

Research on Gender Identity Education for Students in Middle School

Qiaoli Lu

Mingde Lugu School, High-tech Industrial Development Zone, Changsha, Hunan, 410221

ABSTRACT

The middle school stage is a critical period for healthy growth in life. However, there is a common phenomenon of gender role dislocation in the group of middle school students, which seriously affects their healthy growth. Therefore, it is very necessary to provide appropriate gender identity education for middle school students. This article conducts a comprehensive and in-depth analysis and research on the common gender role dislocation among middle school students, and puts forward specific suggestions from three aspects: strengthening campus gender education, family gender education, and correct guidance of social public opinion.

KEYWORDS

Middle School Students; Gender Education; Phenomenon; Cause; Countermeasures

1 Gender Role Confusion Among Middle School Students Is Becoming Increasingly Noticeable

Currently, a significant trend of "role reversal" can be observed among middle school students. Boys no longer behave like typical boys, and girls no longer behave like typical girls. This phenomenon can be summed up in the following aspects.

(1) Clothing and Style

Many boys are showing a preference for traditionally feminine styles with growing hair long, paying close attention to cleanliness, enjoying dressing up, and often wearing brightly colored clothes. Meanwhile, many girls prefer short, boyish haircuts, dress in Korean-style menswear, and avoid wearing skirts. Especially, there has been a noticeable trend in middle schools toward androgynous fashion, with students embracing messy short haircuts resembling bird's nests, oversized faux glasses, and similar unisex styling choices.

(2) Behavioral Patterns

Many boys speak in a soft, high-pitched voice, act spoiled, and get shy when speaking in front of people. Meanwhile, many girls have loud, confident voices, speak boldly, and show a lot of self-assurance. Their behavior can be rough, bold, and even exhibit some signs of aggression. During the annual military training for incoming middle school students, a striking gender contrast becomes apparent: many male students cry openly during the drills, some express homesickness, others dramatically claim "can't go on living" if the training continues. While many female students, in contrast, display remarkable strength and resilience.

(3) Extracurricular Preferences

An increasing number of male students are demonstrating diminished interest in sports or structured athletic activities, instead favoring more delicate pursuits traditionally associated with femininity-such as playing musical instruments or collecting butterflies. At New Year's Eve galas, boys are increasingly featured in dance performances and piano recitals. Meanwhile, many female students enthusiastically embrace physical education classes and contact sports such as basketball and taekwondo, and enjoy watching violent animations and horror films. At sports meets, girls are increasingly dominating the podium, outperforming their male peers in track and competitive events.

(4) Interpersonal Communication

In peer interactions, many middle school boys exhibit behaviors diverging from traditional masculinity-being petty in disputes, emotionally reactive during conflicts, and frequently clustering in female-dominated social circles. When facing interpersonal tensions, some boys even resort to stereotypically "girlish" behaviors like crying to resolve issues. Conversely, many girls display conventionally "masculine" traits: fiercely competitive, stubborn, status-conscious, and often rejecting same-gender socialization in favor of mixed-gender peer groups. During outdoor activities, some girls proactively assume caretaker roles for physically slight boys.

2 Media Misguidance and Lack of Gender Education Affect Gender Identity Among Middle School Students

Nowadays, the confusion of gender roles among middle school students is no longer an isolated phenomenon. One of the key factors contributing to this issue is the misguidance or absence of proper gender education.

(1) Negative Influence from Mass Media and Broader Society

In recent years, under the influence of popular domestic talent shows and variety programs, public attention has increasingly focused on "Androgynous girls" and "Floral pretty boys" idols. Adolescents in middle school, driven by a strong desire to follow trends and embrace fashion, are particularly susceptible. While it is normal for students at this age to admire celebrities-and to go through phases of liking different types of idols, including the recent wave of androgynous figures-the excessive promotion and hype by certain media outlets have amplified this trend among teenagers, encouraging admiration and imitation. From the perspective of gender education, however, such media sensationalism has led to confusion and misdirection regarding gender identity and roles among adolescents. As a result, schools are witnessing a growing mismatch in gender traits and roles among male and female students.

(2) The Lack of Gender Education in Families

A major factor contributing to gender identity confusion among today's middle school students is the failure of family education. In many households, fathers are preoccupied with their careers, leaving most child-rearing responsibilities to mothers. As a result, fathers are often absent or play only a minimal role in their children's upbringing, depriving boys of male role models to learn from or emulate. In some one-child families, children grow up without siblings-boys have no older brothers to look up to, nor sisters to compare themselves with. In such environments, boys may be more prone to developing feminine traits. On the other hand, under the lingering influence of traditional gender biases that favor boys over girls, some boys are overly pampered by the entire family-especially by female family members. This excessive care can lead to the development of delicate, overly sensitive, and effeminate behaviors that diverge from traditional masculine traits.

(3) The Neglect of Gender Identity Education in Schools.

At present, middle school education in China largely remains focused on academic instruction, neglecting to guide students in understanding how individuals of different genders should align with socially recognized gender roles. Schools often fail to help students recognize that both boys and girls should build on the strengths of their own gender while learning from the opposite sex to overcome personal weaknesses-rather than allowing boys to become feminized or girls to become overly masculine. There are no dedicated gender education materials or curricula, nor are there gender-aware evaluation systems for students. In addition, there is a serious gender imbalance among teaching staff in many middle schools, with women accounting for over 80% of teachers in some schools. Under the overwhelming influence of female teachers, a significant number of male students exhibit traits traditionally considered feminine: a lack of masculinity, flamboyant clothing styles, soft-spoken voices, delicate movements, gentle and timid personalities, and low emotional resilience.

3 Strategies and Suggestions for Strengthening Gender Identity Education Among Middle School Students

Middle school is a crucial stage in a young person's development, making appropriate gender education essential. It not only directly affects students' academic performance and psychological growth, but also plays a key role in shaping their future social interactions, romantic relationships, marriage, and family life. Therefore, families, schools, and society at large should pay close attention to gender education for middle school students and work together to help them develop a well-rounded and healthy personality.

(1) Strengthening Gender Education in Schools

Male and female middle school students show distinct differences not only in cognitive abilities but also in emotion, willpower, and personality. In the educational process, schools should help students understand the importance of embracing and fulfilling their gender roles in adapting to society. At the same time, students should be encouraged to adjust themselves appropriately based on their individual traits-so they can both meet societal expectations and maintain their personal identity. Students whose gender roles differ significantly from societal norms should receive proper guidance and psychological support. They need to understand that regardless of being male or female, everyone should build on their gender-based strengths while learning from the opposite sex to overcome their own personality shortcomings-rather than boys becoming feminized or girls becoming overly masculine. In short, schools should acknowledge the different characteristics of male and female students and adopt differentiated educational strategies that respect these differences. Gender-aware teaching can help promote the healthy and balanced development of all students.

(2) Strengthening Gender Education in Families

Firstly, parents must acknowledge and learn to appreciate their child's gender. Research has shown that gender identity is a crucial part of a child's self-awareness. Only when children feel comfortable with their gender will they develop positive feelings towards the gender characteristics of their same-sex peers and desire to embody those traits. If

parents, due to their own unmet expectations, confuse or pressure their children into certain gender roles, it may lead the child to develop a dislike for their own gender, resulting in gender role confusion. At the same time, parents should set a proper gender example. Children often model their behavior based on the knowledge and cues they receive from their surroundings. Therefore, parents are the most important guides and role models when it comes to gender roles. Parents must be mindful of their own gender behavior and help their children select same-gender peers to interact with.

(3) Strengthening the Positive Promotion, Guidance, and Evaluation of Social Opinion

Social attitudes toward "what boys should be like" and "what girls should be like" serve as the primary source for shaping young people's gender concepts. Therefore, society as a whole should place great importance on gender education for middle school students. In practice, it is crucial to effectively utilize traditional media such as television, video, and radio to reinforce and highlight the societal traits of gender roles, subtly influencing the socialization of students' gender identities. At the same time, we must also consider the role and impact of "fourth media" such as the internet in the development of gender roles among middle school students. Various beneficial activities should be organized to encourage both boys and girls to participate together, creating opportunities for students to learn how to interact with the opposite sex, complement each other's strengths, and develop mutual understanding. Additionally, gender education seminars and discussion forums can be held in communities to create a positive, progressive atmosphere around gender education, helping and guiding students to improve their gender awareness and understanding.

References

- [1] Zhu Xiongjun, Feng Xiaohui, Su Zhiyu. Research on gender identity and influencing factors of primary school students—Empirical analysis based on C-S primary school [J]. Beijing Youth Research, 2024, 33(03).
- [2] Li Jiaru. Exploration and practice of project-based teaching in gender education - taking female learning courses as an example [J]. Knowledge Library, 2024, 40 (01).
- [3] Wang Yan. Remission of gender imbalance: A case study on the introduction of male volunteers in kindergartens [J]. Language and Educational Research, 2023, 7 (04).
- [4] Fang Gang. Gender education on campus in Taiwan[J]. Chinese Social Guide, 2007,(2).
- [5] Qiang Haiyan. Gender Differences and Education [M]. Xi'an: Shaanxi People's Education Press, 2000.
- [6] Wu Haihong. Gender research in education. East China Normal University [J], 2004.
- [7] Su Li. On the construction of gender culture in the perspective of school education [J]. Journal of Fujian Normal University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition), 2004,(4).
- [8] Li Shaomei. On the importance of gender education for young people [J]. Journal of Shaanxi Youth Management Cadre College, 2001, (1).
- [9] Fang Gang. Thoughts on introducing gender education into school sex education [J]. Chinese Sexology, 2007, (10).