The Influencing Factors of Gender Stereotypes

- Based on Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: In today's society, gender stereotypes still exist in many aspects of life. Gender stereotype is one of the important factors that cause social gender problems. Preschool is an important period for the formation of gender cognition. The gender stereotype formed in preschool can affect the children's subsequent development, and it is deeply rooted even after they become adults. The healthy gender role cognition will have the profound significance to the young child's future occupation choice and psychological health. Therefore, it is necessary to carry on the correct gender education to the young children in the preschool period. The theme of this study is to analyze the influencing factors of gender stereotypes based on early childhood education. This study analyzed the characteristics of young children. It is found that adult language, dressing, material provision, picture books and magazines for children, and adult behavior are all influential factors for the formation of young children's gender stereotypes and put forward the corresponding proposals from the social perspective, adults, kindergarten three aspects.

Keywords: preschool education, gender stereotypes, gender role identify

1. Introduction

Men should go out to work and be the main breadwinner in the home, while women take care of the household; men are rational and women are emotional; men are unbending and can offer little emotional value, and women are tender and delicate... All of these are common stereotypes of men and women today. Gender stereotypes arise from the long-standing role assignments of different genders in different fields, and the comparison between these assignments and the induction of the typical performances of men and women produce gender stereotypes [1]. The gender stereotype has been recognized and solidified in the process of social development. But in fact, gender stereotypes are one of the main factors exacerbating social inequality [2]. A woman may be considered "Unfit to study math and science" at school and may have doubts and self-constraints about her abilities, which may further influence her future career choices. Women will be asked if they plan to get married or pregnant because women are considered to be a service provider and need to take care of family matters and children's education. It is considered strange for men to cry when suffering and grief. With the progress of society and the attention to gender issues, gender equality has become a global tide. A growing number of people are dissatisfied with the so-called masculine and feminine

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stereotypes and the traditional gender division of labour and pursue a more diverse and egalitarian society. Preschool is a critical period for the formation of gender cognition, and a person will acquire a constant understanding of gender in early childhood. Preschool is also a critical period for dealing with gender stereotypes [2]. Gender stereotyping in early childhood can aggravate children's understanding of gender inequality and social development, thus affecting children's gender cognition, academic and career choices in adulthood [2]. In the process of acquiring children's gender cognition, parents, practitioners and the surrounding environment are undoubtedly external influencing factors.

This study analyzes the influencing factors of gender stereotypes- based on early childhood education. It aims to provide reference and consultation for parents and practitioner's educational methods.

2. Characteristics of Children

Gender constancy first proposed by Kolberg, which is a permanent biological property that is not altered by external, superficial qualities. Studies have shown that children between the ages of three and five have a better understanding of gender stability and that children recognize that gender does not change with age, but do not yet know that gender does not change with external conditions. At the same time, because of the accumulation of gender stereotypes, children's gender stereotypes will become more and more rigid [3]. Bandura believed that observational learning is an important way of learning. Children will observe the same-sex parents, teachers, and gradually learn to imitate the same-sex behavior patterns, inhibition of their own gender is not suitable for their own gender behavior, in order to show their own gender role behavior [4]. Under the Lawrence Kohlbreg's stages of moral development theory, children are at the preconventional level. Once the authority appears, they will adhere to the absolute view of authority in order to protect their own interests [5]. In life, children generally take parents or teachers as the authority, adult gender stereotyping behavior will be regarded as rigid rules for children. Because of these psychological characteristics, young children will be more vulnerable to the impact of adults and the environment.

3. Influence Factors

3.1. Adult Language

In the context of language environment, it has been proved that gender stereotypes exist in common words and phrases through the analysis of a certain corpora. From personality traits to occupational associations, gender stereotypes are widely spread through language [6]. Adjectives can be distinguished by gender stereotypes, with "Strong" and "Tough" belonging to men and "Gentle" being a feminine trait. The results show that the association between gender and occupation is also prevalent in the natural language of adults and children [6]. When occupations such as "Nurse" and "Teacher" are mentioned, the first image that most people think of is a female nurse and teacher. "Military", "Police" and "Fireman" were considered more suitable occupations for men. In English, the root of the word "woman" is "man", and the root of the word "female" is "male", which means that women exist as a non-default gender attached to men. In Chinese and English grammar, "man" and "he" can refer to men and women in general [7]. This can be seen in many common proverbs, such as "One man, no man", "A man can do no more than he can". Most people are accustomed to use the pronoun "he" if they don't know a person's sex, but if we're talking about an elementary school teacher or a secretary, "she" will be used as a personal pronoun. An internationally recognized etiquette, "Lady first", also implies a connection between women and the trait "vulnerability" and "need special care". The development of language has also spread the understanding of gender stereotypes and attracted people to seek identity and meet social expectations, thus strengthening gender stereotypes. The main source of children's language learning is adult's education and language environment. As the gender stereotypes exist in the natural language, and the adult frequently use it, young children's perception of gender stereotypes will be affected.

In the adult's language teaching to young children, the choice and use of words and sentences can convey a gender perspective, which will also have an impact on young children. The first thing should be noticed is the comparison of children of different genders. For boys, a common expression is "Even girls can do it, you should do it better". This description undoubtedly tells young children a stereotype: boys are stronger than girls, a boy cannot "lose to a girl". It is normal for a girl to be inferior to a boy in some way because "It is determined by her gender". "A girl should be beautiful." is also a common sentence that reminds girls to pay more attention to their appearance and dress. When a boy cries, he may be told that this is not allowed because "A man cannot cry lightly", while a sporty girl may be asked to "Act like a girl". There is also the use of gender labels to describe neutral people [8]. For example, "She is doing housework", "He is fixing the computer". Such sentences subtly divide what activities belong to men and what activities belong to women. Bigler's gender classroom experiment has shown that in kindergartens, if gender is frequently mentioned by teachers, such as when queuing or sitting in a seat, teachers categorize children according to gender, "One column for boys and one column for girls", "Boys and girls, please quiet!", such words will make children deepen the distinction between the different genders [9]. If young children are classified by teachers on the basis of gender when teachers organize and implement activities, children will associate many activities, personality traits with gender, leading them to stereotype certain activities as belonging only to girls and certain activities as belonging only to boys [9].

3.2. Dress up/Material Supply

In terms of dress, many adults will choose delicate, beautiful clothes and skirts for girls, and for boys to provide clothing that loose and convenient to do sports. Beautiful clothing can increase girls' attention to appearance, and hinder girls to participate in activities to some extent and may cause a girl to quit outdoor activities because she "doesn't want to get her clothes dirty". When girls can only do quiet activities because of their clothes, but boys can exercise freely, the gender stereotypes that girls are quiet and stable, and boys are active were aggravated. But in fact, regardless of gender, sport is a major way to develop young children's gross motor skills, especially outdoor sports. China's "Kindergarten work procedures" have specific provisions on this: children's outdoor activities not less than 2 hours every day [10].

The color of clothing is also an aspect of gender stereotypes. Because adults often tend to choose gender-specific color products for children, such as pink clothes, toys with girls; blue clothes, toys with boys and so on, this behavior results in children being exposed to this color difference with gender stereotypes, which may lead children to think that "color is the information that marks the gender type" [4]. This kind of collocation will let the child form which color suits the male, which color belongs to the female. Studies have shown that boys who are assigned pink, purple, and white materials in an activity show lower engineering ability because people are more critical of men who participate in female stereotypes [11]. This indicated that color also affects children's gender stereotypes and further influences children to display their ability.

In the provision of materials and toys for young children, in addition to the color of materials may carry a gender stereotype, the type of material can also convey gender bias. Adults may have a biased perception that boys are better at constructing competitive games and that girls prefer social games [2]. Based on this prejudice, parents will provide more blocks and chess games for boys, and dolls for girls. This will make young children form the mind-set that boys' and girls' toys or games are not the same, accelerating the formation of gender stereotypes. And such measures may also separate

children from certain types of games, weakening the corresponding ability of young children and the development of social ability.

3.3. Picture Books/Children Magazines

Picture book are important medium to influence the formation and development of children's gender stereotype, and it can convey the social's sexual expectation of children [12]. In many picture books, the images of the characters and the occupations of the adults carry the stereotyped gender dualism, thus the children's gender stereotyping will be strengthened. Through the observation and statistics of picture books, it has been found that the men in picture books are usually engaged in high-tech jobs, while the women are mainly engaged in auxiliary and service jobs, and women are more likely to work at home and raise children, while men are silent, busy at work and less likely to take care of their family [13, 14]. Such portrayals ignore the importance of women's work to society, ascribing housework to women's work, and the absence of men in the family and the education of children seems to be a natural thing. Such portrayals inevitably leave young children with the impression that there is a division of labour between the sexes, that women need to juggle work and family even become housewives, and that there seems to be no expectation that men will take care of the family. In addition, although there is a lack of a male image in the family, men (fathers) can be the primary caregivers for children in activities related to outings and adventures, which connects the brave and independent traits with the male [14]. Similarly, female's family work, which connects the virtuous trait with the female, and shows the gender stereotype of the character traits. In some fairy tale adaptations of the picture book, the woman is in a passive state, such as "Snow White" and "Sleeping Beauty", in which the two princesses (female) fall asleep, can only passively wait for the prince (male) rescue. Although these picture books convey the pursuit of good feelings, but females still lack subjective initiative in the whole story [13]. In addition to adult images, the portrayal of children in picture books also has an impact on children's gender concept. Love to cry and docile girls, Bold and brave boys are the typical image of children in the picture books. Such images subtly define gender differences and convey them to young children.

Children's magazines are another type of print media that children have extensive access to. Studies have shown that magazines for girls focus more on appearance and family, while magazines for boys focus more on education and work [15]. This difference distinguishes between women's activities (grooming, taking care of the family) and men's activities (studying and working hard for the future). In addition, the behavior of seeking help from adults was much higher in magazines with a female audience than in magazines that target boys [15]. This conveys the stereotype that girls are more vulnerable and dependent on others, and that girls may be more likely to seek help because of the information in these magazines, affecting the development of self-reliance and strength in girls. At the same time, boys may view asking for help as something only girls do and may feel ashamed of asking for help and suppress their legitimate needs.

3.4. Behavior

Parents will unconsciously pass on adult gender rules to young children, and their behavior will affect children's gender stereotypes. Parents' behavior can be divided into parents' usual behavior and parents' reaction to their children's behavior. If parents continue the traditional gender division of labor, with men working outside and women in charge of housework and child rearing, then children will be easily affected by such a gender division of labor and form the stereotyped gender attitudes early. In terms of parents' responses to their children's behavior, studies have found that as early as infancy, parents are already transmitting negative and positive feedback about gender [16]. Parents' responses reinforce young children's behavior, such as smiling and encouraging them when they

behave in a manner appropriate to their gender and discouraging or criticizing them when they do not [16]. For example, boys are encouraged to play with toys such as robots, but are denied requests for plush toys, and girls are not encouraged to engage in risky sports. In the discipline of children, Parents may view boys' aggressive and rule-breaking behavior as natural, and girls' displays of timidity as normal [17]. This tolerance will let the children think that boys should be lively and active, girls should be fragile, aggravating the children's division of personality traits.

Teachers' assumptions and expectations of young children with gender stereotypes can limit young children's perception of their true abilities and even their future life choices [18]. If the teacher in the organization of the activity has a biased view of young children, such as that girls will not perform well in math and science, and that boys are more difficult to discipline, it will not only restrict the development of young children's ability (for instance, mathematical ability and rule awareness), and even cause harm to young children. Especially in children's role play, teachers' intervention will have a great impact on children. Role play is a prominent feature in children's social development, is a child according to their own wishes, creative reproduction of social situations of the game [19]. Common role plays games include playing house, police games and so on. If a boy is stopped by a teacher while playing house, then the boy may be implanted with the idea that the man does not have to take care of his family. If a girl is not encouraged to play the police game, the profession's gender stereotype of her will be reinforced. Moreover, kindergarten teachers are mostly female and may substitute their own gender expectations in the process of play [19]. For example, if a female kindergarten teacher takes on more traditional gender roles in her life, such as cooking and raising children, she may pass this gender expectation on to young children. Girls are encouraged to playhouse and cook games while boys are given a negative attitude towards these types of games.

4. Proposal

4.1. Social Perspectives

In order to cultivate healthy gender attitudes among children, macro-social attitudes must be changed. With the development of social productivity, women have been more and more involved in social work, men and women are facing the same academic, work, and other aspects of competition. Although social development is constantly changing the requirements of gender roles, gender role stereotypes have not been fundamentally changed [20]. For instance, the Chinese ministry of education's response to the proposal to prevent the feminization of male adolescents mentioned that "more emphasis should be placed on the of cultivation of male masculinity" [21]. In this response, masculinity (Yang Gang) refers to "traditional masculine traits" such as courage and commitment. Then why not use these words instead of the word "masculinity", and why not emphasize that women can have the same traits? The word "Feminization" is also thought-provoking. It represents traditional feminine traits, such as gentleness and thoughtfulness, but the presence of men with these traits is considered negative. Whether strong or gentle are good character, should not be defined by gender.

The media, such as children's film and television works and picture books, should also pay attention to the elimination of gender stereotyping in their works, to convey healthy gender concepts to children. In the picture book "The Paper Bag Princess", the image of princess and prince made a clear challenge to the traditional image of female and male [13]. At the beginning of the story, the prince and the princess are about to live happily ever after, but a dragon destroys their castle and takes away the prince. The prince despised the princess's ragged clothes. The princess scolded the prince and left forever. In this story, the prince becomes the object to be rescued, and the princess acts smart, brave, and decisive, compared to the traditional story of the prince to save the princess created a new image of female. Children's films and television works, picture books, children's magazines and other

works can create more colorful characters, such as a decisive female leader, a cook delicious and like to take care of children's family husband, a brave girl who likes adventure, a boy who likes singing and dancing. These images can enrich children's understanding of gender and reduce children's gender stereotypes. In addition, children's toys, clothing manufacturers should also avoid the obvious color (blue, pink), content and other aspects of gender discrimination [2].

4.2. Adults

Adults should correct gender attitudes and form scientific educational concepts [22].

4.2.1. Parents

Parents should support and encourage young children to try so-called "opposite-sex activities" and be open to children learning "opposite-sex characteristics" [22]. For instance, when boys want to make handicrafts and girls want to play football, parents should encourage and guide them so that young children can overcome the concerns that gender stereotypes may bring and make bold attempts. In the same way, parents can encourage girls to be brave and firm, boys to be gentle and careful, and to cultivate good character in young children. Parents should respect the right of young children to express and communicate, as well as young children's choice, when children in the choice of toys and companions, not to stop arbitrary [23]. Parents don't have to define what behavior belongs to boys, what behavior belongs to girls, or "Boys can't play with girls", and so on. Instead, they should not stop girls from playing with toy pistols and boys from playing with plush toys, allow young children to participate in different activities, thus promoting the all-round development of children. Parents should also help their children acquire the knowledge that "differences make the world more colorful", so that children accept differences, eliminate discrimination, learn to appreciate the diversity of the world, and build inclusive values [23].

In child discipline, parents also need to downplay their own gender stereotypes [20]. In the family, there is a very common saying that men "Help" do housework, but this widespread perception is not correct. Housework is not the responsibility of a wife or mother, nor should there be a male to help. Regardless of gender, household chores should be shared by each family member, which can enrich the gender role models of young children. Parents can also guide children to do what they can, such as cleaning up after dinner. Boys who grow up in such a family environment will not think that housework only needs to be done by women and will not refuse to do housework when they grow up. Some parents even have gender-biased attitudes, believing that only boys need to study hard and become the pride of the family, thus demanding achievement from boys and relaxing the requirements for girls. This kind of seemingly tough on boys, gentle on girls parenting is actually a kind of neglect of girls. Parents should treat boys and girls equally and carry out their upbringing and education on an equal footing.

4.2.2. Preschool Teachers

For preschool teachers, they should set up correct gender role concept and guide the development of preschool children's gender awareness scientifically. Teachers should adhere to the concept of lifelong learning, and continue to learn about gender equality, gender stereotypes and related concepts and knowledge, and through teaching children this attitude. Teachers should also pay attention to the development of different gender awareness of young children and be timely aware of the existence of gender stereotypes among young children and give guidance [22]. Teachers should take note of their words and deeds and avoid the frequent use of gender as a criterion to distinguish young children. In guiding children's role play, teachers should respect children's choice of roles and not assign roles to children based on traditional gender stereotypes. Teachers should let children know that occupations are not exclusive to a specific gender. Moreover, preschool teachers should encourage cooperation between children of different genders, so that children learn each other's good qualities and know that different personality traits should not be divided by gender [19]. Teachers should ensure that children's anti-gender stereotypical behavior is not subject to prejudice and stigmatization from peers [18]. When this kind of situation appears, the teacher must stop in time, and seize the opportunity carries on the gender concept education to the young child. In the organization of kindergarten activities, preschool teachers can try to reduce gender stereotypes, such as female teachers lead children to participate in sports activities, male teachers lead children to do crafts. In collective teaching activities, teachers should actively organize the development of gender equality, to eliminate gender stereotypes of the curriculum, to systematically train children's correct gender concept [22]. As preschool teachers who have received professional training, they should have mastered more knowledge related to children and be familiar with the law of children's development. So, they can provide scientific guidance for parents. Only the family and kindergarten requirements consistent, children will not feel concerned and confused about different standards.

4.3. Kindergarten

Kindergarten needs to provide a variety of materials for children, such as role play costumes and building game material, to avoid children conflicting caused by insufficient materials. In addition, kindergartens should purchase and provide non-gender-stereotyped materials for young children, such as minimizing the use of blue and pink materials and providing non-gender-stereotyped picture books in the reading area. In terms of setting up the environment, kindergartens should also avoid the use of colors that are easily associated with gender stereotypes, especially in the division of different activity areas for young children. If the picture is used to decorate the kindergarten, then the figures in the picture should include different genders in different occupations, such as both male and female teachers, both male and female police officers. These measures can enrich children's knowledge of gender, reduce children's gender stereotypes, imperceptibly affect children's gender attitudes.

There are fewer male teachers in kindergartens and a larger proportion of female kindergarten teachers, so increasing the number of male kindergarten teachers can not only enrich the teaching staff, but also benefit the healthy development of the gender roles of young children [22]. If children can only see female teachers in kindergarten, in the long run, children will have a career stereotype that only women will choose to become teachers. The increase of male teachers can also make children know more men than fathers and male relatives and enrich children's understanding of gender. Kindergarten teachers should be trained regularly to deepen their understanding of gender equality, to be more sensitive to gender stereotypes and to enhance their ability to judge and set an example for young children. Kindergartens can also set up lectures for parents, so that parents have the opportunity to learn parenting methods.

5. Conclusion

Based on this study, adult language, clothing and materials for young children, picture books and children's magazines for young children, and adult behavior are all factors that influence young children's gender stereotypes. Because children are good at imitation and the law of Children's gender concept development that have been proved by research, children will be more vulnerable to external factors, and form gender stereotypes. Based on the above factors, it is suggested that the social concept, the works aimed at children, the scientific education methods of adult and kindergarten teachers, the material supply of kindergarten, the creation of environment, the allocation of teachers, the training of preschool teachers and parents is proposed. The formation of gender stereotype should be attached importance to, and try to avoid the formation of gender stereotypes, so that young children

can establish a healthy gender concept and obtain an all-round development. It can be hoped that with the improvement of education, children can become an inclusive individual, to create a more colorful world.

The follow-up research can expand and refine the influencing factors of children's gender stereotype and, with the development of the times, put forward more scientific suggestions on early childhood education. In addition to psychological and external factors, biological factors such as hormones can also be considered.

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