

# Gender stereotypes in education practice

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**Abstract.** Gender stereotypes are often present in contemporary education practice. The research mainly focuses on gender stereotypes, probing into its content in education practice as well as negative consequences through the questionnaire survey. The content of gender stereotypes in education practice includes gender stereotypes about personalities, behavior and ability, and they have negative effects on shaping the gender view and exerting learning potential, and may also harm the physical and mental development of the educatees. By introducing an androgynous educational mode, the research expects to help break gender stereotypes in education practice and then promote healthy development of both male and female educatees. In order to realize this education mode, the educators are required to change their consciousness and action to be androgynous.

**Keywords:** Gender stereotypes; Education practice; Androgyny educational mode.

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Research Background

The reason for carrying out this research is that I find gender stereotypes in education practice very common in my daily life. The specific research background is as follows:

#### 1.1.1 Universality of Gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes, involving education, work, family and other fields, including appearances, personalities, ability, behavior and other aspects, have been widely concerned. It's relevant to life, and it's easy to find some gender stereotypes in everyday life.

For example, in the household division of labor, women are often considered to have the primary responsibility for taking care of the family, while men play the role of breadwinner. Even after the large increase in the number of women entering the workplace, gender segregation in occupations remains: men dominate high-status, high-wage jobs, while large numbers of women work in low-status, low-wage jobs. Outside the specific field, gender stereotypes are more common in people's understanding of characteristics of genders: women are endowed with gentle, virtuous, emotional and other traits, which closely connect them with the image of mothers; for men, traits such as masculinity, intelligence and toughness are associated with status and power.

#### 1.1.2 The importance of Education

As a means to promote individual all-round development and improve comprehensive quality, education plays a vital role in individual growth, social development and even the rise and fall of a country.

#### 1.1.3 Past and Present Gender stereotypes in Education practice

Gender stereotypes have existed in education since ancient times. These gender stereotypes often come from different understandings of characteristics, abilities of male and female students, and are manifested in different concepts, attitudes and behaviors towards students of different genders, and are shown in education practice.

In previous society, gender stereotypes usually exist in family education and social education, which is manifested in the family and society shaping men and women into specific types of gender roles. According to the theory of gender division of labor, men should be the economic providers of the family, while women should undertake the main responsibility of housework and family care (Tong,2005).

In contemporary society, similar traditional gender division of labor still exists, while more gender stereotypes involving the inherent characteristics of both genders (such as personalities, behavior and ability) appear in education practice.

## 1.2 Research topic and contribution

The study focuses on the common content of gender stereotypes in education practice and its possible negative effects, which is an important social issue. And on this basis, we try to put forward relevant suggestions to help break this kind of gender stereotypes.

In order to better understand the content of gender stereotypes in education practice, we adopted the method of questionnaire survey. The collected materials can not only be used for this study, but also provide some empirical research data for other relevant studies. And the measures we proposes may help further realize education equality and play the role of education in promoting individual, social and national development.

## 2. Main Concepts and Theories

### 2.1 Concept Definition: Stereotypes and Gender stereotypes

For some people or things, we always hold a conventional and unchangeable view that they must have the characteristics assigned to them by us. This is the stereotype, which is a set of ideas about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviors of a particular group, or a cognitive representation of the characteristics or attributes associated with a social group and its members (Lian,2003).

The gender stereotype is an important part of the stereotype. According to the definition of stereotypes, it can be known that gender stereotypes are stereotypes of both genders, and they are people's fixed views on personalities, roles and behavior of men and women in social culture (Tong,2005).

### 2.2 Main Theories

In the suggestion part of the research, we introduce androgynous educational mode, which is based on the theories of gender androgyny and psychological androgyny.

The theory of gender androgyny was formally put forward by Rossi in 1964 (Yu & Zhang,2004).The concept of "androgyny" gender role means "an individual has both typical masculine and feminine traits considered by traditional concepts", and Rossi believes that androgyny is the most suitable gender role model for an individual (Shi,2009). On this basis, Bem proposed the theory of psychological androgyny in 1974 (Yin,2002), which confirmed the superiority of androgyny gender role types through a series of empirical studies.

Theories related to the androgynous pattern are different from traditional gender role theories which sees men and women as opposites. They believe that individuals can show both masculine and feminine traits at the same time, and such androgynous individuals are healthier and have stronger adaptability and flexibility than other gender role types (masculine, feminine and undifferentiated).(Yu & Zhang,2004)

Based on the above theories and practice, the androgynous educational mode is proposed. This mode abandons the traditional and absolute monosexual education and believes that the absolute gender stereotyping will only limit the comprehensive and healthy development of children's intelligence and personality (Shi,2006), while advocating the development of androgynous personality.

### 3. Research Questions

The research revolves around the following three questions: What is the content of gender stereotypes in education practice? What are the negative impacts of gender stereotypes in education practice? And how to break gender stereotypes in education practice?

### 4. Data

#### 4.1 Research methods

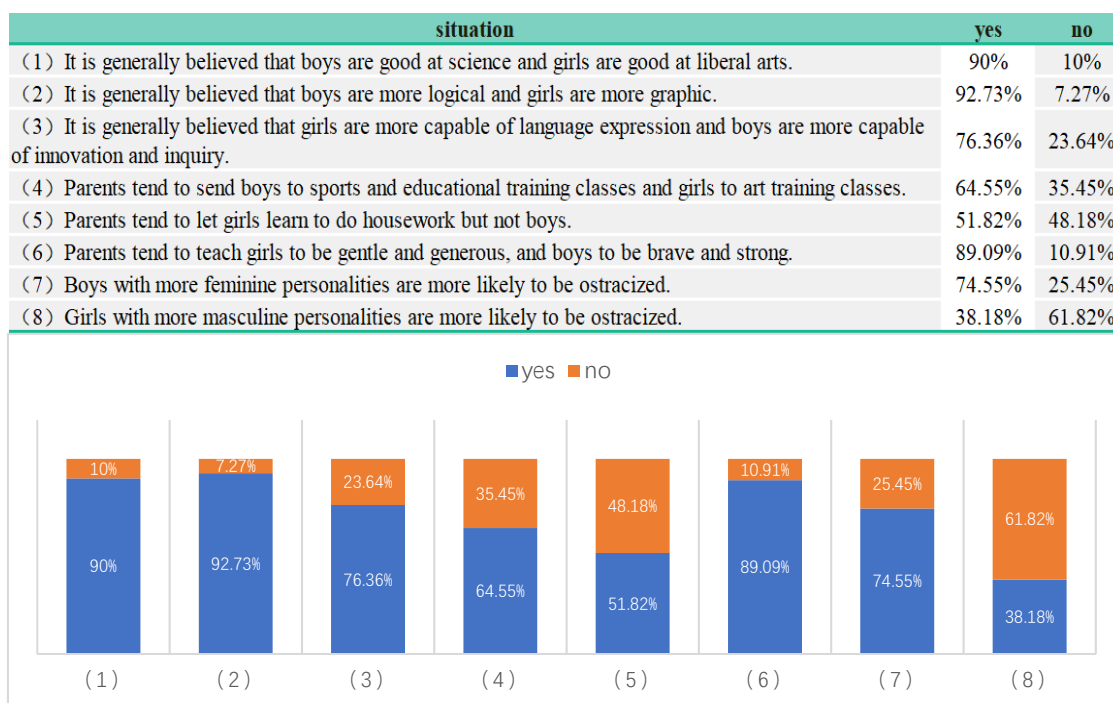
Questionnaire survey and accidental sampling method were used in the study. We distributed online questionnaires on WeChat and Weibo, and a total of 110 valid questionnaires were collected, including 21 men and 89 women.

In the questionnaire, we asked informants for basic information (including gender and age), as well as whether they experienced or found certain gender stereotypes in education practice in their daily lives.

#### 4.2 Questionnaire analysis

##### 4.2.1 There are gender stereotypes in education practice involving the inherent characteristics of both genders.

“Have you noticed or heard of any of the following around?” is a better way to get a general picture of stereotypes than asking about personal experiences. Question 6 of the questionnaire asked informants whether they found or heard about the listed gender stereotypes around them. Figure 1 shows the specific questions and survey results.



**Figure 1.** Have you noticed or heard of any of the following situations around you?

The gender stereotypes listed in the question relate to the internal characteristics, behavior and ability of both genders, which are related to education practice at home and school. According to the survey results, it is not difficult to find that more than 35% of informants agree with each of the listed situations. Most of the cases occurred around more than 50% of informants, and more than half of

the cases occurred around 70% of informants. There were even three stereotypes came up around 90% of informants.

Thus, it can be shown that gender stereotypes involving the inherent characteristics of both genders exist in the education practice of contemporary society.

#### 4.2.2 Both genders were subjected to gender stereotypes about personality and behavior, with a higher proportion of men.

Question 3&4 of the questionnaire focuses on whether informants experience gender stereotypes in education practice. Figure 2 shows the survey results of gender stereotypes in education practice concerning personalities and behavior.

situation		yes	no
male informants	(4) Supposed to have masculine characteristics (e.g., bravery, toughness).	14 (66.67%)	7 (33.33%)
	(5) Being asked to behave in a manner consistent with the male gender (e.g., men should not wear makeup).	13 (61.9%)	8 (38.1%)
female informants	(4) Supposed to have feminine characteristics (e.g., tenderness, gentleness).	69 (62.73%)	41 (37.27%)
	(5) Being asked to behave in a manner consistent with a woman's gender (e.g., a woman needs makeup).	54 (49.09%)	56 (50.91%)

**Figure 2.** Have you encountered any of the following situations?

As is shown in the chart, more than 65 percent of male informants and more than 60 percent of female informants were respectively taught that they should have personalities consistent with their genders. While gender stereotypes of behavior are slightly lower, about 60 percent of male informants and nearly 50 percent of female informants were asked to behave in accordance with their genders. Comparing the results for both genders, we also found that the percentage of male informants who have experienced gender stereotypes about personality is about 5% higher than that of female informants, and the percentage of male informants who have experienced gender stereotypes about behavior is 10% higher.

#### 4.2.3 Both genders were subjected to gender stereotypes about subject ability and learning ability.

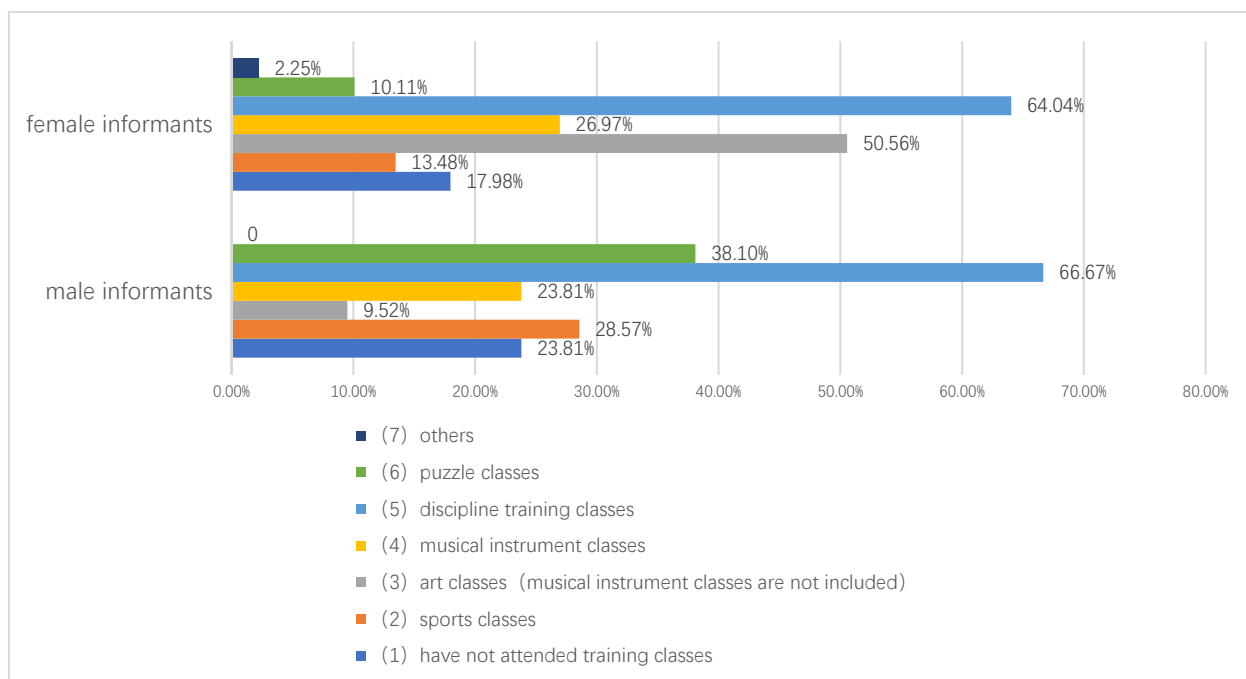
According to question 3&4 of the questionnaire, Figure 3 shows the results of the survey on gender stereotypes of subject ability and learning ability in education practice.

situation		yes	no
male informants	(1) Be expected to be better at science.	15 (71.43%)	6 (28.57%)
	(2) Be expected to be more logical.	18 (85.71%)	3 (14.29%)
	(3) Be expected to be more innovative and inquisitive.	12 (57.14%)	9 (42.86%)
female informants	(1) Be expected to be better at liberal arts.	63 (57.27%)	47 (42.73%)
	(2) Be expected to be more graphic.	46 (41.82%)	64 (58.18%)
	(3) Be expected to be more verbal.	60 (54.55%)	50 (45.45%)

**Figure 3.** Have you encountered any of the following situations?

Through the analysis of the statistical results, we can find that more than half of the informants have experienced all the situations, except that only about 41% of the female informants are considered to have more image-thinking. Men are generally considered to be better at science and be more logical, while women are expected to be better at liberal arts and verbal skills.

In the questionnaire, we also asked informants of different genders about the types of training classes they had attended, in order to further understand the gender stereotypes of subject ability and learning ability, and the results are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4.** Which types of training classes have you attended?

Because of the particularity of discipline training classes, we will not analyze it. Other types of training classes excluding discipline training class are usually called interest classes. Interest classes, as classes outside the regular school curriculum, are mostly selected according to children's own yearning and parents' expectations for children. According to the survey results, we can find that in the four interest classes of sports, art, musical instrument and puzzle, more male informants have entered puzzle (38.1%) and sports (28.57%) classes, while more female informants have entered art (50.56%) and musical instrument (26.97%) classes. Thus, women are often affirmed as having higher artistic ability and are given higher expectations of artistic accomplishment, while men are usually associated with higher athletic ability and logical thinking ability, and are expected to achieve higher athletic and innovative achievements.

#### 4.2.4 The self-evaluation of informants basically conforms to the gender stereotypes in education practice.

Question 7 of the questionnaire investigated the informants' evaluation of their ability in various aspects, and the specific results are shown in Figure 5.

	average score (male informants)	average score (female informants)
(1) language expression ability	3.33	3.48
(2) numeracy	3.52	3.15
(3) innovation ability	3.19	3.13
(4) inquiry ability	3.48	3.36
(5) logical thinking	3.81	3.48
(6) image thinking	3.14	3.56
(7) abstract thinking	3.29	3.31
(8) flexibility of thinking	3.67	3.54

**Figure 5.** Please rate yourself on the following abilities (1-5).

By comparing the average scores of each item, it can be found that the average scores of male and female in all other ability except abstract thinking completely conform to the gender stereotypes in

education expectations: in terms of language expression ability and image thinking, female informants have higher evaluation of themselves; male informants rated themselves higher on numeracy, innovation, inquiry, logical thinking and flexibility of thinking.

## **5. Findings**

### **5.1 The content of gender stereotypes in education practice**

According to the analysis of questionnaire survey, we can easily find that there are gender stereotypes involving the inherent characteristics of both genders in contemporary society, and it mainly includes the gender stereotypes of personality and behavior as well as the gender stereotypes of subject ability and learning ability.

#### **5.1.1 Gender stereotypes about personalities and behavior**

Gender stereotypes about personalities and behavior run through everyone's growth process.

Before a person's gender awareness is fully established, parents often begin to instill "gender-appropriate" personalities and behaviors based on their own experiences. For example, when the child is naughty, parents may tell their daughter "girls need to be gentle and quiet", but think it is normal for their son. When a child falls down and cries, parents teach their son "boys should be strong and brave" and comfort their daughter. As children's self-consciousness and gender consciousness develop, parents and teachers will use typical images of different genders to make more clear and systematic teaching. They always educate girls to be tender, considerate, hardworking and caring for family, and teach boys to be strong, brave and enterprising. On this basis, they strengthen children's awareness of these points through repeated persuasion, rewards and punishment incentives. As a person becomes more and more connected to the society, other people's eyes and social requirements bring influence. Women may be expected to learn makeup and obey arrangements, while men may be expected to have leadership and creativity.

These opinions about personalities and behavior from parents, schools and society are used to and formed by convention. They are in line with the cognition of most people. Therefore, they are carried out in education practice by educators.

#### **5.1.2 Gender stereotypes about subject ability and learning ability**

Gender essentialism has a view that the differences between men and women are innate and essential. This view is often applied to judgments of personal ability. For example, it is often believed that men are good at science and women are good at liberal arts as well as men are more innovative and women are better at language expression.

Therefore, a person's gender has become the basis to judge his ability. Educators are used to determining the level of individual ability in various aspects according to the gender, and thus decide what kind of education methods should be adopted for the educatees of different genders in education practice, so as to develop the ability advantages of different genders and make up for the ability shortcomings.

### **5.2 The negative impacts of gender stereotypes in education practice**

According to the results of the questionnaire, gender stereotypes in education practice affect the interviewees' self-evaluation and future development. Combined with relevant literature and real life, we summarize the negative effects as follows:

#### **5.2.1 Subtly shape the gender view of educatees and influence their future development**

Education is an important way to shape the gender view, so gender stereotypes in education practice have a great impact on the gender view of the educatees.

Family is often the first place for children's gender socialization, and parents' requirements for children are often children's first impression of gender. The consistency of these gender stereotypes

makes the first impression continuously reiterated by the subsequent family education, school education and social education, which subtly shapes the gender view of the educatees.

The gender view not only influences individuals' perception of genders, but also influences individuals' shaping of their own gender roles. The gender view subtly shaped by the gender stereotypes in education practice may make individuals develop in the direction of these stereotypes and eventually become "typical male" and "typical female" that fully conform to the traditional gender roles.

### **5.2.2 Influence the learning potential of the educatees**

In order to explain the difference in academic performance between the white and the black students, Steele and Aronson (1995) first proposed the concept of stereotype threat, which is a phenomenon that members of stigmatized groups have worse performances in the field of negative stereotypes (Zhuang,2021). Educators' transmission of gender stereotypes to the educatees may lead to lower self-confidence and negative self-cognition of the educatees. Influenced by stereotypes, they believe that their abilities in certain aspects may not be comparable to those of the other gender by birth, and they do not believe that it can be changed through efforts, thus their confidence and interest in this field are greatly reduced. In the invisible, those possible learning potential not only can not be effectively developed, but also may continue to suppress until fading.

Studies have pointed out that the math scores of girls threatened by gender stereotypes are significantly lower than those of girls not threatened (Li & Zheng,2002), which intuitively confirms the impact of gender stereotypes in education expectations on the potential of the educatees: women who often hear opinions such as "girls are bad at science" are often limited in their performances in science learning. If we look for a similar phenomenon in our lives, we might find that educatees who are encouraged that "there is no difference between your ability and the ability of the other gender" always achieve some unexpected success in areas where they are thought to be weak.

### **5.2.3 Harm the mental health of the educatees, and even lead to campus bullying and other undesirable phenomena**

Since gender stereotypes have largely become the norm, traits and behaviors that do not conform to stereotypes are likely to be considered abnormal. Contemporary society thinks men should be "masculine and tough" and women should be "gentle and considerate", so those mild men and strong girls may be laughed at and excluded by others; men are not expected to be overly elaborate and women should learn how to dress themselves, so men who wear elaborate makeup are frowned upon, while women who don't wear makeup are considered disrespectful. These doubts and rejections from others make people who do not conform to the stereotypes in the contradiction between personal choices and realistic requirements. They may become anxious and helpless due to self-doubt, or become lonely and depressed due to rejection from others, which ultimately has a negative impact on their mental health.

On campus, such ridicule and exclusion often turn into campus bullying, causing serious physical and mental harm to those students who do not conform to the stereotypes. Micheal who loves watching *My Little Pony*, Lin Xiangyu who has thin physique and gentle character, the Rose young who is feminine, all encounter bullying because they do not tally with the gender stereotypes. Being different with public perception, they become the laughing stock of others, and be despised and attack, or even give up lives.

## **5.3 Suggestions**

Under the guidance of the theories related to the androgynous pattern, we put forward the androgynous educational mode in order to reduce the negative impact of gender stereotypes and promote the healthy and all-round development of individuals. To develop androgynous educational mode, educators need to break gender stereotypes in education practice mainly from concepts and behaviors.

### 5.3.1 Cultivate educators' consciousness of androgyny

The educators' consciousness of androgyny is the foundation of the formation of the androgynous educational mode. Only by breaking the prejudice of their own gender cognition, can the educators adopt the correct way in the follow-up education process and guide the educatees to form androgynous personality.

First, educators need to establish a sense of gender equality. Educators should believe that men and women have the same ability, the same potential, and hold the same attitudes and have the same expectations towards them. On this basis, educators should abandon the idea that traits correspond to gender and focus on the pros and cons of a trait rather than whether it is suitable for a particular gender, and change the concept of "gender-appropriate traits". For example, educators need to realize that bravery and decisiveness are not just for boys, but can be found in girls as well; similarly, female traits such as shyness and sensitivity should not be considered bad just because they appear in boys (Zhuang,2021).

Of course, educators also need to distinguish between "androgynous" and "degendered" and understand that "androgynous" education is not the same as "degendered" education. The androgynous educational mode does not require educators to ignore gender differences, but hope to achieve gender equality under the premise of respecting natural gender characteristics (Shi,2009). It allows some traits to exist in both genders and hope educatees understand and even develop traits which they don't have.

### 5.3.2 Encourage educators to adopt androgynous action

The educator's action has a direct influence on educatees. Therefore, the androgynous educational mode requires educators to adopt androgynous action in the education process.

Since it is an androgynous way of education, the first thing is to avoid strengthening the role of a single gender (Zhuang,2021), which represents educators need to avoid using the language of gender bias and making the behavior of the gender bias. Heterosexual students should be encouraged to do more communication and interaction, discover and learn another gender's advantages and participate in activities traditionally belonging to the another gender (Li & Zheng,2002). It also means that educators need to pay attention to the diversity of each gender and embrace behaviors that do not conform to traditional gender norms as long as they do not cause harm.

Educators also need to guide students to learn excellent traits rather than gender-appropriate ones. In this regard, they should pass on their consciousness of androgyny to educatees, and strengthen educatees' understanding of "traits is only good or bad but not gender" through their action.

## 6. Summary

Education plays an important role in individual development, but the gender stereotypes in education practice limits its play. The research takes gender stereotypes as the main research content, and explores its content in education practice through the questionnaire survey. In education practice, gender stereotypes are usually expressed through different views of personalities, behavior and ability of both genders. These stereotypes have negative effects on shaping the gender view of the educatees and exerting their learning potential, and may also harm the physical and mental development of the educatees.

In order to reduce negative effects, we introduced an androgynous educational mode. Based on the theories of gender androgyny and psychological androgyny, this mode requires the cultivation of androgynous consciousness of educators, and encourages educators to adopt androgynous action in the process of education, so as to break the gender stereotypes in education practice and promote students to establish androgynous personality.

However, there are many limitations to my research. Due to lack of time and money, I adopted the accidental sampling method for the questionnaire survey and researched on the Internet. This method results in an extremely uneven distribution of informants in terms of age and gender, with female

respondents far outnumbering male informants and informants mainly aged 16-28. In addition, a limited number of questionnaires were collected. These defects will affect the accuracy and validity of the questionnaire analysis, and result in the results from the questionnaire can not be inferred to the overall. At the same time, due to the limitation of research time, the design of questionnaire needs to be improved. It is found that some conclusions cannot be drawn according to the questionnaire data, but can only rely on other literature and real life. And in fact, there have been many studies on gender stereotypes in education in the existing literature, but the main point of this research is still based on the original research without much innovation.

In future research, empirical data on gender stereotypes in education practice can be further collected to verify relevant views, especially the data on negative effects. In addition, the problems and effects of androgynous educational mode in practice can be studied.

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