Do Gender Stereotypes Permeate among Chinese of Different Age Groups?

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Abstract. The aim of the study is to explore the extent to which gender stereotypes existed among Chinese people of different age groups and genders. An online survey was designed to measure endorsement of gender stereotypes across four dimensions: appearance, personality, life choice, and career. The questionnaire used five-point scale in which high score meant high agreement with the stereotypes. The findings showed that participants demonstrated different levels of gender stereotypes across the four dimensions. They agreed with the personality stereotypes the most, and the appearance stereotypes ranked the last. Also, there were significant positive correlations among these four dimensions, showing that different types of gender stereotypes were related to each other. With regard to gender differences, male participants showed stronger agreement with personality, life choice, and career dimensions than female participants, but no significant gender differences about appearance. In terms of age differences, people over 40 demonstrated stronger endorsement of the stereotypes than those who were under 26. In general, the current study indicates that gender stereotypes still existed in Chinese society, but the traditional norms became less during the development.

Keywords: Gender stereotype, appearance, personality, life choice, career, age differences, gender differences.

1. Introduction

In our daily life, people judge others of different genders depending on gender stereotypes across four main dimensions including appearance, personality, life choices, and career. In appearance which may influence not only people's body image but also self-esteem and interpersonal communication. Gender norms have created pressure since childhood. Women are expected to be slim and white-skinned, on the other hand, men are expected to be strong and have healthy skin color. In addition, people will quickly generate gender stereotype based on the norms, which affects the first impression and communication patterns. Moreover, women experience greater stress than men, because society is stricter about female appearance. Gender stereotypes of personality influence people's view of behavior and leadership of different genders. Based on the Big Five, women score higher in agreeableness, warmth, and neuroticism, and men usually get high score in assertiveness which are always associated with leadership. In society, people may be aware of the stereotypes of personality, but unconscious biases still affect their behaviors. In the domain of life choices, even though the idea of gender equality becomes more common, men still face the expectation related to family financial responsibility, and women take the responsibility for family care. Moreover, men are always encouraged to seek opportunities far away from their home town. However, women are more likely to be suggested to stay close to their families and be the caregivers. Also, there is a concept named motherhood which means that people often associate a complete and happy life of a woman with being a mother, so women with no kids face the stress of negative comments from the society. Finally, regarding career, in traditional social career norms, men do better in works that requires physical strength and technology, and women do better in caring, and service-based work. These stereotypes affect people's self-concept, then affect how they choose majors and jobs. Furthermore, career stereotypes also make the opportunities of development in workplace for men and women different. This essay reviews studies on gender stereotypes of these four dimensions to demonstrate how gender stereotypes reinforce inequality in daily communication, and even shape access to opportunities.

2. Literature Review

When looking at the four domains of appearance, personality, life choices, and career, it was clear that gender stereotypes influenced people's lives in many ways. People had been influenced by appearance-related stereotypes since childhood, especially girls. Faragó et al. [1] (p. 12) stated that even parents and peers could make appearance stereotyping stronger: "Girls who perceived stronger pressure from peers to conform to gender norms held stronger anti-fat stereotypes" and "Stronger parental pressure to fit gender norms was linked to stronger appearance stereotyping." In Muth et al. [2], 22% of the men and 40% of the women reported an unfavorable overall body image, while Murnen and Don [3] argued that women were supposed to be "thin and sexy" and men were supposed to be "strong and muscular." However, body image standards were not only an individual's concern but also a result of gender norms. Gül Unlü's [4] study compared Turkey and Portugal to examine how appearance stereotypes affected communication. When people met a stranger, they first made judgements based on appearance, using existing gender stereotypes. Then they might have expected others to behave according to these norms, but behavior that was different from their expectations often caused negative comments. It had to be mentioned that, according to Gül Unlü [4], physical appearance was a more important component in the evaluation process for women than for men. The data showed that, in Turkey, 26.4% of people reported that physical appearance was the first characteristic they noticed when they met a woman for the first time, but when they met a man, the figure was only 22.4%. Overall, appearance was a characteristic, but at the same time, it was also a social construct shaped by gender stereotypes.

In personality, some research used the Big Five to study gender differences in personality traits and found that men usually received high scores in assertiveness, while women scored higher in agreeableness and warmth. However, the differences among people of the same gender were often greater than those between two different genders, so gender stereotypes about personality should not have been exaggerated or used to stereotype an individual. Research by Panerati et al. [5] found that the evidence suggested that women were judged across multiple dimensions, making it difficult for them to fulfill all of the expectations imposed by society. It was interesting that Dennhag et al.'s study in 2019 [6], which used the matched-guise technique, found that even though the words were the same, people often made different personality judgements. When listening to a female voice, people felt that the speaker was warm and friendly, but male voices were easily associated with authority. Also, people who supported gender equality might have had implicit gender bias that influenced their automatic judgements.

In the dimension of life choices, the breadwinner norm still existed widely. Men were usually expected to be the financial providers of their families, and women were expected to be caregivers, even if the wife had a higher income. For example, a mother said, "There is more of a social expectation in that when I'm home that I'm gonna, you know, take care and be with kids" [7] (p. 19). If a woman devoted more time to work, society thought that she was not a competent mother. Silvey [8] discussed how gender and social power shape migration and mobility opportunities. Men were expected to be ambitious, so they were encouraged to seek career advancement, but women were considered more suitable for staying in their hometowns and providing care at any time, which shaped different educational and life-development paths. Gender stereotypes also shaped motherhood norms. Society treated becoming a mother as the most important goal of adult women. This showed the influence of gender norms, as society considered that women could gain a sense of worth from being mothers but ignored women's value in pursuing self-improvement and careers.

Furthermore, people had gender-stereotyped impressions of different careers, first of all because of families and the media, especially families. Hassan et al. [9] demonstrated that the career decisions of students depended on their parents' choices and the students' own perceptions regarding gender stereotypes. Therefore, men and women were valued in different types of occupational fields. According to Madushika and Samaraweera [10], in the Sri Lankan labor market, women often worked in traditional and low-income jobs. However, men were more represented in technical and high-income jobs. Therefore, gender career stereotypes continued to strengthen inequality in the labor

market. Similarly, compared with men, women were more likely to be affected by gender stereotypes when choosing majors. For example, Akinlolu [11] examined South African construction students and found that gender stereotypes discouraged women from entering the construction industry, which caused it to become a less attractive career for women. Moreover, McGuire et al. [12] examined gender stereotypes toward STEM fields among 1,206 children and teenagers. It had to be noted that participants across all age groups thought that men performed better in engineering and technology. Importantly, according to the behavioral results, the more strongly participants recognized male capability in science fields, the more they tended to ask men for help. McGuire et al. [12] (p. 456) mentioned that "Such decisions may lead youth to reinforce ability stereotypes by asking boys for help in STEM contexts." In conclusion, people lived in a society with gender career stereotypes that shaped their choices and views of careers and even led to gender imbalance in some specific careers. In short, gender stereotypes led to different attitudes and behaviors toward the two genders.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research design

This research used a quantitative research design to examine people's attitudes of gender stereotypes in four main dimensions: appearance, personality, life choice, and career. This research selected online survey as the primary way to collect data in which participants answered each statement with a five-point scale, ranging from 1(very disagree) to 5(very agree) and identified whether these gender stereotypes were accepted in nowadays society.

3.2 Participants

There was a total of 175 effective questionnaires received. The sample of 175 people contained individuals from different genders and age groups, and the participants were all voluntary to join and anonymous.

Table 1. Gender distribution

Gender	Ratio
Woman	63.43%
Man	36.57%

Table 2. Ratio of age groups

Age group	Ratio
Under 18	9.14%
18-25	24.57%
26-30	3.43%
31-40	14.86%
41-50	39.43%
51-60	7.43%
Over 60	1.14%

3.3 Measurement

Each questionnaire was measured by the five-point scale ranging from 1 to 5. Higher scores meant stronger agreement with the gender stereotype demonstrated in the questions. This research measured people's view of social gender stereotypes according to appearance, personality, life choice, and career. Means, standard deviation, and percentage were calculated to determine participants' attitudes toward different dimensions of gender stereotypes. To test the quality of the questionnaire, this research conducted the reliability and validity analyses.

4. Results

4.1 Reliability and Validity Analysis

This research used Cronbach's alpha to evaluate the reliability of the questionnaire, and the results showed a good interval consistency, wherein the appearance dimension had Cronbach's alpha of 0.80, the personality dimension 0.89, the life choice dimension 0.81, and the career dimension ranked the first place with 0.91. Thus, this research had excellent reliability.

This research also conducted the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity to test the validity. The KMO was 0.904, and Bartlett's Test was significant, which indicated that EFA could be performed on the sample. At the same time, there were four factors that could explain 58.07% data variation, showing adequate validity.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

Table 3. Mean and standard deviation of each dimension

	n	Mean	Standard deviation
Appearance	175	19.154	5.219
Personality	175	33.743	8.337
Life choice	175	23.594	6.332
Career	175	24.794	6.772

The descriptive statistics were calculated for the four dimensions of gender stereotypes, and the results were shown in Table 3. The personality dimension showed the highest mean score (M = 33.743, SD = 8.337), which suggested that participants agreed with the personality-related gender stereotypes most strongly. In contrast, the appearance dimension showed the lowest mean score (M=19.154, SD=5.219).

4.3 Correlation Analysis

This research used Pearson correlation analysis to indicate the relationships among these four dimensions.

The results showed that there were significant positive correlations among the four dimensions, and the correlation between appearance and personality was the strongest (r = 0.771), followed by the correlation between personality and life choice (r = 0.760), leaving that of appearance and life choice at merely 0.578, which illustrated that participants with a high score of one dimension were more likely to agree with other dimensions.

Table 4. Correlational matrix

	Appearance	Personality	life choice	career
Appearance	-			
personality	0.771	-		
life choice	0.578	0.761	-	
career	0.605	0.705	0.755	-

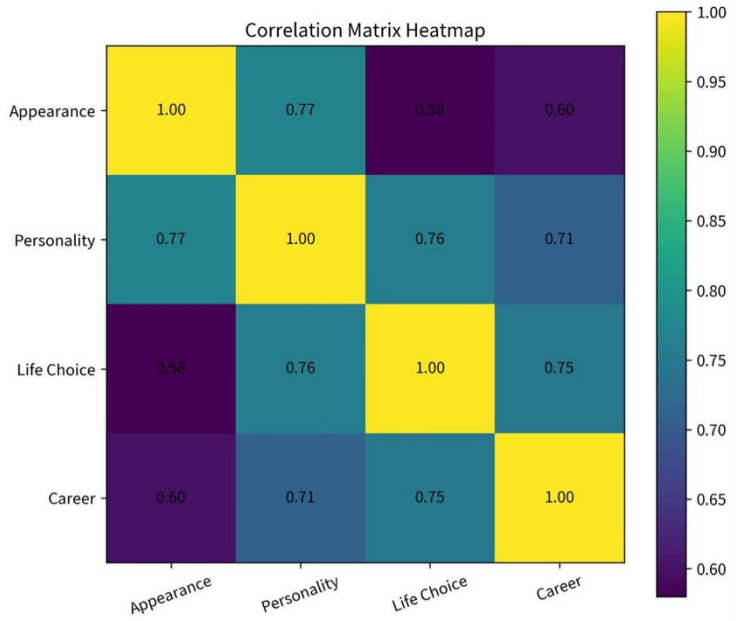


Figure 1. Correctional Matrix

4.4 Gender Differences

The independent-samples t-test was used to compare participants from different gender groups according to the four dimensions.

In the appearance dimension, no significant evidence of gender differences could be found ($p > 0.5$). However, in the remaining three dimensions, there were significant divergences between male and female participants (all $p < 0.001$). It should be noted that women scored lower on these three dimensions relative to men, indicating weaker agreement with gender stereotypes. Hence, gender might have been a factor that influenced a person's perspective of personality, life choice, and career, because male participants represented a higher level of stereotypes. However, both male and female had similar views regarding appearance-dimension gender stereotypes.

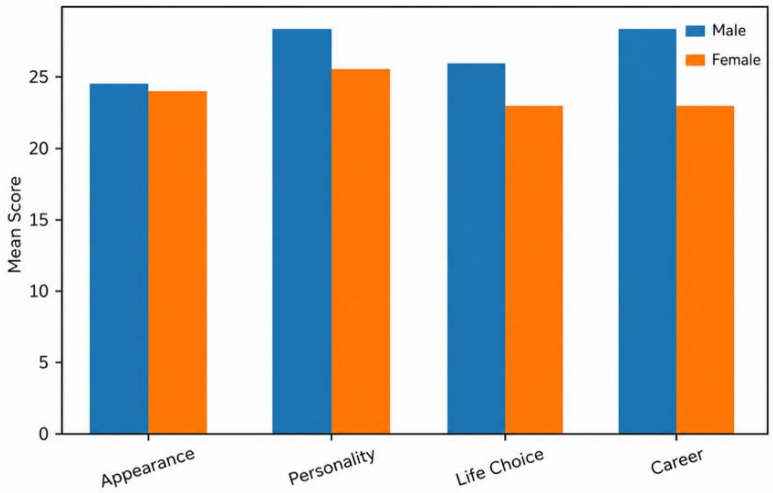


Figure 2. Bar Chart of Different Stereotypes

4.5 Age Differences

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate the differences among different age groups.

Interestingly, all four dimensions had significant age differences ($p < 0.5$), in which the group over 40 scored highest, followed by the 26–40-year-old group, and participants under 26 reported the lowest score. Tukey post hoc tests indicated that participants over 40 scored significantly higher than the under-26 group. The largest difference was found in the personality dimension (Mdiff = 10.39, p

< 0.001), followed by the appearance dimension (Mdiff = 7.02, p < 0.001), the life choice dimension (Mdiff = 5.43, p < 0.001), and the career dimension (Mdiff = 5.30, p < 0.001). The results reflected that older individuals tended to endorse gender stereotypes to a greater extent than younger individuals.

Overall, it could be concluded that agreement with traditional gender stereotypes generally increased as age increased.

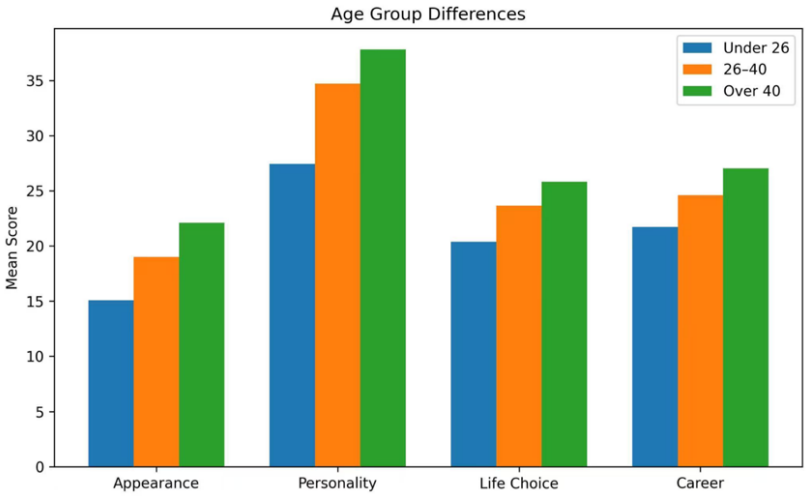


Figure 3. Gender Stereotypes Across Different Age Groups

4.6 Summary

Overall, this questionnaire had good reliability and validity. Participants showed a moderate agreement with the four dimensions of gender stereotypes: appearance, personality, life choice, and career, where the personality dimension represented the strongest endorsement. Moreover, there were significant positive correlations among these four dimensions, especially between appearance and personality. Additionally, male participants showed a stronger belief in gender stereotypes than females, and the level of stereotypes grew with age.

5. Discussion

5.1 General Patterns

According to the results, gender stereotypes in these four dimensions: appearance, personality, career, and life choice were different in degrees. The descriptive data showed that the personality dimension ranked the first (M=33.743, SD=8.337), which meant that the participants had the strongest recognition of personality-related gender stereotypes. By contrast, the appearance dimension had the lowest score (M=19.154, SD=5.219), so the recognition was relatively weak. Therefore, it could be concluded that participants were likely to judge men and women with their personalities. This kind of strong agreement with personality-related gender stereotypes was showed in previous research. Costa et al. [13] found that in most culture, women were thought scored higher in warmth, agreeableness, and openness to feelings than men. At the same time, they noted that the variance within the same gender were often greater than the differences between men and women. In another research, Dennhag et al. [6], only by listening the voice, participants could have different judgement of the speaker, female voice were more likely to be considered friendly, and male voice were more likely yo be considered serious, though the contents of the speech were consistent.

The second place was the career dimension. In Hassan et al. [9], people had been affected by career gender stereotypes since they were kids. Parents and media richness impacted career gender stereotypes massively by reinforcing that certain jobs were suitable for a specific gender than the other. An example was studied by Akinlolu [11], gender stereotypes about career contributed to the gender imbalance in industry and made industry an unsuitable career for women. Madushika and

Samaraweera [10] also showed that in Sri Lanka, women were concentrated in traditional female-dominated and low income jobs, even with high education. However, men usually worked in occupations with higher earnings. Therefore, the career dimension results in this research were consistent with the existing literatures, demonstrating that people would judge whether the career is suitable based on gender.

Additionally, gender stereotypes also existed in the life choice dimension. According to gender stereotypes, men were often affected by the breadwinner expectation. Far from that, women were expected to take the responsibility of looking after children. In Chesley's [7] research on breadwinner mother, even women earned between 80% to 100% family income, the traditional gender expectations still existed, and the society still considered that they should participate in parenting and family care. Moreover, in the questionnaire, many participants agreed that women's life fulfillment was related to motherhood, which was consistent with Suppes [14]. The results of Suppes's research showed that people believe that women needed to have a child in order to have fulfilled lives, which reflected that, in gender stereotypes, women's value was associated with motherhood norm. Suppes also found that after controlling the variance of age, education, income, and marriage status, the difference in happiness between mothers and non-mothers was very small, so the expectation of motherhood were more likely a long-term social norm, not the evidence that motherhood must make women happy and fulfilled.

Finally, the appearance dimension scored the last, showing that participants rarely supported the appearance-related gender stereotypes. However, gender stereotypes still existed. There were still participants having different standards toward men and women. As noted by Muth and Cash [2], 40% of women and 22% of men had a relative negative overall body image, and women were reported more frequent appearance-related negative emotions than men. Similarly, Murnen and Don [3] pointed out that, gender stereotypes expected women to be slim, attractive, and sexually appealing, meanwhile men were expected to be strong and muscular. These norms were related to the gender role in which women were associated with attractiveness, and men were associated with dominant. It should be mentioned that in Murnen and Don [3], men became more and more affected by the body image problems, explaining the reason why the appearance dimension scored the lowest. Likewise, Gül Unlü [4] stated that appearance gender stereotypes also influenced interpersonal communication. When people first met a stranger, they would have gendered expectations about how he or she might behave according to appearance. In addition, the judgment differs according to the gender and culture. Overall, different appearance standard might influence body image, self-presentation, judgments from other, and interpersonal communication.

The positive correlation among the four dimensions showed that gender stereotypes were not independent, the correlation between appearance and personality was the strongest ($r=0.771$), followed by personality and life choice ($r=0.761$) and life choice and career ($r=0.755$). For instance, if a man has strong and angular facial features and often wears formal suits, people may think he is serious and rational, perhaps a businessman who doesn't often take care of his child. So, this research was basically in line with existing literature.

5.2 Gender Differences

The gender differences graph showed that men and women didn't have significant differences in the appearance dimension, but in the rest of the dimensions: personality, life choice, and career, there were noticeable differences, and men scored higher than women in all dimensions. We can roughly conclude that male participants agreed with gender stereotypes more than the females, and there were two reasons.

First, women faced and experienced gender stereotypes more often and directly than men. Chesley [7] found that even women earned over 80% of the family income, they still faced gender stereotypes about motherhood norms. Besides, Madushika and Samaraweera [10] showed that women experienced more negative expectations in workplaces. For instance, employers might think they wouldn't work hard, or the job would conflict with their role as a mother. What is more, Akinlolu

[11] even point out directly that women considered that gender stereotypes had greater impacts on their job than that of men. Because women were more easily to experience gender stereotypes, they might know about the influences of stereotypes more, which could be the reason why female participants didn't agree with the questionnaire that much.

Additionally, the score of male participants was higher, which might be due to the society's reinforcement of men. To be specific, the society expected men to be independent, decisive, and successful, and because these expectations could bring men higher social status, men might not regard them as gender stereotypes. However, traditional gender norms still put pressure on men. Chesley [7] stated that the traditional family model linked the main financial support responsibility with the identity of father. Therefore, when the wife was the main income earner, some men would be laughed at by others as a "feminine dude". In Akinlolu [11], men were often expected to be responsible for managerial duties, technical work, or tasks that required physical strength.

It should be mentioned that in this research male and female participants scored roughly equal to each other in the appearance dimension, which didn't necessarily contradict to the findings of existing research that women received more body image pressure than men. This research studied about participants' opinion about gender stereotypes, not how much pressure appearance-related gender stereotypes brought to them. Both men and women experienced body image distresses, but the contents were different. Therefore, they might have similar score.

5.3 Age Differences

All of the four dimensions had significant differences among different age groups. The results showed that the over 40 group scored the highest, 26-40 group stayed in the middle leaving the under 26 group at the last place. It should be mentioned that the over 40 group and the under 26 group had the largest differences in the personality dimension (Mdiff = 10.39, $p < 0.001$), followed by the appearance dimension (Mdiff = 7.02, $p < 0.001$), the life choice dimension (Mdiff = 5.43, $p < 0.001$), and the career dimension (Mdiff = 5.30, $p < 0.001$), which illustrated that older participants would agree with traditional gender stereotypes more.

There was a possible reason which was the different social environment. The older generations were exposed to traditional gender norms during their development. During that period, almost all people dressed up, behaved, worked, and even chose their lives based on gender norms. As regard to Hassan et al. [9], families and media were the tool by which gender stereotypes were passed from one generation to the next. Therefore, the older age group would receive more concepts about masculinity and femininity.

By contrast, nowadays more gender equality education and diverse media emerged, young people often saw that women didn't deliberately pursue slimness, men showed vulnerability frankly, and people chose jobs that might be not suitable for their genders or became non-marriageism, so they would judge others based on their hobbies and capabilities instead of genders. The score of under 26 group is the lowest, which showed that traditional gender concepts were becoming more diverse and inclusive.

One reason why the differences in the personality dimension were the largest was that the personality stereotypes were embedded in our daily life, to be specific, we usually socialized with others based on his or her personality. The older people lived in the environment with a clear gender division, so they were more likely to expect women to be sensitive and gentle, and men to be rational and decisive. Families, education, and media normalized the gender stereotypes, so they might consider those were the natural characteristics of men and women, not the results of social gender norms. That is why older people were more likely to regard personalities as traits associated with gender norms. For instance, they might teach boys not to cry when they fell, telling them that men had to be brave. In contrast, young people received more education about gender equality, and were exposed to different types of people, so they might be aware that people's personalities like warmth and authority were dependent on their experience and can't be judged just through gender.

Even though age differences were found in appearance, life choice, and career dimension, it was relatively small, which might have several reasons for this.

First, the differences in appearance dimension were less, because people in different generation were affected by gendered appearance standards. Urging the development of the old generation, parents, peers and the media might strengthen appearance-related gender stereotypes. Nowadays, young people might oppose the strict gendered appearance requirements, but they were still influenced by the videos in social media, or the popular aesthetics. In short, the specific requirement of body image might change, but the pressure still existed. Though the people in different age groups were exposed to different channel of communication, men and women were still expected to conform to district ideal image, so the age difference in appearance dimension was not that large.

Secondly, the age gap in the life choice dimension was relatively small, which might be because the traditional family responsibilities still affected the younger generation. Most of the young people grew up in families where men took on the main economic responsibility, and women was responsible for the housekeeper, so they might retain the traditional concept to some extent. Though women now earned more money than earlier times, and young people might be more supportive of women's work than older people, they probably still agreed that women should take care of their families. Therefore, the two age groups had differences in the life choice dimension, but it was still less than the difference in the personality group.

Furthermore, a small difference happened in the career dimension maybe because the career gender stereotypes was extremely obvious in the society. Young people might know that there were more and more women choosing the STEM major, but they could see that the gender inequality was still existing in many careers. Akinlolu [11] found that gender stereotypes could weaken the attraction of the construction industry to women. Also, in McGuire et al. [12], children associated engineering and technical ability with men. Therefore, young people might not support that women could not engage in technical work, or men could not do well in the teaching and training industry, but they might not choose a career that did not match their gender according to the traditional career gender stereotypes.

Overall, the difference in the personality dimension was the largest, which maybe because the personality stereotypes were easily to be explained that men and women were "born like this". Also, the differences in the rest of dimension was small, which did not illustrate that the gender stereotypes were not serious, but meant that they were still affected by nowadays aesthetics, family responsibility arrangements, and gender inequality in many occupations, and these gender stereotypes still influenced older people and young people.

However, this study was a cross-sectional study, and these discussions could not prove that age directly led to different extents of gender stereotypes, because the age differences also related to the education level, marital status, and cultural backgrounds.

6. Conclusions and Implications

The study examined gender stereotypes among Chinese people across four dimensions: appearance, personality, life choice, and career. Overall, these four dimensions of gender stereotypes were still hold by people, but the extent differed. Personality gender stereotypes had the strongest agreement. In contrary, appearance gender stereotypes received the weakest agreement. It should be mentioned that significant positive correlations were found among the four dimensions, which suggested that these four dimensions were linked with each other.

Gender was related to participants' attitudes. The findings showed that male participants agreed with personality, life choice, and career dimensions more than the females, though there was no significant gender differences in the appearance dimension. Moreover, age was an important factor. Participants over 40 showed higher agreement with the traditional norms. Whereas, young participants that were under 26 agreed to a much less extent. These differences reflected the variations

of developing environment including, family concept, education level, and content in daily watched media.

In general, the results indicated that the gender attitudes became more inclusive in new generations. However, the traditional norms didn't disappeared and still influenced how people judge others and themselves. Hence, developing gender equality education and more role models breaking gender stereotypes could bring favorable effects.

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