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Gender-Role Development of Hutterite Children

A Middle-Voiced Account of Gender-Role Development: Examples from the Hutterite Culture

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Abstract

This study examines children's early gender-role development in three Hutterite communities by using a middle-voiced theoretical approach. The results indicate that gender-role related interactions between adults and children in the everyday context are a complex and intertwined process. Even though the Hutterite adults were very intense in gender-role socialization (as evidenced in their initiating more gender-role related interactions than other types of interactions, their frequently responding to children's gender-role initiations, their taking more turns in gender-role related interactions, and their frequently elaborating on children's gender-role initiations), they could not completely control the direction of gender-role interactions. In fact, most of the gender-role related interactions between the adults and the children departed from their original themes and were carried on by the circumstance of the interaction process. This study suggests that when examining gender-role development, we need to focus on the process rather than on either the adults or children.

Keywords: Gender roles, the middle-voice, and Hutterite culture

Children's early gender-role development has been an important focus of research among social scientists in many disciplines. Currently, there are three dominant theoretical positions in the literature: the social-learning theory or the social cognitive theory, the cognitive-developmental theory, and the gender schema theory. Even though over the years these theories have changed and included many similar elements (e.g., see Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002), they still have their distinct theoretical emphases. For example, the social learning theory stresses adults' modeling and reinforcement in gender-role development (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Mischel, 1966). Its recent transformation, the social cognitive theory does consider children's own contribution to gender development. Nevertheless, the environmental factors continue to play an important role in this theoretical approach (e.g., see Bussey & Bandura, 1999; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002). By contrast, the cognitive-developmental theory and the gender schema theory emphasize the importance of children's contribution to gender-role development. For example, the cognitive-developmental theory considers children as active thinkers about their own gender-role development (e.g., see Fagot, 1995; Kohlberg, 1966; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002; Maccoby, 2002; Maccoby & Jacklin, 1974) and the gender schema theory stresses the active guidance of a child's cognitive schemas in gender-role development (e.g., see Bem, 1981; Liben & Signorella, 1980; Martin & Halverson, 1981; Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002; Marcus et al., 1982).

These theoretical frameworks, without doubt, have helped us understand how young children develop gender roles. However, all three share a common problem: they tend either to underscore the adults' roles in children's gender-role development (e.g., the social learning theory/the social cognitive theory) or to overemphasize the children's roles in their own gender development (e.g., the cognitive-developmental theory and the gender schema theory). In an

effort to search for a more balanced theoretical framework to explain how young children develop gender roles, some researchers did consider the *interaction* between adults and children in the cultural environment. For example, the symbolic interactionist approach (e.g., Cahill, 1983; Salomon, 1995; Schildkrout, 1978) tries to situate a child in his/her natural environment and specifically looks at how the child produces and reproduces the gender relations that characterize that particular culture (e.g., Salomon, 1995). At first glance, this approach seems more attractive than the previously mentioned theoretical approaches. However, on a closer examination, it becomes evident that it still focuses on the actors (the children and the adults) instead of the gender interaction process itself. Gadamer (1998, p114) reminded us that in a theatre play, if the audience focuses only on the actors (players) themselves, it will not understand the play. Only when the actors (players) and, for instance, their acting skills become secondary to the representation, can the audience genuinely get involved in the play.

Thus, in this paper we propose to rethink the children's gender-role development by using a new theoretical approach called the middle voice. The middle voice is originally a grammatical term. As its name suggests, it usually designates a verbal voice between the active and the passive (Eberhard, 1999 & 2004). The most common way of rendering it derives from the active/passive and subject/object oppositions: reflexivity, as in "I socialize myself" and reciprocity, as in "we socialize each other." However, based on the works by Gadamer (1989), Benveniste (1971), and Eberhard (1999 & 2004), the middle voice allows one to bypass the common active/passive and subject/object frame of mind and to think in terms of subject and verb when trying to understand any forms of interaction. In the middle voice, the subject is inside the verbal process. He/she does something that at the same happens to him/her. The question is not "who does what and to whom?" but "where are we?" Instead of asking what the adults and

the children give and receive in the gender-role development, the question is the location of the parents and the children within the process of gender-role socialization and learning. The middle voice means that the adults, the children, and the interactions between them are all the subjects of the socialization and learning process. It allows us to go beyond the alternative of adults-determined vs. children-determined and to interpret the adult and child dynamics as being part of a larger process. From the middle-voiced standpoint, gender-role development is neither the exclusive doing of the adults nor the exclusive doing of the children. Instead of seeking an exclusive subject and focusing on the adult socializing or setting an environment or on the children receiving knowledge on gender-role or constructing their own knowledge on gender role, the middle-voice underscores the gender-role development process itself. In a middle-voiced framework, both the adult and the child are getting involved in the gender-role development process, which happens to them as they strive to make it work.

In order to illustrate the middle-voiced account of young children's gender-role development in the everyday context, we chose three Hutterite communities as our research sites because of their strong emphasis on gender-role socialization (e.g., Hostetler, 1967 & 1997; Macgregor, 1991). By doing so, we hope to demonstrate that, even in a very adult-controlled and clearly-gendered society like the Hutterite communities, neither the adults nor the children are fully in charge of gender-role development. Both the adults and the children rather partake in and of everyday interaction processes and struggle on the path of gender development, a path which these processes clear for them and with them.

Methods

Research Sites

The Hutterites are a group of communally living Anabaptists of German ancestry. They distinguish themselves from the world with their religious belief, customs, dress code, and language. Persecuted for their differences, particularly their religious conviction, the Hutterites migrated to the North American continent in the 1870's. To avoid the influence of the outside world, they founded their colonies on the isolated farmlands of eastern South Dakota and western Canada. Today, there are about 40,000 Hutterites living in many self-contained colonies in the United States and Canada (Decker, 1993). The Hutterites are trilingual in Hutterish, German, and English.¹

The three Hutterite colonies included in the study were located within the 50-mile range of Aberdeen in South Dakota. At the time of the study, there were 96 inhabitants in the Brookville Colony, 105 in Meadow Colony, and 91 in Grassroots Colony.² These colonies were self-sufficient farming communities. Like other Hutterite colonies, these colonies have clearly marked roles between men and women. The adult males are responsible for communal farm work, colony business, and decision-making. The adult females are responsible for communal childcare, cooking, sewing, and gardening. They do not participate in any forms of colony business and decision-making. They are not allowed to drive or go outside of the colony without men's accompany.

Participants

Twenty 5-year old children participated in the study (SD = 6 months). The genders of the children were balanced by including ten boys and ten girls (4 girls and 5 boys from the Brookville Colony, 3 girls and 3 boys from Meadow Colony, and 3 girls and 2 boys from Grassroots Colony). Since the Hutterite society is living communally and young children are under the care of many other adults in the communities, we also included sixty-five adults who

interacted with the children daily during the study (31 from the Brookville Colony with 6 males and 25 females, 19 from the Meadow Colony with 2 males and 17 females, and 15 from the Grassroots Colony with 4 males and 11 females). The ages of the adults ranged from 22 years to 61 years.

There are two major reasons for us to include 5-year olds in the study. First, literature has suggested that ages 4 to 6 appear to be an important period for gender-role learning (e.g., Albert, 1986). Children around 5 or 6 years of age begin to develop gender-identity and begin to understand gender knowledge and meaning (Kohlberg, 1966). Second, the Hutterite children at this age are formally introduced to the colony life styles. They spend most of the day in the community settings such as the dining room, German school, church service, English preparation class. At this age, children are also required to assume their gender roles. Boys and girls sit separately in all the communal settings such as the church service, classroom, and dining hall. They are also given different chores (e.g., fields and hog farms for boys and gardening and baby-sitting for girls).

Procedures

Data collection

As part of a longitudinal study of child development in the Hutterite culture, the data used in this study were collected in a period of time from September 1993 to September 1996. The data were collected through the ethnographic method (e.g., participant observations, field notes, formal and informal interviews, conversations, and audio-visual recordings in naturalistic daily contexts of various settings). However, the data reported in this paper are solely based on the video recordings. 234 hours video-recorded data were used in the paper (ranging from 9 hours to 14 hours for each child).

The children and adults were observed and videotaped in various settings when they carried out their routines with peers, siblings, parents, and other adults in the colonies. The researchers visited the colonies once or twice per week for six months before the videotaping began. The researchers obtained oral consent for the study from the colony ministers and the parents of the children.

Data transcription and coding

Transcription. Since the middle-voiced framework was used to guide this study, we considered the context of the interactions between the adults and children and between the children themselves to be crucial. Thus, all the interactions between the children and adults were first transcribed verbatim by native speakers.³ The transcripts were then checked for accuracy by different native speakers and translated into English.

Identifying gender-role episodes. In order to examine the process of the gender-role related interactions between the adults and the children, we needed to find a way that could best capture the interactions between the adults and the children. Informed by previous studies on adult-child interactions (e.g., Wang, Mylander, & Goldin-Meadow, 1995; Wang, Bernas, & Eberhard, 2002), we decided to use gender-role *episodes* as the basic unit for coding. A gender-role episode is defined as an interaction between adults and children about a gender theme or several gender themes (e.g., socializing proper gender behaviors, reprimanding a gender-role transgression, or gender-role playing). All the interactions that were related to the theme or derived from it are considered as an interaction episode. An episode ends when the parties involved have no intention to go on or some events interrupt the interactions. For example, the following interactions between a female adult and a 5-year-old girl and her friends were coded as a gender-role related episode:

(Context: Amanda and her friends, Claire, Brenda, and Ryan,⁴ were climbing onto a long wooden bench in the German Room—a room used for German School).

Female Adult: Amanda, pull down your skirt. You are showing your legs.
Amanda: (Does not respond and continues to climb onto the bench)
Female Adult: Amanda, Amanda. Your legs are out!
Pull your skirt down.
Amanda: (Looks at the woman's direction and giggles, pulls down the skirt)
I don't like it.
Female adult: You don't like what?
You don't like it, your skirt?
Amanda: Yeah.
Female Adult: Mary (Amanda's mother) made it for you. She said you liked it.
Amanda: I like Claire's.
Yellow flowers.
Ryan: It's ugly.
Female Adult: What is ugly?
Ryan: (Giggles)
Amanda: He said, he said, he said
Brenda: (Interrupts) Her skirt is ugly.
Female Adult: Men don't know!
Amanda: Ryan knows.
Female adult: Oh (smiles), he knows, he knows trucks.
Amanda: John (Ryan's father) is in the field, in the, in the truck
Ryan: Tractor! (Makes a belittling facial expression)
Female Adult: (To Ryan) You'll know how to drive that stuff in a few years.
Amanda: I will
Female Adult: (Interrupts Amanda) You will work in the kitchen with Mary (head cook in the colony).
(The minister of the Colony enters the room and all the children run back to their seats).

The advantage of using episode as a basic unit for coding is that it allows us to understand the dynamics of the gender-role related interactions in several ways:

- 1) It allows us to see the frequency of the gender-role related interactions in relation to other types of interactions (e.g., moral interactions and literacy interactions) in the everyday encounters between the adults and the children.
- 2) It allows us to see how the gender-role related interactions were initiated.

- 3) It allows us to see whether a gender-related interaction was explicit (clear gender-role related message as conveyed by the adult in the above example; “Pull down your skirt) or implicit (often through nonverbal channels such as the facial expression made by Ryan on Amanda’s “ignorance” about tractors).
- 4) It allows us to see how the adults and children responded to the gender-role initiations. For example, how frequently they responded to each other’s initiations, how many turns they took in each interaction episode, and how frequently they elaborated on the initiations by the other parties.
- 5) It allows us to see what types of gender-role themes were involved in the interactions and how these themes were related.
- 6) Most importantly, it allows us to examine the gender-role interaction process and see how a specific gender-related interaction started, evolved, and ended.

Coding Reliability

Coding reliability was established by randomly selecting 30% of the data. The overall reliability of the data was 87% (gender episodes vs. other episodes 92%, adult and child initiations 91%, explicit vs. implicit initiations 94%, frequency of response 85%, mean number of turns 90%, frequency of elaboration 81%, gender role themes 78%, and the process 86%).

Results⁵

Frequency of Gender- Role Interactions vs. Other Types of Interactions

The data indicate that the Hutterite adults tended to engage more in gender-role related interactions than the other types of interactions in their daily encounters with the children (69% gender-role interactions vs. 31% other types of interactions), $X^2(1) = 78.26, p = .000$. Moreover,

the adults tended to have more gender-role related interactions with the girls(58%) than with the boys (42%), $X^2(1) = 10.03, p = .002$. While the adults also tended to have more other types of interactions with the girls (56%) than with the boys (44%), this difference was not found to be statistically significant.

Frequency of Gender-Role Episodes Initiated by Adults and Children

The Hutterite adults tended to initiate far more gender-related interactions than did their children (72% initiated by adults vs. 28% initiated by children), $X^2(1) = 69.87, p = .000$. In addition, the adults tended to initiate more gender-role related interactions with the girls (60%) than with the boys (40%), $X^2(1) = 10.96, p = .001$. Although the girls tended to initiate slightly more gender-related episodes than the boys (53% vs. 47%), this difference was not statistically significant.

Frequency of Explicit and Implicit Gender-Role Episodes by Adults and Children

The adults tended to initiate more explicit gender-role related episodes than did the children (78% explicit episodes initiated by adults vs. 45% explicit episodes initiated by children). On the other hand, the children tended to initiate more implicit gender episodes than the adults (55% vs. 22%), $X^2(1) = 36.56, p = .000$. The adults tended to initiate more explicit gender episodes when interacting with the girls than with the boys (60% vs. 40%), $X^2(1) = 10.96, p = .001$. Although the girls tended to initiate more explicit episodes than the boys (55% vs. 45%), this difference was not statistically significant.

Adult and Children's Responses to Gender-Role Initiations

Frequency of responses to initiation. The adults tended to frequently respond to the gender-role related interactions initiated by the children. Out of all the episodes initiated by the children, the adults responded 88% of the times. They responded slightly more to the initiations

by girls (52%) than by the boys (48%), but the difference was not statistically significant. The children tended to respond less frequently to the gender-role related interactions initiated by the adults. Out of all the episodes initiated by the adults, they responded 49% of the times.

However, the girls tended to respond to the episodes initiated by the adults much more frequently than the boys (71% vs. 29%), $X^2(1) = 23.09, p = .000$.

Mean number of turns to per episode. The data show that the adults tended to take more turns than did the children in a gender-role interaction episode ($M = 9.60, SD = 2.38$ for the adults and $M = 3.75, SD = 1.62$ for the children), $t(63) = 27.55, p = .000$. The number of turns that adults had when interacting with boys and girls did not differ significantly ($M = 9.03, SD = 2.38$ with the boys and $M = 10.09, SD = 2.29$ with the girls). The girls, however, tended to take more turns in an episode than the boys ($M = 4.69, SD = 1.55$ for the girls and $M = 2.85, SD = 1.09$ for the boys), $t(63) = -5.53, p = .000$.

Frequency of elaboration. The adults elaborated 84% of the gender episodes initiated by the children. Though not statistically significant, they tended to elaborate the gender episodes initiated by the girls slightly more than the ones by the boys (53% vs. 47%). In contrast, the children tended to elaborate much less on the gender episodes initiated by the adults (40%). However, the girls tended to elaborate significantly more on the gender episodes initiated by the adults than the boys (69% vs. 31%), $X^2(1) = 18.24, p = .000$.

Types of Gender Themes by Adults and by Children

Table 1 shows that most of the themes expressed by the adults in the interaction processes were intended to socialize proper gender behaviors (41%) and reprimand gender-role transgressions (32%). There are some differences in the themes that the adults expressed when

interacting with the boys and with the girls. For example, the adults tended to request that the girls behave in a gender proper ways more frequently than the boys (45% vs. 37%), $t(63) = -6.58, p = .000$.⁶ They were also more likely to reprimand the girls than the boys from deviating from their gender roles (34% vs. 31%), $t(63) = -2.40, p = .02$. The adults tended to differ in their ways of assigning chores to the boys and to the girls (16% to the boys and 14% to the girls), $t(63) = 2.37, p = .02$. Most interestingly, the adults used significantly more teasing to the boys than to the girls in their gender-role interactions (14% vs. 5%), $t(63) = 8.64, p = .000$.

(Insert Table 1 here)

Table 2 suggests that most of the themes expressed by the children in the gender-role related interactions are role playing (33%) and teasing (30%). The girls tended to confirm their gender-role behaviors more frequently than the boys (22% vs. 19%), $t(63) = -2.50, p = .02$. While there were some slight differences in teasing, reprimands for gender-role transgressions, and role-playing between boys and girls, these differences were not statistically significant.

(Insert Table 2 here)

The Process of the Gender-Role Related Interactions

Up until now, we have examined the specific aspects of the adult and child interactions in the interaction process. Now let us turn to the most important step of the study, i.e., the interaction process itself. When examining the sequence of the interactions (i.e., how an interaction began, developed, and ended), we noticed that majority of the gender -role related interaction episodes initiated by the adults or by the children departed from their original themes and were transformed in the interaction processes. The data shows that the adults transformed 86% of the original themes in the gender episodes initiated by the children (there were no statistically significant differences in whether the episodes were initiated by the boys or girls)

and the children transformed 65% of the original themes in the gender episodes initiated by the adults. Girls were more likely than the boys to transform the original themes initiated by the adults (60% vs. 40%), $X^2(1) = 7.36, p = .007$.

Discussion

To put all these results in perspective, it is clear that Hutterite adults are indeed very focused on gender-role socialization in their everyday interactions with young children. As our data have suggested, they frequently initiated gender-role interactions, frequently responded to children's gender-role initiations, took more turns in gender-role related interactions, and frequently elaborated on the children's gender-role initiations, frequently requested the children to follow proper gender behaviors, and frequently reprimanded children's gender transgressions. They did so more intensely to the girls than to the boys. However, even though the Hutterite adults were eager and intense in gender-role socialization, they were not able to be fully in charge of the gender-role related interactions with the children. In fact, they were merely part of the gender interaction process. As we can see, 65% of the gender-role related episodes initiated by the adults and 86% of the episodes initiated by the children departed from their original intentions and evolved throughout the process of the interactions. Look at the example on page 9 again. The female adult initiated the gender-role related interaction by requesting the girl (Amanda) to behave in a gender proper way. The child responded to the adult's initiation by compliance (pulling the skirt down). If the interaction between the adult and the child stopped here, one could argue that the adult played an important and active role in this gender gender-role related interaction. However, when we examined the interaction process further, we noticed that the interaction was transformed when Amanda brought in another theme (she did not like the skirt). The interaction moved to yet another direction when Amanda's friend Ryan commented

about Amanda's skirt (it's ugly), and the theme evolved further when the adult commented that "men don't know women's affairs such as dresses." The interaction evolved continuously to Amanda's "ignorance" about tractors, Ryan's future (driving tractors), and Amada's future (cooking in the communal kitchen). If we look at the beginning of the interaction in the episode and the end of it, we can see that both the female adult and the children (Amanda, Ryan, and Brenda) were involved in the interactions, yet none of them were solely responsible for the direction of the interactions. Both the adult and the children were doing something to each other and to the process and something happened to them. At the end of the interactive episode, one can no longer see who was responsible for the interaction, the adult or the children. Both the adult and the children were involved in and contributing to the process that carried them both.

In the light of this study, we believe that the middle-voiced theoretical approach is a more subtle and complete approach in examining children's early gender-role development than the other current theoretical frameworks. By using the middle-voiced theoretical framework to examine gender-role development, we are able to focus on the process rather than the adults and children. We are able to leave behind the quest for an exclusive subject, i.e., the either/or question of adult vs. child and the active/passive picture of gender socialization as an either received or imparted object. The middle voice allows us to account for a process happening to both parties without determining them since they both contribute to it.

Notes:

1. Hutterish is an oral dialect most nearly resembling that spoken in the province of Carinthia, Austria. It began as a Tyrolian dialect, was strongly influenced by the arrival of the Carinthians into the group in 1762, and was further modified by stays in Slavic area, in Transylvania (Romania), in the Ukraine, and finally in North America (Patterson, 1980).
2. The real names of the colonies were changed to protect their privacy.
3. The transcribers were students from the Hutterite colonies, who were enrolled in the education programs in a local university.
4. Pseudonyms were used for the children.
5. Since no significant variations were found across the colonies, the results were reported by comparing the adults (from the three colonies) as one group (the Hutterite adult group) and the children (from the three colonies) as one group (the Hutterite child group).
6. The t-test was conducted on the $y' = 2 \arcsin (y/2)$ transformation of the proportion data. This transformation was conducted in all the succeeding t-tests involving proportion data (Winter, 1971).

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Table 1
Gender-Role Related Themes Expressed by Adults

Theme	Frequency (%)	Description	Example
Request proper gender behavior	41	Request or remind a child to behave in a gender appropriate manner.	<i>“Walk like a woman!”</i>
Reprimand gender transgression	32	Stop gender-role inappropriateness.	<i>“You stand at the corner and think why you shouted like a boy.”</i>
Assign chores	15	Assign different chores to boys and	<i>“Boys go help clean the Hog Farm. Girls go to the vegetable garden.”</i>
Teasing	9	Tease a child for gender-role inappropriateness.	<i>“You really look like Mary.”</i> (When John put on Mary’s hat)
Other	3	Themes that occurred only once.	

Table 2
Gender-Role Related Themes Expressed by Children

Theme	Frequency (%)	Description	Example
Role Play	34	Play the role of a male or female.	<i>"I am Mary."</i> (Mary is a head cook in the colony)
Teasing	30	Tease at another child for gender-role inappropriateness.	<i>"Ryan is a girl."</i> (When Ryan cleans his clothes after cleaning the hog farm)
Confirmation	20	Seek adult opinions in a gender-role aspects.	<i>"Women work in kitchen, right?"</i>
Report gender-role transgression	14	Report to adults about another Child's gender-role transgression.	<i>"Amanda hit me like a boy."</i>
Other	3	Themes that occurred only once.	

Note: The sum does not equal 100% due to rounding.