An investigation on gender stereotypes targeting female role on family, career and characteristics for international students through interview and IAT

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Abstract. Although in recent years, with the feminist movement, the impact of gender stereotypes on females is no longer apparent. However, it is undeniable that there are still many negative effects of gender bias in the daily lives of the public, and that cultural variation will determine the extent of these effects. This paper focuses on a sample of Chinese international students to investigate the impact of gender stereotypes about Chinese females in regarding career, family, and characters, as well as their personal perceptions of femininity. Semi-structured interviews and Gender-career Implicit Association Test were applied to receive the results of the study. The result of this study highlights the perception from participants of female states and gender stereotypes about China in the three aspects is different from the perceived individual expectations of females. By analyzing the results of the study, this study found that the formation of individual gender ideology and gender stereotypes is correlated with the level of education received and the gender ideology of the country and culture they are exposed to. Meanwhile, the division of household labor is connected to the gender ideology of the country, the SES and region of family and the employment status of females. This paper have also mentioned gender discrimination against females in the professional environment. However, it is effective to mitigate the negative effects of gender stereotypes promoting female participation in the workplace and utilizing gender-neutral language in education and balancing gender-specific academic expectations of students.

Keywords: Gender stereotype, international students, family, career.

1. Introduction

A gender snapshot from UN Woman 2022 indicates that the prospects for achieving gender equality by 2030 have already gone dark and indefinitely [1]. Through UNICEF's report (2018), gender inequalities are played out daily, with unequal distribution of household work among parents and the majority of low-capacity requirements with lower income for community health worker positions being filled by females [2]. The origin of gender inequality in society probably results from behaviors generated by gender stereotypes in people's consciousness. Gender stereotypes are structural belief sets about individual attributes, which are typical generalizations about groups and mirror social common expectations about specific gender [3,4]. Meanwhile, gender stereotypes are separated into two categories, descriptive and prescriptive. Descriptive gender stereotypes are portrayals of the images presented by masculinity and femininity and the prescriptive gender stereotypes and prescriptive gender stereotypes regulate males and females as rules in society, which informs them how they should perform for the gender that they belong to [5]. Various types of stereotypes restrict the personal development and independence of females. At the same time, gender as a dichotomy divides people into male and female through mandatory grouping and focuses on differences between groups while ignoring the distinctiveness and diversity that necessarily exist between individuals. In addition, the long-term division and comparison of males and females will further intensify the differences between genders, which in turn solidifies and reinforces the existence of gender stereotypes and produces gender antagonism [6].

However, the study conducted by Eisend demonstrated that the effects of gender stereotypes on society may be divided into four main components, which are trait descriptors, physical characteristics, role behaviors, and occupational status [7]. The trait descriptors are mainly about

personality characteristics and self-esteem; prescriptive gender stereotypes will potentially have an impact on individuals' self-concept and self-efficacy and result in negative emotions [4]. In terms of physical characteristics, gender stereotypes may cause women to suffer from anxiety about appearance and body image. Furthermore, role behaviors refer to a division of the roles of the different genders in societal stereotypes. For instance, when females become mothers, the society implicitly assumes that they should be less passionate and ambitious at work, and devote limited time to preserving family stability, which would not be predicted if instead men have the role of father [6]. Regarding occupational status, gender stereotypes would increase the disadvantage of women in the workplace. For instance, when both men and women were on task, the merits of women in interpersonal communication and emotional perception will be magnified, which dilutes their achievements and ambitions and obstruct their career development. Hence, gender stereotypes shape people's lives in those four aspects and bring out gender inequality in our society.

Most people who grow up in the same cultural environment will develop similar gender ideologies and schemas [8]. In China, the culture receives substantial influences from Confucianism and Buddhism, which would have been favorable in increasing the status of men in society. After experiencing the Cultural Revolution, the employment rate of women and their social status has risen [9]. However, compared to the cultural concept of egalitarianism in Western countries, the status of women in China seems to be not optimistic. Accordingly, exploring the influence of cultural background and gender stereotypes on gender ideology is essential.

The aim of this study is to explore how gender stereotypes influence overseas students' gender ideologies and to investigate the differences between their personally perceived general female gender status and their own expected female gender attributes. Based on the research of Deaux and Lewis this research will focus on the examination of gender stereotypes on three aspects of females in terms of career, family, and personal characteristics [10]. Meanwhile, in collecting data, the author will use mixed research methodology (qualitative and quantitative) to ensure the validity of the data. The five female participants would be interviewed and tested to engage in this study. Interviews were conducted to obtain their perceptions of the gender attributes associated with most Chinese females, and their own interpretations of femininity, then analysis of the results will lead to appropriate solutions and conclusions. This article follows by describing the details of the research methodology, reviewing the results of the participants' experiments and discovering the peculiarity of their gender perception, discussing the results and summarizing the conclusion. The findings of this research might be utilized to address gender stereotypes in education as well as gender discrimination and inequality in employment.

2. Methods

2.1 Study Design

The purpose of this article is based on a semi-structured interview survey to investigate the extent of gender stereotypes for females among undergraduate students following qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Additionally, the interview intended to explore the perspectives and views of current undergraduate international students toward contemporary gender bias against females. In this study, the implicit-association test (IAT) about Gender- Career was utilized to measure the intensity of participants' subconscious perception about associations between both aspects of family and occupation with gender, The IAT is considered as an efficient and easily administer method, stimulating unreached experiences and concepts of participants [11]. First, this test required participants to assign a range of words (professional, relatives, marriage, business) according to family and career only, later grouped names (John, Ben, Rebecca, Michella) into female names and male names. Following this, previously displayed words and names needed to be placed into four categories: family/female and male/career, female/career and male/family. The response time and correctness rate of participants in allocating word categories were both used to evaluate the results about the strength of implicit association. In the interview session, The interview has shown a

six- minute public educational video that aimed to serve as a medium to trigger reflection and analysis by the participants, and assisted the research obtained the explicit opinions of participants on gender stereotypes and perceptions about the common gender division for female in the Chinese community structure.

2.2 Participants

The data were collected from five female participants who volunteered to participate in the study by taking convenience sampling. The inclusion criterion was who enrolled as an international undergraduate of Chinese nationality and currently chose BSc Education in the University of Manchester, as well as with the living experience in UK and China. All participants will be assigned with pseudonyms names (student A, B, C, D E) for further analysis. All participants are between the ages of 20 and 22 and have received between three and five years of international education (international high school or preparatory course, and UK university). The native language of participants is Chinese and their English proficiency levels have arrived at IELTS 6.5 or above. While all five participants were brought up by their parents, only one participant (student D) had been without parental supervision during middle school, and student A was from a single-parent family with only his mother, who later formed a reconstituted family.

2.3 Procedure

At the beginning of the semi-structured interview, participants completed the Gender-Career IAT and collect the demographic data. In the IAT, participants are required to use a laptop and complete personal information, and once the test begins, participants are assigned to specific genders (male or female) and specific categories (career or family) based on their subjective perception of certain words. Afterward, participants were required to watch the video and respond to the questions about the content and individual views about gender stereotypes. The public educational video featuring three families with different family structures through narration interposed the lives of different families, and reflected the division of family responsibilities and personality traits of females with the maternal role. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in person with audio recordings. Interviews are conducted in the participant's home and the time duration is between 30 minutes and 60 minutes with communication in Chinese during the process. The recording was transcribed for analysis and the author presented throughout the interview. The electronic consent was already signed by the participants before the interview. All participants were informed of the purpose, procedure, and data confidentially about the study, and may withdraw at any stage.

3. Results

3.1 Female gender stereotypes and career in the perception of international students.

3.1.1 The analysis of Gender- career Implicit Association Test

The author analyzed the individual perception among overseas undergraduate students about the correlation between gender and career engagement by the Gender-career IAT. Overall, out of the five participants, only one presented a moderate level for female-family connection in the aspect of individual perception, whereas the other four were all either not or mildly related. The test results for the responses from two participants (Student B and C) suggested ‘little or no automatic association between Female and Male with Career and Family.’ The responses of Student A and E reveal that they tend to slightly associate male with career and female with family. While the option of Student D was labelled as the moderate connection for Male with Career and Female with family.

3.1.2 The analysis of interviews

The study explored the influence of gender stereotypes at the level of participants' individual perceptions and perceived public perceptions between females and careers. First, Through the semi-structured interviews, all participants agreed that balancing work and family is extremely difficult or

unachievable for females in Chinese society. Moreover, when being asked whether women would prefer family or work as their priority, there was a general perception among all participants that most females in China would prioritize family over their careers. Students A, B and D commented that in their personal perceptions Chinese females tend to place the family above all else, even ending their professional journey to contribute to their family.

Student A described this, "Most women prefer family to work, and put their career second. "

Students C and E suggested that the importance between career and family is judged on an individual basis, but through personal observation of society, they consider that women might take a back seat to their careers. Also, Student E added that contemporary women do not consider having a family anymore and deracinate this distress question at its origin. The responses of these participants confirm that in their personal perceptions females in Chinese society would tend to place family ahead of work and it is a struggle to balance both aspects.

Meanwhile, in the interview, four students believed during the recruitment process in China, females may suffer from intimate gender discrimination and rigid gender attributes from companies. They all mention the fact that females within the marriageable and maternal age range will probably receive doubts about whether they intend to form a family and be pregnant when interviewed. However, if the answer "yes" in line with the gender stereotypes and common perceptions of gender attributes, it seems possible to drop out of the competition and candidate list from the consideration of the interviewee. Gender discrimination in the workplace is constantly relegated to the passive position of females, whose career development may be affected by the probability and uncertainty of staff turnover in the company due to personal decisions such as maternity and marriage.

When participants described their individual-level perceptions of the relationship between career and family. Every participant indicated they were committed to the occupation and aiming to find a balance with family. Participants expressed that although the choice is liberal and personal, but prioritising work over family is a sign of irresponsibility.

Student E mentioned that “If it was a choice between family and work, I would choose work.“

3.2 The perception of female gender stereotypes and family

Through the interviews, participants commented on the high similarity between the three families in the video: they reported that the Chinese common family structure is represented by family C. Family C is a typical male-dominated family, where the husband is responsible for working outside and providing financial support for the family, while the role of a wife is taking the overall household duties and responsible for children education. Moreover, in relation to questions about whether general Chinese families are more structured with egalitarianism as the core distribution of responsibilities or with male domination, the views of students suggested that most families are composed of a male-dominated and female sub-dominated family structure, in contrast to the egalitarian family structure prevalent in society. Furthermore, students considered that the structure of families was determined by the education level of spouses, socioeconomic status, and the region they are residing in.

Student B mentioned “In fact, nowadays family structure still depends on the region, the income of the family, and the level of social class. It is undeniable that family with egalitarianism and a greater concept of gender equality can be easily found in urban areas, rather than in rural areas with ineradicable patriarchy.”

Student C proposed "Traditional family structure as C may be found in families with not very high educational level or else in regions where traditional malpractices are quite widespread."

In the individual opinions of the three participants, most females continue to shoulder a higher proportion of the burden and sacrifice in the family, and the responsibility of childcare and domestic duties in China remains involuntarily taken up by women.

However, in responding about the reasons for the formation of Chinese females’ current status in the family, participants identified a combination of both internal and external factors. Participants expressed two different interpretations of the internal causes, with some claiming that women are

naturally maternal or genetically predisposed to be more child and family oriented. While others thought that the education and environment in which women were brought up had internalized gender attributes and made it possible for females to be more committed and responsible for their families compared to males.

Student A claimed that "The education received from parents in childhood might have made stability the priority for girls, but boys are expected to break out. It is like saying that women are better suited to the family."

The explanation for the external causes comes from external public pressure. This consists of societal opinion and pressure from conservative elders and family members.

Student A explained the societal opinion as "The media and society will naturally categorize the responsibility of family care as a female duty and impose moral restrictions on female behaviors, just as there is no criticism for fathers who are constantly out drinking and ignoring their families. In fact, this demonstrates that society has a lot of inhibitions towards motherhood, both in terms of identity and gender."

Student D discussed the pressure from family members "elders or husbands may expect females to stay at home, causing women to self-doubt about whether I should really return to the family."

Therefore, the participants are convinced that the reasons for the general female understanding of their family status are not merely genetic or result from their early education but may also be wrapped up in social opinion and pressure from their families.

However, the individual perception of participants regarding females' roles in the family is that the division of responsibilities in the family should remain equal and that the family structure of male domination and female sub-domination is not acceptable. Moreover, both spouses need to respect and communicate with each other to assume responsibilities, instead of either one giving alone and being hostage to a patriarchal social system.

Student A comments that "Nowadays the requirements for mothers in society, such as mothers behaving as a mother is expected to, persuading mothers to give up their careers and be with their children, and so on. All of these seem to me the remnants of traditional patriarchal history that is necessary to be destroyed."

At the same time, it was recognized that the responsibilities of the family should not be determined by individual financial expenses and income. Participants expressed the view that household responsibilities are supposed to be mutual and awarded by discussion. There requires reciprocal understanding rather than assigning responsibility and obligation based on gender stereotypes about any gender.

Student B explained, "Whether you can earn money or not, you have obligations that come with it, and you are responsible for being involved for sure, even if you don't spend a lot of time with your family."

3.3 The perception of female gender stereotypes and personal characteristics

By taking a short video as a stimulus in the interview, the participants revealed that the commonly perceived image of a maternal personality in their minds involves being virtuous, tolerant, and inclusive. In addition, characteristics such as rating families the first, being submissive and reliant on their husbands, and being capable of cooking are also claimed. Furthermore, female with the mother identity is generally regarded as temperament, timid and without the courage to express their personal opinions. These were the public gender stereotypes concerning the characters of motherhood as perceived by the participants. For women without motherhood, they are always tagged with personalities including good-natured, sympathetic, fragile, and sensitive. Several participants expressed that it would affect the self-concept of females and probably constrain their beliefs and behaviors.

Nevertheless, in expressing their individual perceptions of female personal characteristics, 'being yourself 'was the word referred by each of the participants. Participants demonstrated that rather than

being overly concerned with the impression of female identity in the eyes of the public, females may pursue independent ideologies of their own.

In student E view “females of all ages would be able to think independently and be empowered and strong.”

Student C states that “It is just being yourself, there is not a very specific template to follow. Each person is different.”

It is important for females being attentive to their own desires and ideas, rather than surrendering their authentic ideas in order to satisfy external judgmental standards.

3.4 Comparison

3.4.1 Career

Participants stated that they would try to balance career and family, when responding to the statement about their choice if there was a severe conflict between these two factors. Three students preferred careers, while student B considered family first and made decisions based on matters of necessity, and student D preferred prioritizing family.

3.4.2 Family

Moreover, when being asked about the division of household responsibilities in most Chinese families, three of the students concurred that females contribute substantial efforts and time to sustain the burden of family, either accompanying maternal or wifely roles.

Student A explains " In terms of the general status, it is definitely women who have to give more. Whether in the past, present, and future, women might continue to sacrifice more, both mentally and physically. But males are also held hostage by gender stereotypes and have to be strong and stand up for their families."

Student C adds content about “I think most families in China tend to involve women working more in the family. For example, they must balance their careers with their families, deal with their children's schooling and housekeeping. So there is enormous pressure on them. In general, men are more concerned and willing to devote more to their careers, thinking that if their careers are successful, the whole family will benefit.”

However, two others believe that in the common Chinese family, both spouses contribute to the children's education and household duties, and they also mentioned that the mother is relatively more committed to the education of the next generation.

Student B: “Both mum and dad will be off to work and then the task of supervising the children will probably be mostly in the hands of mum, but dad will also be involved.”

Generally, it is apparent from the interviews with the five participants as to their perception that some families in China have both parents contributing together, but that the majority of the burden is carried by the mother.

3.4.3 Personal Characteristic

Through the interview, Student A in particular mentioned that some of the adjectives commonly applied to describe a personal character might be attributed to a negative or positive orientation by gender. The words typically used to describe males are generally implied to be superior, whereas the stereotypical words for describing the female character are regarded as inferior. As revealed by boys, being effeminate may seem like a criticism with pejorative tendencies, while girls being brave and ambitious appears to be a commendation and praise.

Student A described “Ambitious, adventurous, these are used to describe boys, so that they fit into the direction of pursuing careers, but for girls it is gentle, ladylike and dignified, these are words linked to the family, thus the education of boys and girls has begun to be stratified from an early age.”

4. Discussion

In this study, participants as students with international educational backgrounds demonstrated distinctly different gender ideologies with egalitarianism compared to their own perceptions of Chinese mainstream female behaviors. This is a considerable extension related to the educational and national aspects. According to Davis's study, the level of educational attainment is positively associated with the individuals' perception of gender egalitarianism [12]. As a country with a rapidly growing and meritocratic tertiary education system, the UK is able to provide young girls with future opportunities to attend higher education institutions and raise their expectations [13,14]. On the individual aspect, the family background has also affected the probability of receiving an education. As international students benefit from a higher socioeconomic status (SES), and combined with a higher educated and professional family background, international students have more access to a high level of education and produce personal confidence [12]. Therefore, as a result of their education, international students find easy to establish higher-level self-efficacy and self-esteem than general Chinese females who may not have the educational advantage to develop self-concept and cognition as tools to break down gender stereotypes and achieve more gender-role attitudes [12,15]. Meanwhile, national gender ideology may vary greatly in different social and cultural contexts and tend to affect the formation of self-gender perspectives, and with increasing age, gender stereotypes from parents and family will diminish and be replaced by peer influence [16]. Hence, in Western countries where there is relative gender equality, international students may renew self-gender ideologies and behavior by understanding various societies and interacting with new peers. In general, higher levels of educational participation and access to a new cultural and national environment are likely to help international students to acquire a different gender perspective than previously.

In addition, the division of household labor might be shaped by the ideology of gender in a country. Socioeconomic states and region dimensions. Firstly, national gender ideology will determine the macro-level organizational structuring and features of society and the micro-level individual beliefs and interactions. Since in Chinese history, the national gender ideology basically originated from the core philosophy of Confucianism, which has significantly influenced the micro-level structure of gender ideology in current society [17,18]. For this reason, the male is perceived as the center of authority and evolution within gender relations, which might impede females from developing as individuals and negatively influence their status in society and family [17]. Additionally, in the micro-level of the individual aspect, based on this cultural context and measures of their own benefits, males might appear less convinced about the feasibility of egalitarianism, further promoting gender inequality in the household [16]. Female family status has had to be forcibly changed or voluntarily conformed to history and national gender ideology to reduce cognitive dissonance. Moreover, because the division of household labor is related to the ideology of both spouses and the husband dominates a more extensive degree of determination, wives are required to undertake most of the household duties [19]. Secondly, Maume and Bellas study found that urban husbands in China are burdened with more household duties as opposed to rural husbands, but wives always remain the most involved ones [15]. The division of household labor was related to the socio-economic status of the family and the region where it is located. In China, the finance of family in rural or undeveloped areas often depends mainly on the male's income, while female contributes to farm work and childcare, which would probably enhance the conservative thought of female and diminish their motivation and ideas for employment. In addition, based on the situation, females may spend extra time at home and rely on their husbands more emotionally and financially, resulting in surrendering voice and decision-making rights and deteriorating the family status of females [15]. With the economic development of the region and the advancement of individual education, females in urban areas generally possess more job opportunities and a more equal gender perception, which allows them to perform fewer household duties in contrast to traditional women in rural areas [20]. Nevertheless, the study of Heilman revealed that when the income of the husband is higher than the income of the wife, they will put less effort into household activities [4]. The social role attributes

were reinforced by the history and national gender ideology, as well the area and SES of the family, which might give explanations for the status of wives in most Chinese families.

Gender stereotypes have the potential to have a negative impact on gender equality in employment. As emphasized by the participants, males were always described by agency adjectives with characteristics and attributes such as rational, logical, independent, and decisive, which inclined to express leadership and achievement orientation. Female attributes are consistently captured in communality terms with a tendency toward subordination and emotional sensitivity, such as modesty, friendliness, and intuition [4]. Nevertheless, the stereotypical gender attributes of females are more likely to diminish the fit level between females and the attributes necessary for achieving success in the workplace than males. When gender stereotypes reinforce the association of management and administrative positions with males and detract from the fit between women and careers, it not only negatively affects performance expectations and evaluation results in professional area, thereby lowers opportunities for women to be promoted [21]. Moreover, when similar situations arise in the workplace, gender stereotypes will lead to different interpretations depending on the gender, as men who delay making decisions will be considered thoughtful and a symbol of maturity while women will be treated as indecisive [4]. Additionally, gender stereotypes resulting in a lack of fit among women in the workplace may also affect self-esteem and self-efficacy, leading to lower motivation and weakened self-contribution to success [22]. Therefore, the government and companies might try to improve issues of gender stereotypes and low self-efficacy that women encounter in the workplace by enhancing the proportion of female applicants and managers and expanding the number of females in team activities [4,23].

Meanwhile, gender segregation in academics may affect the proportion of men and women in specific occupations as well. STEM is perceived by students as a dominantly masculine and masculine discipline, which significantly impacts the self-identity and self-efficacy of girls in STEM fields and discourages them from entering STEM-related careers by discouraging female students from choosing STEM disciplines as academic pathways [24]. The majors that most females choose in higher education are probably causing lower income in future employment than male-preferred majors [13]. Consequently, teachers should have the same level of academic expectations for students of all genders in any specific subject, so as to alleviate the impact of gender stereotypes on students' self-concept [25]. Furthermore, teachers may use gender-neutral language in their teaching practices to communicate with students and mitigate gender segregation by minimizing the transfer of stereotypical gender attributes to students [26].

The subjects of this study were predominantly females and studied the effects of gender stereotypes for females on three aspects: family, career, and personal characters, hence ignoring the gender role of males in gender stereotypes and how males will be impacted by this gender attitude. It as well fails to consider the convergent validity between these three elements. Secondly, the perceptions of gender roles for Chinese public females were also derived from the individual perceptions of the participants about the general population, which were subject to certain inaccuracies. Finally, based on the negative perception and labelling of gender stereotypes in society, participants may conceal or modify their gender ideology to preserve their reputation.

5. Conclusion

This study began by describing the gender stereotypes in the female international students and investigates how gender ideologies impact females' common perceptions and individual perceptions of career, family, and personal characteristic. In this article, the interviews and IAT were used to obtain participants' gender ideologies and revealed that the perceived public image of females in the perception of the individuals involved was distinctly opposed to the image they expected females were supposed to portray in their own level. There were many current situations and issues regarding gender inequality in the family, careers and characteristics that were revealed by the participants during the interview process. In this case, gender ideologies of international students have been found

associated with the education level and the national ideology, since higher education and experience with Western egalitarian culture allow international students to prefer equitable gender relations over the lower social status of Chinese public females in their personal perceptions. The status of women in China is not always the same, SES and region of living may have played a vital role in bringing about the gender ideology and the division of household labor. While concerning the general dimension, the national gender ideology has been the significant factor in the gender states' performance. Phenomena of occupational gender discrimination may have been caused by the gender attributes described in gender stereotypes and the academic segregation is probably related to subject gendering. Therefore, promoting the representation of women in group activities and at upper management levels in professional contexts and being aware of academic expectations and utilizing neutral language instruction at the educational level may be effective in mitigating the negative implications of gender stereotypes on gender ideology and attributes. This study assessed the objective effects of gender ideology with perception, which facilitated subsequent research on the causes of gender stereotypes and gender ideology as well as the association and mutual implications between individual gender attributes and perceived public gender attributes. Overall, this article selected three aspects to examine gender ideology without focusing on a specific area to conduct research, and the sample size was relatively limited. For this reason, future research may improve the specificity of the research direction and enhance the breadth and validity of research by increasing the number of samples and may attempt to visualize the results using quantitative experiments to assist in obtaining a deeper investigation.

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