



# The Research on the Gender Stereotypes in Society and Their Impact Taking the Movie “The Coward” as an Example

Hebe Jiang(✉)

Concordia International School, Shanghai, China  
hebe2024409@concordiashanghai.org

**Abstract.** Due to the special factors of historical times and the prejudices of people in the past, gender stereotypes have gradually become a problem of public concern, and it has caused many effects in the fields of personal mental health, school, family and society. By exploring the causes of gender stereotypes and using films to illustrate the impact of the problem, people can learn about its dangerous. Using the literature reading method, this paper takes the influence and solution strategies of gender stereotypes as the research object, and analyzes the causes and consequences of gender stereotypes through the author’s original film “The Coward”, expounds the harm of gender stereotypes, and uses a variety of the source provides possible solutions. The results of the study found that the causes of gender stereotypes include the innate biological differences and products that further accentuate gender stereotypes-textbooks. The effects of gender stereotype include on individual and on others-bullying, and people can through school and family to solve this question. The author hopes that this research can provide some contributions to scholars who study this field in the future.

**Keywords:** Gender stereotype · Gender research · Masculinity · Femininity

## 1 Introduction

With the rapid development of the internet, people can easily access different information in a short period. Because of that, some people who are different from the mainstream of society can find groups that are similar to them on the internet and stand up bravely. However, many gender stereotypes and biases in society have become obstacles to these groups.

Gender stereotypes are simple and general ideas of what men and women should be like and expected to do whether in mental or physical traits. For instance, society’s values show that some colors should not be worn by a particular gender. When people search “cloth for girl baby”, most products are pink. While on the other hand for boys, it’s all blue products. Sam Smethers (2019), the chief official of the Fawcett Society said: “Evidence shows up that there’s no such thing as a female or a male brain but retailers persevere in making and maintaining sexual introduction contrasts reasonable to offer items [1]”. Moreover, family, school, society, and many other factors cause the generation of gender stereotypes.

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The first chapter of this research paper introduces the fundamental concepts and characteristics of gender stereotypes. The second section concerns the specific effects of gender stereotypes in different conditions. The final section focuses on possible solutions to these gender stereotype issues. The reason of this article needs to explore the essential constitutive causes, potential hurts, and arrangements of sex generalizations in modern-day society.

### 1.1 The Short Film “The Coward”

“The coward” is a 5-min short film that presents gender stereotypes in school among teenagers. The main character, Jeffery is an ordinary boy, and in his class, there is a boy named Vivian. He was judged by his girly name and his actions. For example, when he cried when watching the romantic movie “titanic”. First, Jeffery was also judging Vivian with his friends. However, he realized that Vivian was very kind and even more “masculine” in some cases. He slowly starts to change his views toward him and become friends.

The main character, Jeffery discovered the problem of gender stereotype among his friends when they make fun of Vivian just because of his actions and his girly name, ignoring his true “masculine” personality of Vivian. Gender stereotypes in society shape the toxic masculinity that generates this story.

In the film, Jeffery use two ways to solve this issue. Firstly, by standing out for Vivian in front of his friends in school. This action pushes his friends to reflect on their behaviours. Secondly, when Jeffery grown up, he teaches his son that “boys can wear pink”, and provide the correct value for his son.

## 2 Gender Stereotypess

Jin Shenghua (2010) believes that gender stereotype refers to people’s relatively stable belief in the specific behavior characteristics that men and women "should" have, and refers to different behavior patterns specified by specific societies or groups according to gender. Within the cognition of individuals, individuals continuously attempt to discover the common characteristics of different parts to abbreviate and disentangle the cognitive process [2]. Gender generalizations more often than not incorporate four angles: appearance picture (such as ladies are little and frail, men are tall and effective), part behavior (such as ladies taking care of children and men repairing houses), identity characteristics (such as ladies are passionate, have a solid sense of inadequacy, men are levelheaded and certain) and occupation (such as ladies are secretaries and men are supervisors).

A research published by QianMingYi introduces that in 1894, the British sexual psychologist H.H.Ellis published the book "men and women", which marked those gender roles began to become one of the topics of psychological research; In 1936, J. H. Pleck, a scholar of Wellesley College in the United States, proposed that gender roles are a set of behavioral norms corresponding to one’s gender obtained by imitation learning in the process of socialization based on the theory of social learning [3]. In any case, individuals moreover discover that generalizations will create one-sided judgment and behavior for cognitive objectives, and quick generalizations will inevitably lead

to unavoidable partiality and separation, hence causing social bad form and intergroup conflict [4]. In later a long time, increasingly analysts have examined the negative impacts of sexual orientation generalizations, particularly on children and teenagers, such as identity characteristics, consideration inclination, social judgment, inferential decision-making, behavior translation, scholastic execution, etc. [5].

Traditional social concepts will bring people traditional gender stereotypes, which, in turn, require children to grow up according to their own established gender role behavior norms through traditional ways of education. The sexual mental generalization and sex concept shaped in early childhood are the premise of profoundly clear concepts and convictions beliefs convictions of grown-ups and are moreover imperative variables influencing grown-up sexual behavior [6]. Early childhood is not only a critical period when gender roles and gender awareness begin to sprout and gradually form, but also an important stage of cognitive development and personality development. Any components that will have negative impacts ought to not be overlooked, particularly the development of sex mindfulness awareness mindfulness that cannot be maintained at a strategic distance from existence [7].

## 2.1 Causes of Gender Stereotypes

### The Innate Biological Differences

In ancient times, people's clothing, food, shelter, and transportation all depended solely on the output of nature, including gathering, hunting, and fishing. At the same time, man also had to fight with wild animals to maintain the safety of the tribes. Because of men's advantages of strength, they are responsible to fight and hunt outside with their courage, strength, and wit. While women take care of the family. However, this behavior is considered to be instinctive, relying on men to provide survival necessities products. Therefore, housework is considered to be simple and non-risky work. In contrast, men are thought to contribute more to maintaining the group than the woman. Thus, generalizing the stereotype.

### Products That Further Accentuate Gender Stereotypes

#### *Textbooks*

Sanders J. (2005) believed that historically, women had very less participation in the STEM field as these fields were handled predominantly by males [8]. In Beede, D.N, etl.'s (2011) investigation on "women in stem" expressed that the STEM field was considered a high-status calling where females were not energized to try whereas guys were constrained to aspire [9]. This introduction is built based on people's sexual orientation generalizations. Females are considered caring, adoring, physically frail, and less shrewdly though, whereas guys are considered solid, brilliantly, dependable, and bread-winners of the family. Taking the field of science as an example, in the Chinese chemistry textbook, Marie Anne Pierette Paulze Lavoisier, an extremely important female scientist was Photoshop away from her husband, another significant scientist, Antoine-Laurent de Lavoisier. The original picture is Fig. 1. The photoshop picture on the textbook is Fig. 2.



**Fig. 1.** The original picture. (globo)



**Fig. 2.** The photoshop picture on the textbook. (Chinese chemistry textbook, RenWen Version 2015)

Not only that, many female figures such as the astronomer Maria Winkelmann Kirch, mathematician Maria Gaetana Agnesi, and philosopher Margent Cavendish are all removed from the textbook. These will further increase the gender stereotype in all student's hearts.

In Yangjie (2002)'s research reported that from 1994 to 1998, the people's education press edited and published 12 Chinese textbooks for primary school (a six-year system). There are 149 selected texts that describe or contain characters (including personification). Among them, the proportion of female characters in volume 9 is the highest, which there are 33.3% of women characters in the text. For Volume 10, there are 24 characters, but only one female character is included. Ironically, In volume 11, the proportion of male characters is 100% [10].

The proportion of female roles in the text is not only weak. Moreover, the number of women taking on the leading role in the real sense is even less. In 149 texts that are describing a character. There are 172 protagonists in total, and Only 33 of them, which is 19.2% of all were women. On the other hand, nearly 81% are men. Within the scope

of the text, Men dominate. The position of women in the text generally plays a role as a foil for male (or male) roles.

## 2.2 Differences Among Boys and Girls

Although all gender experience stereotypes, boys and girls experience them slightly differently. Analysts (2019) in addition found that six in 10 (59%) people felt it was more palatable for a youthful woman to be a 'tomboy' than it was for a boy to be 'feminine', while 69% of men underneath the age of 35 said that generalizations had a hurting effect on discernments of what it infers to be a man or a woman [1]. Through the different physiological structures and social statuses females and males hold, a stereotypical image of masculinity as better than femininity is rooted in society. In other words, A tomboyish girl is trying to be "as good as a boy". Whereas a feminine boy is seen as deliberately aligning himself with the inferior and subservient class, making himself lesser.

Not only that, females and males also have completely different reactions to gender stereotypes. Marina A. Pavlova, (2014) a student studying biomedical magnetic resonance at the university of Tübingen conducted a test and conclude the main differences [3]. When stereotyping influences both females and guys, females will involve a more articulated effect. However, an express negative message for guys inspires a striking dumbfounding disintegration within the execution of females. Besides, independent of sexual orientation and the explicitness of the message, a negative generalization message specifically influences the execution.

## 3 Effects of Gender Stereotype

"Unjust gender generalizations are enormously negative to our society," said MP David Lammy (2019). "As well as holding back ladies and young ladies, they send harming messages to boys around what it implies to be a man-like whether it's Alright to appear feeling, or to have an break even with part in parenting [1]."

### 3.1 Effects on Individual

One of the major damages is an individual's self-confidence. All individuals are different and have the right to be whoever they are willing to be, but in that case, they will experience pressure. In this case, the gender stereotype. In the film 'The Coward', the main character, Jeffery experienced the issue of gender stereotypes. When he saw a touching scene in the movie, he was afraid that if anyone find out he cried. Because they will laugh at him for being "weak" or "girly". He is experiencing the stress of gender stereotypes. This stress made him scared to face himself and express his true feeling. Not only Jeffery, but Jeffery's other friends will also experience similar issues of self-expressing as they were limiting themselves by the rules of gender stereotypes.

### 3.2 Effects on Others-Bullying

In addition to individual effects, other effects are also presented. The friend group all believed in toxic masculinity values. Therefore, when they saw the “girly” character, Vivian. They bullied him for being a coward. These actions strongly damage Vivian and made him introverted and not even try to socialize with others or make any new friends.

The effect can also be shown in the character of Jeffery’s son. His son got laughed at for wearing a pink t-shirt. When he got home, he refused to talk to his father and even quietly cried.

Furthermore, this could lead to family and relationship issues. For instance, if Jeffery did not experience gender stereotypes in his childhood, maybe he wouldn’t understand his son and even blame him for wearing pink. The relationship between Jeffery and his son would collapse. There will be a risk that Jeffery’s son will also believe in toxic masculinity as he is a victim when he was a child.

## 4 Solution to Gender Stereotypes

### 4.1 School

Stone (2015)’s research on gender stereotypes among elementary school children discovered that children aged around 6 to 11 rated sexualized girls as more popular but less intelligent, athletic, and nice compared to non-sexualized girls [11]. Children mostly have access to media around that age such as movies, Tiktoks, cartoons, etc. Teachers and schools need to encourage more diversity. For example, teachers can introduce girls that are successful in the stereotypical man field, or introduces boys that always do stereotypically girly stuff but are masculine on the inside in some way. Schools can organize activities such as spiritual week to encourage students to express themselves differently and break stereotypes. Not only that, Master (2021) stated that young ladies are less interested than boys in computer science and design. Sexual orientation intrigued generalizations may contribute to ensuring sexual orientation incongruities within the interest of societally imperative areas. The conclusion is that tending to intrigued generalizations may offer assistance make strides in instructive value [12]. From that, teachers could introduce programs or majors while specifically mentioning the gender stereotype and encourage students to try. For example, introducing nursing to male students and computer science to female students. In that case, education equity will also benefit from this action.

### 4.2 Family

The impact of guardians on children within the family is intangible. In case the guardians develop up, live and get instruction beneath the impact of sexual orientation generalizations. When teaching their following era, they will deliberately or unknowingly embrace diverse child-rearing strategies and assessment states of mind due to children’s sexual orientation. For illustration, the distinction in naming children is exact since they have distinctive desires for children of diverse sexual orientations. Mu Qing (2003) believes that the way parents treat children of different genders is an important factor affecting

the gender socialization of children in early childhood. Parents consciously or unconsciously pass on the gender rules of the adult world to children. For example, when a boy cries, his parents will tell him that he must be strong, not cry, not act like a spoiled child; When a girl speaks loudly or jumps, her parents will tell her to be gentle and not to smile [13]. Li Linxian(1995) believes that in the family, the formation of parents' stereotypes about children's gender roles plays a role in two aspects: first, through parents' expectations, the children develop in the direction of their parents' expected gender roles, so that the children can absorb these desires into their sexual orientation part generalizations; Moment, parents' demeanor, and sexual orientation gender sexual orientation sex part generalizations will subtly influence children's sex part concepts [14].

### **Strategies for Dealing Family Gender Stereotypes**

Family is the first educational place for children, and parents are the first teachers of children. Family members' gender awareness, lifestyle, education concepts, etc. will imperceptibly affect the formation of children's gender stereotypes. Parents' upbringing includes gender role education, which is expressed through parents' words and deeds so that children can gradually acquire and enrich their understanding of gender roles in life. Therefore, parents should pay attention to the influence of their own and family environment on the development of children's gender awareness.

#### *Enhance Awareness of Gender Education*

In daily life, the gender stereotypes generated by families, schools, and society can not fully and accurately reflect the objective gender differences. It extends some understandings to other aspects that do not actually belong to gender differences, and then distorts all members of gender groups. These distortions and generalizations will have certain negative effects on children's cognition and growth, and these effects will be strengthened and solidified with children's age. Children can obtain information about gender roles, especially parents' behavior, by observing others' behavior habits; In the process of family education, parents unconsciously reveal their attitudes and views on gender roles and pass them on to children through live interaction. Therefore, parents must enhance the awareness of gender education for children and provide scientific gender education for children. Scientific gender education can not only promote the healthy development of children's personalities but also help them to take a more positive attitude in future social exchanges, love, marriage, family, and so on.

#### *Gender Education Should Start from the Birth of a Child*

Age is a critical determinant of sexual orientation uniformity mindfulness, and with the development of age, people's sexual orientation correspondence mindfulness will have a persistent and slow alter. The study found that the development of children's gender stereotypes began from infancy, and gradually strengthened in the preschool stage, reaching the peak between 5 and 7 years old. D. n. ruble(1994), a scholar of New York University, believes that the development of gender stereotypes of preschool children can be divided into two stages: the first stage is the construction stage, that when preschool children have certain cognitive abilities, they will contact with the surrounding gender-related behaviors, activities or phenomena to generate a preliminary impression related to gender in the brain, and then enter the gender stereotype deepening stage, With the improvement of preschool children's intelligence level and the influence of the

surrounding environment, the rigidity of children's gender stereotypes has reached the highest level; The second stage is the flexibility stage. At this time, preschool children can flexibly use gender stereotypes to look at the social individuals and groups around them [15]. Therefore, the sooner gender education starts, the better. From the birth of the child, parents should provide the child with scientific gender awareness and gender role education, weaken the existing gender stereotypes in themselves and the family environment, and help the child establish a scientific gender outlook and values.

#### *Gender Education Cannot Be Separated from Home Cooperation*

Children's gender stereotypes will increase with the strengthening of their living and educational environment. Some studies show that 3–5 years old is the sensitive period of children's gender awareness development. In the process of preschool education, teachers play an important role in the formation of children's gender concepts, gender behaviors, and gender roles. Whether they have scientific gender equality awareness and values will have a profound impact on the shaping of children's gender concepts and behaviors. Kindergartens and families are important places to cultivate children's gender awareness and establish a scientific gender perspective. Therefore, strengthening communication and cooperation in home gender education is one of the effective ways to promote the smooth development of children's gender roles and gender awareness.

## 5 Conclusion

This research investigates the primary causes of gender stereotypes as well as identifies the difference between females and males while facing gender stereotypes. In this case, the female side of the gender stereotype is getting better but the male side is worsening. First and foremost, this paper briefly introduces the basic concepts of gender stereotypes and the film "The coward" in chapter one. Based on these characteristics, the generation of gender stereotypes is also explained, such as the biological reasons and the modern factors. This research mainly discusses and researches the effect of gender stereotypes, concluding that inner effects and outer influences. The potential harms and causes of gender stereotypes are complex but significant. Therefore, future scholars can continue to pay attention to this topic and deepen the research.

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