Differences in gender roles and expectations are easily noticeable and accepted in my family. Both my parents were born and raised in India. They immigrated to Canada in their early 20’s. Prior to residing in Canada, they both lived in very small villages that were in close proximity to each other. My father grew up in a household with his parents, two sisters, and two brothers. They all lived in a very small one-story home. My father is the youngest among his siblings. He was the only one who attended school because his siblings were expected to stay home to help around the house and/or farm. My father immigrated to Canada in the early 1980’s. He came here with barely five dollars in his pocket. He completed his high school diploma and college diploma while working full-time night shifts. Due to the struggles my father faced, he prioritizes and values getting an education. On the other hand, my mother grew up in a household with her parents, two brothers, aunts, uncles, and cousins. They all lived between two large houses that are next to each other. My mother rarely completed any housework, as her parents were able to afford several servants. She was sent to the city to attend a prestigious girl’s hostel. Unfortunately, my mother was not able to complete high school because she married my father and immigrated to Canada. After moving here, she had no desire to complete her high school diploma because my father’s income was sufficient to support both. However, she did complete a small keyboarding course and sustained a part-time job until I was born.

I grew up in a very strict Indian home where my father was the breadwinner and authoritative figure where as my mom was the homemaker (this situation still applies today). Coming from an Indian home, I witnessed and experiences several gender role and expectation differences within my family. In India, boys are seen as more precious and are more desirable than girls are. Some reasons for this are that boys carry the family name and stay with the family even after there are married. Unfortunately, this mentality still applies to Indians who live in Canada. The desire of having a boy is apparent even before the sex of the child is determined. For example, when I was a teenager, my parents told me the story of how when my mother found out she was pregnant with me, she prayed and hoped that I was a boy. In addition, after I was born, my parents informed my grandparents and great-grandparents that they had a baby girl. I was told that they were extremely upset because I was not a boy and my great-grandmother (on my mom’s side) cried and told my parents to keep trying until they had a boy. Hearing all this about me was very upsetting however, I was not surprised. Fortunately for my family, two years later my younger brother was born.

Growing up in my house with my brother, I noticed many differences in the way that my parents treated the both of us. The first difference that was evident was in terms of leniency. I have noticed that my parents were more lenient when it came to my brother. For example, he was able to go out with his friends whenever he wanted to. He did not have to give any details as to where he was going or whom he was going with, all he said before he left the house was “I‘ll be back” which was sufficient for my parents. On the other hand, I was rarely allowed to leave the house to go out with my friends. On occasion when I did, I had to tell my parents, who I was going with, where I was going, when I was expected to be home and give any phone numbers of friends that I was going to be with. Furthermore, my brother was allowed to leave the house at any given time and come home at any time. On the other hand, I was only allowed to go out during the day and only for a few hours. Moreover, when I was out with my friends, my parents would call me every half an hour to inquire about what I was doing. This was very annoying and embarrassing because I was with my friends and had to leave the group to talk to my parents. Unfortunately, for me, my parents did not call my brother that often when he went out. Lastly, my mother would always lecture me about not staying out too late, dressing appropriately, interacting with boys, and becoming sexually active before marriage. This made me feel like my parents did not trust me. Thus, enabled me to learn about the limits of questioning social norms in my early teens (Parmeswaran, 2001).

When my brother and I both started driving, we shared a van with my father (my mother does not drive). At the beginning, my brother was the only one allowed to take the van when he wanted to go out. Whenever I asked if I was allowed to drive the van, I was bluntly told “no”. This was the situation even when my parents were in the car, they would only allow my brother to drive. As time passed, I was allowed to take the van out on occasion. However, I had to be home at a certain time. Recently, my parents bought me a used van to use for work and running errands. My brother is allowed to use it whenever he wants to. There have been times where I would have to go tutor but I have no car to take because my brother has taken it. In addition, I am the only one who pays for gas even though my brother uses it often and many times empties the gas tank. When I discuss this with my parents, all they say is “you’re the older sister it’s your job”.

In terms of household chores, I also experienced gender differences. Growing up, I was always told to clean my room, soap and rinse the dishes, sweep and mop the floor, cook and do the laundry. I had no problem doing this for myself. However, the problem occurred when I had to do this for my brother as well. I found it very unfair when I had to clean his room and clean his dirty clothes. To this day, I am still expected to clean after my brother because according to my parents “it’s a woman’s job to do house work and men are not expected to do it.”

Within education, academic achievements and educational trajectories is another area where I have experienced gender role differences. Ever since I was younger, I was expected to do really well in school. This meant getting good grades and staying out of trouble. My brother was expected to do the same however; the level of enforcement was very different. For example, if both my brother and I received C’s on our report card, he would get a simple “just try harder next semester” whereas I would be lectured and punished for doing so poorly. A reason for this is that they expect girls to be more studios than boys, especially when it comes to literacy (Gambell & Hunter, 2000). In addition, I remember times where I would bring home a test where I received a ninety percent and my parents would ask, “Where is the other ten percent.” I was expected to get straight A’s in all my subjects. In addition, as I was completing my undergrad, I had to show my parents each report card for every semester, whereas they never even asked for my brothers marks. This infuriated me because I experienced the way they treated us differently. Furthermore, when I confronted my parents and asked “why,” they simply denied the fact that they treated us differently. In addition, my parents expected me to go into law, science or the medical field. My mom was very upset when I told her I wanted to go to school for Early Childhood Education. On the other hand, my parents did not focus too much on my brothers educational and career goals.

Norquay (1999) suggested that individuals who are subjected to gender subordination and gender role differences tend to test boundaries to challenge or poke fun at authority. This applies to my experiences with gender role differences. For example, in high school, I purposely did poorly in some of my subject areas because I wanted to observe the difference in reactions by my parents when they saw my grades verses my brothers. At times, I have threatened my parents saying that if they did not treat me as equally as my brother then I would fail on purpose. In addition, when I was allowed to go out with my friends more often, I would ignore my parent’s phone calls and come home later than expected. This was my way of being a rebel and defying authority.

During my post-secondary years, I made a promise to myself that I would try my best during university and made it my goal to complete my masters. I thought that I needed to do this because I felt that my parents preferred my brother over me and since I know my parents value education, I thought that the more education I had the more my parents would accept me. However, even though I know that my parents are proud of my educational gains, they still try to push me to further my education, which they do not do with my brother. When I ask my parents why they do not push him in school or when it comes to finding a job, they say that because one day I will be married and leave the house whereas my brother will bring home his wife. This implies that Indian parents want their daughters to have everything so that they are “marriage material” (Parameswaran, 2001).

My experiences with gender role and expectation differences have shaped my identity. For example, I am more aware of gender differences when I see it and I am more verbal about treating boys and girls equally. I would not call myself a feminist; however, I do sometimes “fight” for female equality when it comes to my immediate family and my extended family. In addition, I do sometimes identify myself as a rebel because even now, I still defy my parent’s authority especially in instances where I feel they are treating me differently than my brother. For example, I am getting married on April 21, 2012 and I did not let my parents know of my plans of getting married until recently. This was mainly because I knew they were not going to approve of my choice in partner. However, without their consent, I went ahead and planned my wedding. My entire family is disappointed and shocked because this is not something they expect me to do as I have always been very obedient and fulfilled my parents’ wishes.

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