

Gender Qualities and Campus Bullying: Psychological Causes and Social Ecology Behind the “Rose Boy”

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Abstract: In April 2000, "Rose Boy" Ye Yongzhi died due to bullying by his classmates for his unique gender identity. Although the Ye Yongzhi incident has drawn increasing attention to the seriousness of gender identity discrimination and campus bullying, the phenomenon of "gender bullying" still exists today. In this study, the author conducted a questionnaire survey of 100 male youths in mainland China who had experienced or were currently experiencing campus bullying to clarify the current status of campus bullying and gender bullying in mainland China, and conducted statistics on the forms, reasons, solutions, and impacts of bullying. On this basis, this paper adopts a social-psychological perspective to explore the social psychological causes behind "gender temperament bullying". On the one hand, adolescents may develop stereotypes about gender temperament due to prejudice. On the other hand, adolescents may exhibit irrational group behavior under the influence of "deindividuation". In addition, "obeying authority" is also one of the reasons why some teenagers join the ranks of bullies. Finally, this paper elaborates on the deeper macro-social ecology behind social psychology, such as the influence of traditional gender role beliefs on parents' expectations and requirements for their children in traditional Chinese families; most schools in China fail to provide comprehensive and scientific gender education courses, lacking in-depth exploration and correct guidance on gender issues; the administrative and judicial departments have not sufficiently punished and prevented campus bullying; the whole society's attention to campus bullying and gender discrimination also needs to be improved.

Keywords: Gender Qualities, Campus Bullying, Social Psychology, Social Ecology

1. Introduction

In April 2000, high school student Ye Yongzhi from Gaoshu, Pingtung County, Taiwan, China, was found dead in the school toilets after being bullied due to his different gender traits. Initially, the school claimed that he had "fallen accidentally", but as news of the incident spread, it was revealed that Ye Yongzhi had often been bullied at school due to his delicate appearance and gentle behavior. Some male students even surrounded him when he went to the toilet and forced him to take off his pants to "check if he was a girl", which led him to fear using the toilet. In any case, his death was still related to "gender discrimination and bullying".

In 2006, the Gender Equity Education Association in Taiwan, China, published "Embracing the Rose Boy" which documents the Ye Yongzhi incident and explores its gender educational

implications. In 2007, a documentary titled "The Rose Boy" was filmed in Taiwan, China. In 2009, the film was distributed to high schools in the island as teaching material. In 2018, the song "The Rose Boy" from Taiwanese singer Jolin Tsai's album UGLY BEAUTY was also inspired by the Ye Yongzhi incident. As such, "The Rose Boy" has become a synonym for young people who are bullied in school due to their unique gender traits in Taiwan and Mainland China.

Despite the impact of the "Rose Boy" incident, which has led more and more people to recognize the severity of gender-based discrimination and campus bullying, the phenomenon of campus bullying due to gender traits still exists today, and the research on sexism is still in a state of "secrecy" in the academic community of Chinese Mainland. Based on this, this paper uses a questionnaire survey to reveal the overall situation of gender temperament bullying in Chinese mainland. On this basis, the author will introduce the perspective of social psychology to summarize the overall social psychological causes behind "gender temperament bullying". Finally, the author will place "gender temperament bullying" in a macro social ecosystem to explore the multiple subjects of family, school, administrative and judicial departments, and social atmosphere, in order to understand how the above-mentioned social psychology emerged in a social ecosystem.

2. The current situation of campus bullying caused by gender trait

In a survey of 5,864 primary and secondary school students in 10 provinces in China in 2010, 6.1% of the students reported being "often bullied by older students," while 32.5% reported being "occasionally bullied" [1]. Another survey in China in 2017 showed that among 298 students surveyed, 84% had witnessed at least one bullying incident, with 38% reporting that they witnessed bullying behavior occurring at a frequency of one to two days. About 40% admitted to engaging in slightly aggressive forms of bullying behavior towards others [2]. Due to the special nature of the survey content and the immature state of the surveyed individuals, the actual incidence of campus bullying may be much higher than the data reported in the above-mentioned surveys.

Based on the previous research work, this study investigated 100 male youths from mainland China who had suffered or were currently suffering from campus bullying through a questionnaire survey to understand the forms, reasons, solutions, and subsequent effects of bullying. At the same time, the author linked the bullying phenomenon with social psychological principles through literature review, and used the survey results to support the connection between them.

2.1. Reasons for campus bullying among survey respondents

According to the survey results, 76% of respondents believe that the reason they were bullied on campus may be related to their personal characteristics, such as being withdrawn, weak, timid, or having low self-esteem. 72% of respondents believe that their experience of campus bullying may be associated with their gender trait. Specifically, such things as voice, appearance, hobbies, and personality are not aligning with the stereotypes of their physiological gender. 48% of respondents believe that they were bullied due to physiological factors such as age, appearance, and body shape. In addition, factors such as academic performance, sports skills, family conditions, and specific events may also contribute to the occurrence of campus bullying. It is worth mentioning that 16% of respondents believe that "being envied due to outstanding achievements, appearance or good interpersonal relationship with classmates" has also become one of the reasons for their experience of campus bullying.

It is a thought-provoking issue that, 23 years after the Ye Yongzhi incident, "gender expression" still remains one of the primary reasons for campus bullying. The Gender Equality Education Act in Taiwan, China, clearly states that no person should be subject to differential treatment based on their

physiological gender, sexual orientation, gender traits, or gender identity. However, it is evident that campus bullying due to gender discrimination has not stopped.

2.2. Forms of campus bullying among survey respondents

Based on Goldsmid's definition, any act of aggression that meets the following five conditions can be classified as bullying: malicious intent, imbalance of power, long-term repetition, negative motivation, and emotional trauma to the victim [3]. Based on this, the academic community in mainland China categorizes campus bullying into the following five types: verbal bullying, rumor bullying, physical bullying, material bullying, and relational bullying. According to the author's research, verbal bullying (such as verbal abuse, ridicule, sarcasm, threats, etc.) accounts for the highest proportion of all types of bullying, reaching 85%, followed by physical bullying (injuring the victim's body or sexual bullying), accounting for 54%. Ranking third is relational bullying (including the widespread use of cold-bloodedness or malicious isolation), accounting for 46%. In addition, rumor bullying (spreading false information about the victim in reality and online) accounts for 33%, and material bullying (possessing or damaging the victim's personal belongings) accounts for 32%. In real-life campus bullying, multiple forms of campus bullying often exist simultaneously.

2.3. Consequences of "gender-based bullying"

Because of the unwillingness to reveal the fact and reasons for being bullied to teachers and parents, along with the difficulties in obtaining evidence of some types of campus bullying, 68% of victims choose to struggle alone or suppress their anger in campus bullying, and only 8% of victims have tried to seek help from their families, while 24% have tried to seek help from their schools. Among the 32 campus bullying victims who sought help from their families or schools, only 7 believed that campus bullying was effectively resolved with the intervention of their parents and teachers. It can be seen that, in most cases, campus bullying is difficult to solve, and easy to be ignored.

83% of respondents believed that they suffered from serious physical and mental effects due to campus bullying in a short period of time, while 36% of respondents stated that the harm caused by campus bullying was long-term and even irreversible for them. As for the short-term impact of campus bullying, some existing psychological and educational research has shown that long-term exposure to bullying among school-aged individuals will produce many negative outcomes for them, including anxiety, depression, withdrawal, loneliness, reduced self-esteem, decreased self-efficacy, attention deficit, and academic performance decline [4]. At the same time, victims usually experience a strong sense of insecurity and various forms of psychological disorders. Some may even engage in self-mutilation to varying degrees and go so far as to commit suicide [5]. If the time span of the impact of bullying on victims is prolonged, it may lead to recurrent depression, low self-esteem, and trusting others difficultly. In addition to these apparent effects, these experiences of being bullied will also affect their self-identity, quality of social interaction, and mental health status, thus affecting their satisfaction and sense of happiness in life [6].

It is worth noting that the impact of "gender-based bullying" goes beyond the victim individuals, also having a negative influence on the entire peer group and even the whole society. The existence of gender-based bullying may lead peers to develop prejudice and discrimination towards certain genders or gender expressions in a subtle way, deepening the stereotype of gender expressions in the whole society. This may result in views such as "it is abnormal for boys to possess feminine qualities" and "boys who behave like girls should be bullied," which will aggravate social inequality and injustice in the future, posing a negative impact on social harmony and stability.

3. The Social Psychological Causes of Gender-Based Bullying

In modern research, social psychology has been widely applied in various behavioral analyses, such as the social psychological influence on Nazi officers and modern consumer psychology. However, because domestic campus bullying analysis has focused more on individual behavior and personality, social psychology has rarely been used in the analysis of domestic bullying phenomena. This paper analyzes gender-based bullying from the perspective of social psychology, aiming to explore its deep-seated reasons.

3.1. Stereotype: cognitive dissonance resulting from gender prejudice

The stereotype theory was first proposed by the famous American sociologist Walter Lippmann in his book "Public Opinion" in 1922. Lippmann believed that people have a fixed cognitive model for certain groups or categories, which is called a stereotype. These stereotypes are often based on prejudice or overly simplified information, neglecting the uniqueness of each individual or group. The stereotype theory mainly includes two aspects: one is the overly simplified cognition of specific groups or categories, which leads us to only see their commonalities and neglect their individualities; the other is that this overly simplified cognition is often based on prejudice, which may be caused by factors such as social status, cultural background, gender, and race.

Traditional Chinese society has strong expectations for male gender roles, such as strength, boldness, courage, and confidence. These traits are seen as essential characteristics that men must possess under social norms, and these expectations for internal masculinity are also externalized to appearance and body shape. In the long history of patriarchal systems, there have been strict social norms and expectations for male gender roles in Chinese society, such as "Men don't cry easily" and "Real men can hold up the sky." These norms have contributed to the long-standing stereotype of male gender roles in Chinese society. Even today, in both family and work settings, men are still expected to play leadership and protective roles, while women are expected to take care of the family and children. Media such as advertisements, TV dramas, and movies tend to emphasize gender stereotypes, creating role models that conform to traditional masculine and feminine norms. These differences in role expectations solidify stereotypes of male gender roles and biases against female gender roles, ultimately leading to inequality in gender status in society [7].

For middle school and elementary school students who are not yet psychologically mature, if they discover that the gender expression of their peers differs from the stereotype associated with their physiological gender, they may easily experience strong cognitive dissonance. The theory of cognitive dissonance was proposed by Festinger. He believes that when individuals face new situations and must express their attitudes, they will experience a conflict between new cognitions and old cognitions. To eliminate the discomfort caused by this discrepancy, individuals tend to use two ways to adjust their cognitions: one is to deny the new cognition, and the other is to seek more information about the new cognition to increase its credibility, completely replacing the old cognition with new ones to achieve psychological balance. For young students, denial is often a simpler option. Bullying is one of the most direct ways to achieve this denial.

3.2. Deindividuation: The Occurrence of Group Polarization

"Deindividuation", proposed by social psychologist Ed Diener, is a social psychological model that refers to the phenomenon of individuals losing self-awareness in a group, resulting in a decrease in introspection and moral standards, and the emergence of impulsive, irrational, and even antisocial behaviors [8]. In the process of deindividuation, individuals may feel that they are no longer seen as independent individuals, but rather as part of the group. This feeling can lead to individuals losing

self-control and self-awareness, thus engaging in behaviors that they would not normally engage in. For example, engaging in bullying, attacking others online, or participating in destructive behaviors.

One characteristic of deindividuation is “lack of self-awareness”. In the case of deindividuated individuals, group behavior is highly “normative”, so the unethical behavior of a few individuals in the group is easily imitated by most people. And the more people involved, the more pronounced this phenomenon becomes. In order to align with the collective and adapt to changes in the collective, individuals are prone to ignoring rational self-control and becoming caught up in this giant whirl of deindividuation. Each individual in this violent group is a part of this collective, but it is difficult for them to realize that they are unjustly bullying others. Another characteristic of deindividuation is the strengthening of collective consciousness, which stems from individuals’ desire to obtain self-respect through the collective. A 2017 survey conducted in mainland China found that the third highest reason for bullying was “following other classmates to bully others”. In order to promote collective pride and enhance the reputation of the collective, students in the collective may follow one or two bully initiators to engage in bullying behavior, thus strengthening collective consciousness [2].

In terms of “gender-based bullying”, “roses” (a term used to describe boys who display more feminine characteristics) are often seen as “aliens” or “outcasts” because their gender expression does not align with mainstream masculine images. They are excluded from the mainstream collective and are more susceptible to becoming targets of deindividuated groups. They may even become scapegoats for collective emotions or tension release. From the perspective of the bullying group, members may believe that their actions are “justified”, “moral”, or even “proud” because they are punishing and isolating those who are “different”. This moral ambiguity can explain why “gender-based bullying” is sometimes tolerated or even encouraged in some situations.

3.3. Obedience: Pressure from Group Authority

“Obedience theory” suggests that people are influenced by various factors in order to follow the rules or authorities. These factors include rewards and punishments, social pressure, group support, and moral identification. When individuals believe that obedience is in line with their values and interests, they are more likely to demonstrate such behavior. In the face of authority, people may experience a sense of pressure and helplessness, which may lead them to abandon their own judgments and follow the requirements of the authority [9].

"Obedience" is an innate human trait. In a group setting, anyone who displays behavior that is different from the norm risks being labeled a "traitor" and isolated by other members, which could result in severe punishment. One of the reasons why students engage in bullying is because they are susceptible to the influence of authorities in school, such as leaders of small groups, class officers, and teachers. As authorities in the classroom, teachers, class officers, and group leaders can use verbal abuse, emotional abuse, and disgust to influence other students, leading them to shun these students for fear of receiving the same treatment. Additionally, with the leadership of powerful individuals, bystanders may also join in the bullying. The more bullying is implemented by students, the higher the authority of the bully becomes, leading individuals to be more obedient. This is why classroom-wide verbal and attitude bullying is so common. The more students value the class collective, the more likely they are to engage in bullying.

When considering gender, in traditional patriarchal society, men hold dominant privileges while women remain in subordinate and secondary roles. Even today, family education and school education in mainland China are still influenced by patriarchy. "Rose boys" often find it more difficult to gain authority status in schools due to their feminine gender qualities. They may even be positioned as being on the opposite side of authority. To this day, especially in certain underdeveloped regions of mainland China, many parents and teachers still cannot conceal their dislike towards "sissy" and use verbal violence or emotional abuse towards their gender qualities. Similarly, "authority figures"

may also engage in derogatory, insulting, or even demonizing Rose boys' feminine gender qualities in order to solidify their male gender qualities' dominant position.

4. Insight: Social Ecology Behind Social Psychology

With the singing and shouting of the song "Rose Boy", the occurrence of Ye Yongzhi event has undoubtedly revealed to us the seriousness of the problem of campus bullying based on gender temperament in current Chinese society. Campus bullying, as a social phenomenon or social issue, has a deeper social ecology behind its social psychology, and this social ecological system involves the interaction of multiple forces, including families, schools, government agencies, and the social atmosphere.

Firstly, in traditional Chinese family education, many parents' expectations and requirements for boys and girls are still influenced by traditional gender role concepts. For example, boys are usually expected to show "strength" and "independence", while girls are expected to show "softness" and "dependence". This gender-based expectation and requirement often ignores the individual differences and diversity of children, resulting in individuals who do not conform to traditional gender role categories becoming the targets of bullying. The "Rose Boys" also dare not seek help from their families due to fear of their parents' misunderstanding. In addition, Chinese parents lack attention and investment in gender education. Some parents believe that gender education is the responsibility of schools, while others even avoid talking about it. The lack of family gender education leads to children's insufficient understanding and recognition of gender issues. If parents cannot correctly guide their children to understand and respect different gender temperaments, the possibility that children will become "bullies" will increase significantly.

Secondly, schools are also an important part of this issue's social ecology. Currently, most Chinese schools have not provided comprehensive and scientific gender education courses and psychological counseling systems, lacking in-depth exploration and correct guidance on gender issues. This results in students' insufficient understanding of gender issues and may even lead to misunderstandings and prejudices, increasing the risk of campus bullying based on gender temperament. There are also some problems in school management in preventing and responding to campus bullying. For example, there is a lack of understanding of the seriousness and harm of campus bullying, a lack of effective prevention and response mechanisms. For example, schools may lack clear anti-bullying policies, fail to detect and handle bullying incidents promptly, or provide insufficient support for victims, allowing bullying behavior to persist. In addition, most Chinese schools currently adopt closed-door and unified management, lacking understanding and tolerance towards diverse cultures. In this atmosphere, students with different genders, temperaments, sexual orientations, and gender identities find it difficult to receive equal respect and opportunities. This non-inclusive environment is prone to triggering bullying behavior based on different gender temperaments.

In addition to schools, the prevention and punishment of bullying also involve educational administrations and judicial departments. Since 2016, relevant government agencies have attached great importance to the issue of campus bullying. The Ministry of Education and other eleven departments have issued the "Program for Strengthening Comprehensive Management of Campus Bullying" to propose following the principles of education first, prevention foremost, protection essential, and law-based management to establish a sound prevention and response mechanism for campus bullying. This ensures that the prevention and treatment of campus bullying will be implemented effectively so that schools can become the safest and sunniest places possible [10]. However, compared with Taiwan, mainland China has not yet issued any laws related to gender education, which will continue to be a problem in the prevention of "gender temperament bullying". In the judicial field, currently there are no specific laws in mainland China dealing with campus bullying. This makes it difficult for judicial departments to handle bullying incidents when they arise.

Even if it reaches the judicial level, given the identity and age of the parties involved, judicial agencies usually seek criticism and education as opposed to punishment. It can be said that it is precisely because of this lack of laws and the corresponding mild attitude of judicial departments that the deterrent and punitive functions of the law cannot be demonstrated. This not only fails to make the bully bear the corresponding punishment for their bullying behavior but also makes it possible for such behavior to become more severe as a result of such handling outcomes.

Behind the family, school, and government sectors, there is a more macro social environment. The influence of social environment on individual behavior and its importance in personal growth is not only reflected in classical stories such as "Mencius' mother moved three times", but also confirmed by some empirical studies. The influence of peer groups on individual behavior reflects the commonly known principle of "being influenced by one's peers". In addition to the overall social issues mentioned earlier, such as gender inequality, gender stereotypes, and cultural inclusivity, China has long had a tradition of not taking school bullying seriously and paying attention to its potential consequences in the minds of the public. Incidents of bullying and even fighting among students are generally regarded as normal "playing around" and "child's play", and only when the nature of the event is relatively severe or causes significant consequences, will it be taken seriously and intervened. However, this tolerance towards bullies has not been equally transferred to victims, because they may be seen as "losers" and "those whose reputation has been damaged" by others due to being bullied, resulting in significant physical and mental trauma [11].

5. Conclusion

Despite the impact of the "Rose Boy" incident, which has led more and more people to recognize the seriousness of gender discrimination and campus bullying, the phenomenon of campus bullying due to gender temperament still exists today, which has strong negative impacts on individuals and society. From the perspective of social psychological causes, on the one hand, adolescents may develop stereotypes about gender temperament due to prejudice. On the other hand, adolescents may exhibit irrational group behavior under the influence of "de-personalization". In addition, "obeying authority" is also one of the reasons why some teenagers join the ranks of bullies. Finally, this paper elaborates on the deeper macro-social ecology behind social psychology, such as the influence of traditional gender role beliefs on parents' expectations and requirements for their children in traditional Chinese families; most schools in China fail to provide comprehensive and scientific gender education courses, lacking in-depth exploration and correct guidance on gender issues; the administrative and judicial departments have not sufficiently punished and prevented campus bullying; the overall society's attention to campus bullying and gender discrimination also needs to be improved.

Only social psychological etiology analysis and social ecological analysis were conducted, without further proposing operable intervention measures and optimization plans based on these. All of this requires more interdisciplinary researchers and collaborative participation from relevant departments. We expect subsequent research to pave a smooth path for the future of "Rose Boys", and we look forward to a more equal, bias-free, and campus bullying-focused social environment.

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