

# How Gender Stereotype in Education Impact Female Students' Development in Secondary School

Xilin Jin\*

Department of English, North China University of Science and Technology, Tangshan, China

\*Corresponding author: Jinxilin@stu.qhnu.edu.cn

**Abstract.** Currently, gender equality has gained considerable development across the world. However, gender issues did not really disappear. Gender bias and gender discrimination still widely exist in society and the field of education. The achievement of gender equality will always be an unavoidable key issue in education. Because secondary school students are in a critical stage of socialization, the educational environment can readily influence their gender preconceptions. Finding gender stereotypes that harm secondary school girls is crucial for reducing their effects. The research on gender stereotype of female teenagers in the secondary school setting is reviewed in this paper. By analyzing research done previously, the author aims to determine the effect of gender stereotypes on female adolescents' development. This paper summarizes stereotypes from three aspects: the family, the school and society. Females were likely to grow up with negative influences from the three perspectives above, resulting in lower self-confidence and more mental health problems, hence catering to a rigid social identity rather than choosing a future path based on their interests and abilities. The findings highlight that educators, parents and public media need to support both male and female students in all academic areas.

**Keywords:** Gender Stereotypes; Education; Female Teenagers.

## 1. Introduction

Gender stereotypes refer to the general views, expectations, and requirements about male and female's behavior on personality, characteristics and other aspects. Gender stereotypes may cause people to oversimplify their understanding of gender groups with wrong views. For example, gender stereotypes exaggerate the differences between males and females, lead to a kind of discrimination against a certain group, or cause people to lose their individuality. It is vital to eliminate gender stereotypes for individual and societal development.

Education is one of the most crucial factors in personal growth and social progress. The period of adolescence is crucial for the development of self-cognition. Many gender differences in subject and career choice are related to gender stereotypes rather than intelligence differences between men and women [1]. Thus, it is significant to find gender stereotypes that have a negative impact on female students in secondary school and minimize those impacts.

Gender stereotypes are the result of family culture, education at school, and influences of the social culture. Gender stereotypes can affect children's self-confidence, academic achievement and future career choice. Secondary school students are in a critical stage of socialization, so their cognition of gender role is easily affected by the educational settings. However, as for the influence factors of children's gender stereotypes, most of the studies in China have simply focused on family factors, teachers factors and lack systematic analysis. Therefore, this study summarizes the influence of gender stereotypes on secondary school students, especially female secondary school students, from three aspects: family, teacher and society. Meanwhile, the findings will help educators, parents and public mass to support both male and female development in all fields. Given that gender preconceptions have evolved over the decades, these latest analytical data can be considered as an advantage of this study [2].

## **2. Family**

### **2.1. Parents' Gender Bias**

Family is the first place of education for children. Parents as the children's first teachers, have an influential impact on children's gender concepts. Parents, consciously or unconsciously, pass on their own gender stereotypes to children. Parents often treat girls and boys differently. Girls are mostly dressed in pink by parents and are more likely to be encouraged to choose toys such as dolls and kitchenware. In contrast, boys are dressed in blue clothing and most of their toys are cars and robots, and are criticized for playing with girls' toys [3]. Girls receive more gender-stereotyped toys as a result of the way in which children are treated, and as a result, these kids develop differently.

### **2.2. Parents' Expectations**

Sarkar found that parents with gender stereotypes have a positive and supportive attitude toward the education of boys, while their attitude toward the education of girls has dramatically deteriorated [4]. When parents subscribe specific academic gender stereotypes, for example, boys are better at math and girls are better at English, children are more likely to have the same stereotype. As a result, children's confidence in these areas will be undermined. Compared to boys, girls are more sensitive to these gender stereotypes, especially when they are studying math. Also, parents' expectations will work on their children's choice of career. As parents usually considered the STEM subjects were not quite proper for girls to study, parents were likely to not support children to study certain majors. Parents' support is essential in children's development, because many students still need their parents to provide financial support when they are getting higher education.

### **2.3. Parents' Role in Family**

In most Chinese families, parents follow the traditional role division of "male master outside, female master inside". Specifically, the father in a traditional family is responsible for working, while the mother spends more time doing housework [5]. Roles that parents play will lead to the gender stereotype of teenagers. Especially for girls, as they believe that they are going to undertake the main responsibility of looking after the family like their mothers in the future, they think that women's education is not as important as men's, so they are not willing to work hard in school.

## **3. School**

### **3.1. Teachers' Gender Bias**

Teachers are more concerned about boys through asking them more questions during class and providing them more time to react. Boys are praised more for their intelligence, while girls are given less teaching time and fewer challenge, and are expected to be conventional and passive. Additionally, teachers are said to instruct boys and girls to treat success and failure dissimilarly, by encouraging male students to overcome difficulties while allowing female students to give up [6].

### **3.2. Teachers' Expectations**

In the process of learning, students have the tendency to adopt and internalize gender beliefs from their teachers because teachers are significant authority figures. It has been demonstrated in numerous studies that teachers' expectations for individual students can have an impact on those students' actual academic performance [7]. An experiment found the relationship between teachers' expectations of students' reading ability and students' reading performance has a positive correlation. Teachers have higher expectations for the girl's reading ability than for the boy's [8]. Moreover, in mathematics, girls' academic performance shows signs of declining after being taught with gender stereotypes for more than a year [9]. According to research, gender stereotypes may lower girls' interest in seeking careers in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

### 3.3. Distribution of Teachers

The gender distribution of teachers varies greatly in secondary schools, with fewer male teachers and more female teachers. However, most important positions such as headmasters and directors are held by male teachers, while female teachers are just teaching teachers. Thus, for female students, the implicit message such as "male's status is higher than female's" will influence them to select low-paid professions in the future. Because most of the low-paid professions students see in schools, like those of cleaning staffs and their teachers, are mainly held by women. It potentially impacts student's views of gender roles.

### 3.4. Teaching Material

Textbooks, as one of the main media to impart cultural knowledge to students, play a vital role in the formation of students' views on gender. However, there is an obvious phenomenon of gender inequality representing gender stereotypes in Chinese textbooks. Researchers had found that from English textbooks in China that masculine characters appear more often. At the same time, men take on more professional roles than women. Men are mostly engaged in jobs with higher status and higher salaries such as scientists, doctors, and engineers. Women are most often employed in lower-paid jobs such as teaching, nursing and selling [10]. The conclusion can be drawn that males are demonstrably dominant figures.

Xia Liu discovered gender bias through his research on the illustrations in secondary school textbooks [11]. He observed from the images in the text that the images of female roles are mostly family women, and females in the illustrations are mostly supportive roles [11]. Children will unconsciously imitate the characters depicted in the textbooks when they are reading. As a result, stereotyped characters in textbooks can easily lead to the gender stereotypes of secondary school students.

## 4. Society

### 4.1. Culture Norms

In China, the idea of male superiority and female inferiority is a social awareness that has endured from the feudal society to modern society. There were still many girls not able to go to college in China because their poor families needed them to go to work and support their brothers. The thousand years of history of preventing women from studying had actually caused a profound effect on women and society. Females were labeled as "not good at studying" and they were even not allowed to study before. Even now, families and schools still do not recommend or encourage girls to major in science, and some women have cited this stereotype as an excuse for their failure to pass scientific exams.

In academic fields, especially in STEM areas, males have always been the dominant gender. Even in psychology, a field in which there are more women academics than men, male specialists still hold the majority of the faculty and tenured positions, while females are over-represented in part-time, non-tenured lectures, and other temporary positions [12]. As a result, women scholars often suffer from prejudice and misconceptions that prevent them from fully engaging in their research. Consequently, the culture full of gender discrimination should be progressively reduced and addressed.

### 4.2. Mass Media

The mass media has an extremely important influence on the development of teenagers' gender roles. Due to the influence of traditional information on social media, the widespread dissemination such as "females are naturally not good at science" had made girls unsure of their grades in science subjects, while boys were simultaneously pressured to excel at certain subjects if they are "real men". According to Pu Wei, the gender norm conveyed by mass media that men are supposed to be strong and confident while women are soft and sympathetic, which are the main aspects for teenagers to

imitate and learn [13]. In the process of watching television and surfing the Internet, teenagers will be affected by gender-related concepts to some extent, which is not conducive to the construction of gender concepts.

### **4.3. Peers Environment**

Classmates as important socializing peers play a strong part in the formation of students' beliefs during adolescence. Moreover, students' views and values can be prominently influenced by those of their classmates. It has been demonstrated by previous research that classmates can be presumed to play a vital part in shaping students' views and values regarding academic achievement. One study looked into how gender norms among classmates affect students' achievement in mathematics [14]. Scholars discovered that girls performed worse in classes with stronger traditional gender norms, whereas there was no difference between girls' and boys' math scores in classes with lower or no traditional gender norms [14]. In addition, reading-related gender stereotypes shared by classmates have a negative contextual effect on boys' reading self-concepts [15]. In conclusion, students' gender concepts may be significantly impacted by gender stereotypes expressed by their classmates.

Moreover, under traditional gender concepts and institutions, females are supposed to be kindhearted and hardworking, while males are strong and capable. Given that males have the advantage of dominating resources and higher power status, male adolescents tend to use bullying to establish and maintain their masculinity and gain gender privilege. In addition, female adolescents affected by gender stereotypes have lower self-esteem and are more vulnerable. Therefore, the majority of school bullies are men, while the majority of bullied students are women. According to one study, almost 40 percent girls reported being laughed at owing to their gender, compared to under 10 percent for boys, and 50 percent girls expressed they are unhappy to be a girl [16].

## **5. Impacts on Female Students**

### **5.1. Academic Achievement**

Gender stereotypes have a direct impact on teenagers' school grades. Teachers' views of gender-appropriate roles expressed in the classroom may affect girls' academic ambition and interest in male-stereotyped subjects like mathematics. For example, educators have lower expectations for girls than boys in math, which has a negative impact on girls' academic self-concepts. Moreover, it is shown that students' academic self-concepts have a significant impact on their subsequent achievements. If girls are subject to math-related stereotypes, their future math performance may be impaired, and then influence student's decisions when choosing high schools and university courses.

### **5.2. Self-Confidence**

Both boys and girls experience changes in self-confidence during adolescence, but girls' self-confidence appears to be more negatively impacted, whereas boys' seems to possess a more positive impact. Compared to boys, girls were more sensitive to these gender stereotypes. Female students usually represented less confidence and more depressive symptoms in schools, and that is related to gender stereotypes in both academia and society. Putnam found that gender stereotype threat caused girls lose confidence and interest in one particular field, and eventually quit this field and threw themselves into other directions [17].

### **5.3. Career Choices**

Stereotypes may lead to artificially restricted professional options. The stereotypes that students encounter often influence their job decisions. People's preconceived notions about women's talents have led to their exclusion from or rejection from STEM disciplines. In particular, girls may be more likely to think that their indeed perform worse in mathematical skills are inferior to those of boys. Strong gender stereotypes are linked to women's lower interest in jobs that are generally associated

with men. Compared with boys, girls are more likely to major in “less profitable” fields like literature and art while choosing not to seek careers in Science, Technology, Engineering or Mathematics (STEM), in spite of the fact that they have the capacity to thrive in these fields.

#### **5.4. Social Identity**

Gender stereotypes, which cause girls to feel inferior and subordinate, will have an impact on how females perceive themselves and how they view their social identities. Even in environments where people have a higher level of education, such as universities, gender stereotypes still exist and will impact students' further achievements. For instance, because of people's perceptions of their ability, women have been rejected from or forced out of STEM fields. One study demonstrated that in the seminar or tutorial class, women usually spoke less and were interrupted by male students repeatedly when they tried to share their opinions [18]. Male students, on the other hand, felt more comfortable and confident when speaking during class [18].

### **6. Suggestion**

First of all, girls need to develop a growth mindset in order to lessen the impact of gender stereotypes. Girls with a growth mindset are less likely than those with a fixed mindset to be impacted by gender stereotypes [19]. In addition, it was significant for parents to learn more about children's development and then eliminate gender biases. In the same way, it is important to promote children's interests as this may impact future career choices and current learning motivation. On the other hand, teachers should enhance the awareness of gender equality and reduce gender classification in daily teaching. Encourage boys and girls to work together instead of grouping activities by gender. Treat both girls and boys equally if they make the same mistakes. Finally, textbooks and mass media should present more anti-stereotype models such as female scientists to convey the message to girls that all occupations are gender-free. Overall, this requires the combined efforts of students, parents, teachers and society.

### **7. Conclusion**

According to gender stereotype researches, girls and boys undergo different socialization processes, such as the gender stereotypes they encounter in their environments. In early childhood, families have the earliest and most straightforward influence on the formation of teenagers' gender role beliefs. Once children go to school, elements that lead to the formation of views become extensive and more complex. In addition to the fact that teachers' views on gender roles may directly or indirectly influence students' attitudes, children contact with their peers in a more complicated circumstance. Furthermore, mass media may constitute gender stereotyping endorsement among children.

Through the analysis of previous researches, this paper concluded how gender stereotypes impact female students and pointed out negative influences from family, schools and society would lead to lower confidence and increased mental health problems during girls' development. Consequently, girls exhibit lower grades in specific subjects, and got fewer academic achievements. The findings highlight that educators, parents and public media need to encourage both male and female development in all fields.

This paper is mainly based on the analysis of previous literature and daily observation, without systematic investigation and fieldwork research, so there will be some subjective omissions, which need further study. Moreover, due to the limitations of the author's ability and experience, there may be some unclear and contradictory defects in the article. Although there are many problems in the article, the author will continue to pay attention to the research on gender and education, and make contribution to the realization of gender equality in education.

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