, the fact that a few men answer the question “how should an ideal man be?” saying that “there is no such a thing as ideal man” is significant in indicating the existence of a segment that refuses to gender stereotypes.

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