The Formation and Impact of Female Gender Stereotypes

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ABSTRACT

Women have been under much pressure due to constant evaluation of their appearance and discussions of their achievements and careers from externals. The standard of an excellent woman has been debatable over time. Should women follow the appreciation of others or abandon the men's perspective? The prejudice against women can be attributed to the gender stereotype in society, which continues to change but remains a problem. Previous research has focused on analyzing the objective description of gender stereotypes while lacking in analyzing its origins from social effects. This article explores the roots of gender stereotypes during socialization and social interaction and analyzes their impact on women's careers and performances. This article provides insights into the evolution and status of gender stereotypes, encourages women to be independent, and guides women's future development and equality.

Keywords: *Sex, gender stereotype, gender regulation, domestic violence, stereotype continuity, gender equality*

1. INTRODUCTION

Equality for women has always been a widespread focus in society around the world. The 19 Amendment passed by Congress has guaranteed women suffrage since 1919, and the Equal Rights Amendment in the late 20th century protected the equal legal rights of women, which means women's social status has been tremendously improved. However, the progress of law does not always mean the change of people's ideology, which is formed by their living cultural background. Ideology is not being taught, but it can be a consistent element in the whole society. It helps one easily deal with others in their group, so it is an inherent habitual way of thinking about problems. The ideology in a group of people is usually compatible with their culture because ideology exists in a specific group that interprets and explains this group's behavior, which is often a self-evident fact. That is to say, although the law guarantees that women and men are legally the same, people in modern society still maintain an ideology that potentially gives biases and restricts women's behaviors. This kind of regulation adheres to society and thus supports people's lives. Therefore, gender ideology in modern society generates gender stereotypes that primarily affect women. This article will explore the formation of this kind of stereotype and its potential influences in society,

especially the negative impact of stereotypes on females, emphasizing the importance of escaping from men's perspective and supporting female independence. Because ideology is pervasive and unconsciously accepted in one society, it is difficult to perceive its deficiency. However, we must realize that gender stereotypes can potentially hamper female development. Thus, this article may also provide guidance for females' future development and tries to attach importance to female freedom and the elimination of their patterns' regulation.

2. FAMILY AND MEDIA-FORMED GENDER STEREOTYPES

The gender difference of newborns only exists from a biological point of view and cannot determine their innate abilities. However, children's behavior and personal development can be shaped during socialization and social interactions, in which they begin to perceive gender differences from various perspectives. Socialization plays a significant role in shaping a person's values, beliefs, and norms, and the four most predominant agents include family, schools, peers, and the media. The most significant and original agent is the born family, which internalizes a child's social values and norms. Moreover, because the thoughts and

understanding during the infant period are insufficient to reinforce the gender difference and gender attributes [1], the physical environment that parents bring to them will be essential for the origin of sex-stereotype. In other words, gender stereotype is a heritable ideology that can be "inherited" from parents. A typical way of education including activities and characteristics are influential to children's behaviors. The study finds that girls and boys in their young ages have already experienced dissimilar environments, which will impact their development of specific abilities and preferential activities. There is considerable evidence. A study from Canada shows that children from 25 months to 5 years old always receive gender-stereotypical toys and gender-specific clothes from their parents, and they are encouraged to play with same-gender instead of cross-gender friends [2]. Parents' awareness of gender stereotypes will have a particular impact on the initial period of children. They explicitly categorize toys, clothes, and sports to "regulate" what belongs to girls and what is typical for boys.

Researchers from the "longitudinal study Boys will be Boys" found that girls show a stronger gender stereotype than boys when their mothers show gender stereotype [1], which means that girls are more susceptible to gender stereotype, and it may accompany them when they grow up. For example, the graph below shows that maternal implicit gender stereotypes about children significantly predicted children's implicit gender stereotypes [1]. Furthermore, it demonstrates that girls show a stronger sense of gender stereotypes and are prone to inherit from their mothers.
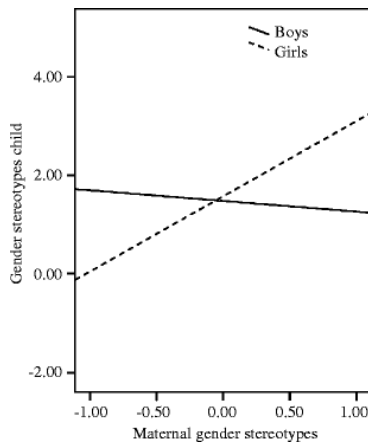

Figure 1. Interaction between maternal gender stereotypes (AIP) and child's gender stereotypes [1]

Apart from parents, other family members will also impact the formation of children's gender stereotypes. Another US study proposed that "mixed-gender siblings might have the strongest explicit gender stereotypes, because parents of mixed-gender children have the opportunity for gender-differentiated parenting, and these experiences will lead to stronger attitudes about gender in children [3]. In addition to the education difference between boys and girls, such as interest classes

and behavioral regulations, many families tend to act differently when handling family situations toward their sons and daughters. For example, parents always want their sons to be brave, so they may be stricter when boys encounter difficulties, but they appear gentle and provide protective warmth while facing their daughters. Therefore, having siblings will also affect children's perception of gender differences, such as the thought that girls are weak, and boys get used to being more independent and enterprising**.** As a result, we can conclude that their family largely influences the formation of children's stereotypes, and the passing relationship can be shown in the following graph.
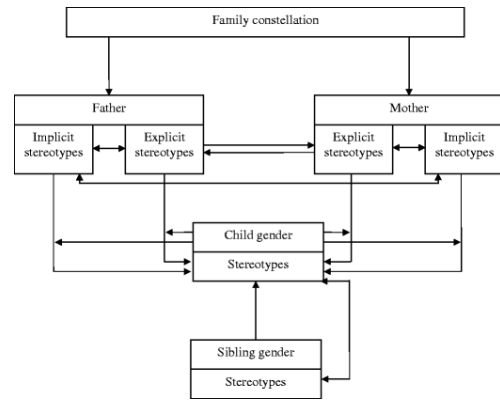

Figure 2. Model of associations between parental gender stereotypes, child gender stereotypes, parent gender, child gender, sibling gender, and family constellation [1]

Another crucial socialization process began with the media. Girls and women are often stereotyped and sexualized in the mass media [4]. Because Mass Media has great potential to inform knowledge and educate young people, this kind of gender role emphasizing may encourage children to internalize values, beliefs, and norms early. Children from most families read fairy tales in pre-school ages. Fairy tales live in fantasy, which is a well-created dream for the audiences. This dream can maintain lasting if the author does an excellent job of maintaining this dream's environment, so the readers, the children, enjoy this dream and will continue to read and believe in the fictional world created by the author. Mass media uses the art form of movies or cartoons to increase the reality of fantasy in fairy tales by adapting them for the screen, such as famous Disney movies such as Cinderella, Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs, and Sleeping Beauty. Children who watch these movies are likely to form a common idea, as Sara Crewe includes in A Little Princess, "I am a princess. All girls are" [5]. In addition to expressing the beauty and love of princesses, Disney's movies also convey many strong messages of traditional gender role stereotypes for girls and women (e.g., physically weak, affectionate, nurturing, helpful, fearful, innocent, submissive). For example, in the fairy tale Snow White, she fled to the forest but could not live independently, so she came to the home of the seven

dwarfs, which indicates her incompetence. Snow White's stepmother tried to poison her repeatedly, but she was still innocent and continued opening the door. Many fairy stories are about the prince saving the princess or taking advantage of her kindness. This is likely to convey to children that girls have to wait for boys to save, and boys are more powerful than girls, so girls have to rely on boys. Although fairy tales and Disney movies have brought sweet childhood memories and beautiful princess dreams, they also influence the formation of children's ideology, the ideology of gender dominance.

3. SOCIAL ROLE THEORY AND CONTINUITY OF GENDER STEREOTYPE

According to social role theory, gender stereotypes can derive from the discrepant distribution of men and women into social roles both in the home and at work [6]. There has long been a gendered division of labor, and it has existed until modern society, a more socioeconomically complex society than the foraging societies [6]. Being an "ideal womanhood" is always accompanied by anxieties for women. With the development of modern society, equal education for women is strongly advocated. They have the opportunity to pursue better education and to understand virtue and knowledge. However, this advocation to education still serves as being a qualified partner for men. Talleyrand advocates equal education opportunity for women; however, at the same time, he points out that only when women are well-educated, and their knowledge and virtues have progressed can they be prepared to become the ideal companion of a man [7]. Therefore, women have always needed the family as support but are not independent individuals.

3.1. Historical Gender Stereotype

Historical development and clothing evolution bring female social role stereotypes. Traditional Chinese costumes had a distinctive difference from modern clothes so that we can learn about the social status and social division of men and women from this type of costume. In ancient Chinese society, women's clothing was often imbued with auspicious symbols for fertility, as that was considered their leading role in society. Women's bodies were hidden and weighed down by heavy and shapeless clothes, suppressing their individuality and restricting their freedom. Under the same period, men's clothing had a faster-developing speed than that of women. Throughout the early years of the Republican period, during which women's clothing still expressed the traditional social role, they were still encumbered by heavy and indelicate clothing, which significantly restricted their activities outdoors, such as dancing or socializing. However, men had already adopted Western attire. This unbalanced development shows that the function of clothing and the social role for women have always been related to family responsibilities, such as the expectation of doing the housework.

3.2. Contemporary Gender Stereotype: Unhealthy Trend on Women Appearance

In ancient times, women were seen as the person who should take care of their homes, which is a common perception. However, in addition to the division of labor in the old society, modern females' stereotypes are also displayed in their appearance. The media influences the public's definition of beauty continuously. In addition to news and drama works, the images portrayed by the media are more advertising. The pictures presented in those advertisement posters are always idealized body shape that is thin and has a slender build. Despite their heavy editing and refining with computer software, the media images appear realistic, and they are the most apparent appearances people perceive [8]. These overwhelming graceful figures gradually changed people's aesthetic standards, a monotonous standard: thin equals beauty.

The media's aesthetic misleading of modern young women has formed a new "norm" of the female gender. Nowadays, TV entertainment programs are becoming more diverse, among which talent shows have developed rapidly under the increasing development of the Internet. On average, there are one or two variety shows each year which are about trainee auditions. Hundreds of people compete for a limited number of debut positions, and the audiences' votes are the only assessment criteria. Audiences vote for the contestants they appreciate, and "appreciate" can be defined from multiple angles, including but not restricted to dance performance, singing skills, outgoing characteristics, beautiful appearance. Dance and singing are skills that are trained after being discovered as trainees, and appearance is a prerequisite for being discovered as a trainee candidate because the stage always needs beauty. All trainees at the stage have a slender figure and fair complexion, and their performance conveys a sense of cute and purity. Because of their beauty and sexy, they have become idols of many young people. The power of idols is to provide motivation and a positive attitude towards life; however, the primary thing many people have learned from them is not the hard-working of girls who have tried their best to pursue dreams, but the pursuit of appearance. With their widespread popularity, fans and groupies tend to be younger age. Young people of all ages are accustomed to the beauty of girls as "white, thin, and cute." So, the public's pursuit of appearance may also move in this direction. As a result, the term "appearance anxiety" appeared. It refers to women who feel anxious and unconfident because they are not thin and beautiful enough. They blindly pursue weight loss and even ignore those unscientific and undesirable ways to lose weight,

which has caused great harm to their bodies. This pervasive new popular aesthetic standard of the society proposes newer stereotypes for women. To cater to the social aesthetics, women choose to go with the tide, reflecting that women are highly susceptible to stereotypes.

4. THE INFLUENCE OF GENDER STEREOTYPES ON FEMALE

4.1. Domestic Violence

Because of these societal stereotypes, such as being tender, home-loving, and their obligation in housework, people get used to pursuing a societal conception of "ideal behavior" for women. However, this could become an origin of domestic violence [9]. Since ancient times, men have been in a dominant position. For example, they were the only group who first had the right to vote and make decisions. By contrast, women are excluded from the strenuous works and onerous duties because of their delicate constitution, peaceful inclinations, and the many duties of motherhood. Thus, women occupied a subordinate position for a long time, and even in modern society, some men are accustomed to making the demand on women. For example, when a male partner gets home, the wife should prepare a meal waiting for him, or women are in charge of washing and ironing clothes. Therefore, psychologists summarize some signs of domestic violence due to patriarchal domination, including when a female partner refuses to do certain "women-only" chores, women are expected to behave in a submissive way, and women are not allowed to contribute to decisions [10]. All the discontent toward women comes from the idea that women should act as partners and be affiliated with men, implying the stubborn gender stereotype.

4.2. Gender Gap in Employment and Business

Many types of research support that finding a job is much more challenging for women than it is for men. When women are employed, they tend to work in low-quality jobs in vulnerable conditions. There is little improvement forecast in the near future because the often-stereotyped manager (man) would like to receive a colleague of the same sex as he is. Although the European Commission (2011) issued the document Strategy for balance between men and women, it is still challenging to suppress women's potential and practice proper balance [11].

Many people believe that women must perform the responsibilities of motherhood and support family care, and these are roles that cannot be avoided and given up by women. Therefore, in the highly stressful modern society, women need to make choices of either their families or careers. This "possibility of giving up career" leads to the labor market being more willing to create more suitable working conditions for men. However, this fallacy is discrimination. We hardly hear people in the labor market emphasize the responsibilities of being a father of men in the family and believe that men also can choose between home and work. Because of this prejudice, the labor market believes that women are more restricted at work, so they are not the most suitable candidates. Therefore, under suitable working conditions created for men, women must either adapt to the "male" way of working or give up work and choose family. Because of the unequal working environment, women face more challenges in business. They work very hard to balance paid work and unpaid family work, but they are still placed in lower-competition positions due to biases such as poor work continuity and low stability. Therefore, senior leaders are mainly made up of men. The survey from the article "The Consequences of Gender Stereotypes in The Work of Managers" summarizes that "top-level management is dominated mostly by men – in our case 40.91% men against 10.34 % of women"[11]. This data is significant because it shows the unbalanced development of businesswomen under the influence of gender stereotypes and their biases.

4.3. Gender in Research

The perceptive prejudice on female gender stereotypes is likely to negatively affect women's math and other research areas. Sometimes, gender stereotypes will be inevitably connected with women's intellectual powers by some masculine opinion, which may lead to a "stereotype threat" to women's performance [12]. People always habitually endow men with logic, intelligence, and rationality but underestimate women's abilities. When an ability is exposed to judgment, such as doing tests, people always bear more pressure and are eager to act well. However, when women have emphasized that their math ability on difficult math problems is inferior to men, their overwhelming pressure will eventually interfere with their performance. Furthermore, people are likely to avoid evaluating threats and things that threaten their self-esteem, so they may resist seeing math as an essential domain for women. The thought that math is not suitable for female identity will lead them to pay less attention to it, which will cause poor performance on math. The research shows that women who were informed that the test had gender differences and experienced gender stereotype threat performed worse and got significantly lower scores than those who did not [12]. The grades decline drastically by about 20%.

5. CONCLUSION

The attributes and differences to gender are embodied through various characteristic features, behaviors, and the way of life; those are not endowed with when born but formed as a result of roles played by men and women in the history of humanity and socialization [11]. Thus,

different expectations and paradigms are imposed on different gender, which significantly restricts the possibility of women in society. Women's beautiful appearance and the characteristics of being mothers are their advantages and should not be the agents that hinder their development. Society is accustomed to the dominance of men's viewpoints, but it should resolutely develop this idea with diversity and accommodate female perspectives, which is crucial to social development. As half of the population in the world, the power of women deserves attention and future encouragement. The formation of gender stereotypes shows that there is the possibility to guide in socialization process correctly. This article may also provide directional opinions on reducing gender stereotypes, and future researches are needed.

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