

# ***Secondary School Teachers' Teaching Strategies Toward Gender-atypical Students***

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**Abstract:** More people need to be aware of how easily gender-atypical youths can be hurt in terms of body, sex, or emotions. Gender-atypical individuals refer explicitly to males with feminine qualities and females with masculine qualities, namely those who deviate from traditional gender expectations and often labeled as “sissy” or “tomboy” by society. Since gender-atypical behaviors are deemed to deviate from the mainstream, destabilize the power-based social construct in which male is associated with dominance while the female is related to submissiveness and is associated with homosexuality, Boys who act in ways that are associated with femininity and girls who act in ways that are associated with masculinity are at a high risk of becoming rejected, bullied or victimized. It is of great necessity for the secondary school teachers and relevant organization to take initiatives to develop strategies that specifically support gender-atypical students because primary and secondary schools have previously been more traditional and resistant to social change and students at that age are more likely to reinforce the patriarchal social system and conventional gender norms. To buffer the victimization and distress gender-atypical youngsters encounter in their lives and help them develop into healthy adults with self-love and self-acceptance, secondary school teachers should reform teaching practices and programming decisions to establish a supportive and inclusive school environment and apply what they have learned about gender disparities and gender norms into practice to encourage their students to embrace a positive view on heterogeneity and diversity. Moreover, knowledge about homosexuality should be popularized to abate the negativity of homophobia.

**Keywords:** gender-atypical, secondary school teachers, gender norms, gender awareness, strategies

## **1. Introduction**

Gender-atypical individuals refer explicitly to males with feminine qualities and females with masculine qualities, namely those who deviate from traditional gender expectations. According to the conventional gender norms, masculinity refers to aggressiveness, dominance and independence, and femininity refers to warmth, sensitivity and nurturing [1]. Williams found that femininity positively correlates with close same-sex friendship, while masculinity has minimal impact on the level of reported closeness [2]. Women are supposed to be tolerant and refrain from becoming authoritative, and males are supposed to avoid appearing vulnerable, sentimental, bashful, and manly in appearance

while maintaining an interest in science and technology [3]. When it comes to educational settings, male students are thought to be more talented than female students in all fields of science [4]. Some occupations like law enforcement are dominated by males, while others like nursing are dominated by women [4]. Moreover, Men who behave modestly in a professional situation contradict gender norms and are hated because they are thought to be vulnerable and unworthy [4]. On the other hand, females who exhibit authoritative conduct (by being proficient, driven, and tough) come out as being less pleasant, which makes them disdained and underappreciated [4].

Students who don't conform to the gender stereotypes, such as boys with specific behaviors like the desire to be female, the use of makeup, the preference for female playmates, the use of feminine gestures, the play with dolls, and the dislike of males' games or girls who wear primarily male apparel, have short hair and not wear cosmetics when in high school are always perceived as gender inappropriate and face many challenges in their lives [5]. Many gender-atypical youths have come out to disclose parental abuse [6]. The male-assigned children who were detected cross-dressing were frequently punished; some claimed to have experienced physical or sexual abuse, while others claimed they had been taken to therapists or placed in institutions to be "cured" [7]. Males who act in feminine-identified ways are more likely to experience abuse, stigma, and exclusion [8]. Boys who identified as "gender atypical" also reported higher levels of victimization, loneliness, lack of male friends, even peer teasing, adult censorship and distress than their "gender-typical" counterparts [1]. All these challenges may take a toll on the psychological well-being and peer relationships of gender-atypical students.

Gender-atypical students of victimization can benefit from peer support, and peer supporters can also gain from the experience. Nonetheless, boys are considerably underrepresented among peer support, and a sizable portion of male victim's neglect to disclose their anguish [9]. The reason behind it is that boy who exhibits NTGA (non-traditional/gender atypical) are viewed as violating masculine gender roles since patriarchy denigrates and devalues women and all things associated with femininity, and to be able to relate and empathize with NTGA boys, men must get over the act of coercion and terror brought on by the discounting of matters with an identity that is female [8]. Therefore, it is of great necessity for teachers to develop strategies that specifically support gender-atypical students by popularizing the idea that gender atypicality is not an abnormal group and helping cultivate the correct gender awareness among students to buffer the victimization and distress gender-atypical youths encounter in their lives. There are some research that highlighted the role school staff might play in addressing gender-based victimization. Anagnostopoulos et al. argued for extending prevention initiatives additional to intervention to involve educational workers in criticizing stereotyped and homophobic compliance, attitudes, and behaviors [10]. Kollmayer et al. discussed psychological theories of child development that dealt with how children adopt gender-typical preferences and behaviors and made a connection to the part that gender stereotypes held by parents and instructors played in this process [11]. Missing from the previous research is how secondary school teachers develop teaching strategies to address the unique needs of gender-atypical youngsters. The goal of this research project is to bridge this gap by using qualitative research methods, including archival research and textual analysis to explore the development of gender awareness of middle school students and how to further the guidance.

## **2. The Underlying Reasons for the Plight of Gender-atypical Students**

There are many reasons that underlie the plight of gender-atypical students. Only by exploring these reasons and finding specific solutions can secondary school teachers effectively help gender non-traditional youngsters get rid of the plight consisting of exclusion, rejection and victimization and develop into a healthy adult with self-love and self-acceptance.

## 2.1. Deviance from the Mainstream

When it comes to the reasons why gender-atypical students face so many challenges in their lives, firstly because they deviate from the mainstream. According to Thornberg, bullying is a reaction to deviance. Those interpreted as deviant, different or odd are more likely to provoke others to bully them [12]. DeRosier and Mercer also mentioned that atypicality was linked to greater levels of peer victimization and social rejection, as well as poorer academic performance and emotional adjustment [13]. And children selected other people as atypical for a number of low-frequency observable (such as dress and look), behavioral (such as weird speech, clumsy actions and solitary behavior), verbal abnormalities, disabilities (such as deaf, retarded and confined to a wheelchair) and deviant personalities (geeky, childish or strange) [12,13]. A degree of gender-atypical conduct may be a further aspect of abnormality, which promotes vulnerability to victimization [1]. That's the consequence of human evolutionary history. In order to buffer the vulnerability to harsh physical environments, humans evolved to survive by adopting group living in the forms of collective knowledge and collaborative information sharing. As a result, individuals tend to categorize themselves and favor others who are also members of their group. The existence of the out-group seems to be a threat to the preservation and social identity of the in-group [14].

## 2.2. Destabilization of the Patriarchy

The second reason is that the existence of gender-atypical people destabilizes the power-based social construct in which male is associated with dominance while the female is related to submissiveness. According to Brooks, the patriarchal social system causes gender-atypical youths to be mistreated [8]. Patriarchy gives absolute precedence to men. In a patriarchal society, males rule over, unfairly mistreat females, and take advantage of them, thus underlying the women's subordination in which women's standing is lower than men's and lack decision-making power and access to resources. Women's subjugation began with the emergence of private property. When private property first appeared in society, men strove to cling onto their power and money so they could pass them on to their progeny. To ensure this inheritance, mother-right was removed. In order to safeguard father's rights, women had to be tamed and restrained and had their sexuality governed and ruled [15]. Within a patriarchal social order, matters deemed to be "female" or "feminine" are undervalued and disfavored and matters that are "manly" and "masculine" are overvalued or favored. The sexism and misogyny enforce and reinforces rigid gender roles and those who don't conform to the gender role compliance (namely boys who are not masculine enough to retain the dominance and girls who are not feminine enough to perform the submissiveness) are increased risk for paying the price of social exclusion and persecution [8].

## 2.3. Homophobia

Homophobia also constitutes the cause of the plight of the gender atypicality. The word "homophobia" is frequently used to refer to prejudice towards homosexuality [16]. The notion that all gender-atypical youths are homosexual further exacerbates the situation and complicates the problems facing gender-atypical individuals and just adds to the stigmatization of both groups. Being one of the most stigmatized oppressed groups, gender atypicality carries societal projections of homophobia, general discomfort with human sexuality, and a projected fear of everything feminine identified [8]. As a result, the presumption that when boys are anxious to demonstrate their machismo and shy away from less manly classmates out of fear of being stigmatized themselves, gender-atypical acts and sexual preferences may be hypersensitive during this phase of development [1].

### 3. The Development of Gender Awareness

According to studies, most kids learn how to categorize people into gender groups and employ those labels in speech between the ages of 18 and 24 months [17]. Rudimentary stereotypes appear around the age of two, and by the age of three, many kids have developed their basic stereotypes [17]. The rigidity of stereotypes peaked in youngsters between the ages of 5 and 6 and subsequently increased in flexibility two years later, according to research on children between the ages of 5 and 10 [17]. Preschoolers strongly believe that boys and females carry out separate activities, therefore it is believed that they will react negatively to transgressions of gender norms [17]. Girls are perceived as polite, wearing dresses, and like dolls from kindergarten until the end of the primary school, whereas guys are deemed to have short hair, engage in vigorous games, and be tough [17].

It takes a while for children to become aware of gender discrimination and the unequal statuses of the sexes. Although some younger children were aware of gender discrimination, older children had stronger perception. It may take until later in primary school for a more nuanced awareness of injustices to develop [17]. Little ones as early as six years old knew that positions that in higher likelihood of being detained by males (such as executives working in companies) have more status than jobs that are more common among women, nevertheless, only older kids (11 years old) connected imaginary “male” occupations with becoming more prestigious [17]. According to the studies, perceptions that men are entitled to more authority and respect than women significantly increased between the ages of 7 and 15 years old [17].

Additional studies described the many “norms” that kids have about preserving gender limits and discovered that kids upholding limits are easier to be well-liked by their classmates [17]. Girls and especially boys are mocked and excluded by classmates, according to research with kids who demonstrate extreme gender-nonconforming behaviors [17]. Boys who disobeyed the expectations of masculinity were bullied, rejected, or referred to as “girls” throughout middle school [17].

### 4. Secondary School Teachers’ Teaching Strategies Toward Gender-atypical Students

It is common for NTGA (non-traditional/gender atypical) students to remain on the periphery of academic life since primary and secondary schools have previously been more traditional and resistant to social change. Schools and organizations that work with young people need to prioritize educating students about the safety of NTGA youths [8]. To abate the negativity of the rejection and interpersonal victimization gender-atypical individuals experience within the secondary school settings, teaching practices and programming decisions must be reformed to create supportive school environments and adopt intervention strategies that make gender non-traditional students feel safe. Great inclusivity of diverse groups should be encouraged lest gender-atypical students are disenfranchised and anti-bullying policies should be enumerated to guarantee the well-being of the NTGA. Moreover, teachers ought to provide progressive education by popularizing the idea that gender atypicality is not an abnormal group to buffer the exclusion and hostility the gender-atypical experienced by peers and adults.

Secondary school teachers should possess the necessary knowledge they need in order to adapt their teaching (such as understanding the causes of gender inequalities and patriarchal social system, the effects of stereotypes and power-based social construct, and the development of gender awareness among middle school students) and increase the subjective action space (e.g., raising their self-efficacy with reference to boosting motivation among both boys and girls and paying attention to individuals and their competence development, learning motivation and self-regulation regardless of their gender). They should be encouraged to consider how they contributed to the formation of gender disparities and the rigidity of traditional gender norms, and lastly lower gender stereotypes among

secondary school students and educate them to embrace a positive view on heterogeneity and diversity.

In addition, fostering student-run LGBT associations, establishing LGBT service along with research centers inside schools, and establishing Gay-Straight Alliance can be applied to enrich the knowledge of middle school students about homosexuality and abate the negativity of homophobia among them, thus buffering the stigma experienced by gender-atypical youths.

Our sexist, homophobic, and heterosexist society significantly restricts NTGA boys' ability to develop into healthy adults. All grownups need to be aware of this plight and start acting to help the NTGA youngsters. Reduce the hatred and disdain that are directed at these guys as much as possible so they can live safely and freely. They're entitled to forging personalities grounded in embracing oneself, fullness, and self-worth of their true nature as capable, important, deserving, and worthwhile individuals [8].

## 5. Conclusion

Gender-atypical individuals refer explicitly to males with feminine qualities and females with masculine qualities, namely those who deviate from traditional gender expectations in terms of dress, look and interests and often viewed as gender incorrect by society. It is usual for the gender-atypical boys and girls to remain on the periphery of academic life and face the plight consisting of exclusion, rejection and victimization by peers or adults. It is the sexist, homophobic, and misogynic society that underlies the precarious environment which takes a toll on NTGA youngsters' physical and psychological well-being. The youngsters who break the gender role compliance are perceived as betrayers of conventional gender norms, deviants from the mainstream or homosexuals who may stigmatize the heterosexuals and will be punished or abused to warn and force other youths into norms, thus enforcing and reinforcing the conventions. Since elementary and middle schools have previously been more traditional and resistant to social change and students at that age are more likely to strengthen the patriarchal social system and conventional gender norms, secondary school teacher plays an pivotal role in cultivating the correct gender awareness among youngsters and giving NTGA students the potential to grow into adults with healthy personalities by buffering the exclusion and hostility the gender-atypical experienced in middle school.

Through strategies like implementing anti bullying polices, providing progressive education which encourages greater inclusivity, being equipped with necessary knowledge about the emergence and influence of gender role compliance and patriarchal social system and eliminating prejudices about homosexuality among students by establishing relevant organizations or research centers, teachers can set up a more supportive, inclusive and safe environment, thus helping gender-atypical students get rid of the plight within the secondary school settings. It is of great necessity for everyone to embrace the idea that gender atypicality is not an abnormal group and hold a friendly and equal attitude towards them. And since gender-atypical teenagers are in a special and sensitive phase of growth, secondary school teachers should develop and adopt specific strategies to help and support these students.

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