

Gender Stereotyping and News Reporting: A Case Study of China post-2021 Amendment of Female Laws

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines gender stereotypes in Chinese news reporting in 2022, mainly through a sample analysis of rape and intimate partner violence (IPV) coverage by different news companies. It tries to find out the relationship between the legal changes of women's rights and the awareness of gender equality, since in 2021, the government improved women's law. Government news releases are relatively even-handed in crimes, without discrimination and demeaning of perpetrators, but other news companies are more likely to include more words that contribute to gender stereotypes. China still has a long way to go to eliminate gender stereotypes and further eliminate gender inequality.

1. Introduction

"Mathematical modeling is a major at most, not a department. Can you be specialized when you write it?" "Really good students don't show off"... (Weibo, March 2022)

A girl named Zhu Zhu has sparked a massive malicious discussion online. The controversy was sparked by a post she made: She graduated first in mathematical modeling and was awarded a 200% scholarship to Cambridge University for her Ph.D. While some supported her, their voices were drowned out by negative comments. Zhu Zhu was accused of cheating academically, just wanting to be famous, and so on. She was called an "academic yuan," which means someone who reads for publicity or attention. She settled the debate by solving an undergraduate's problem. She only did this to prevent further radicalization by people online, but what happened behind the scenes should be noticed by people, being casually attached with a stigmatizing label.

Why does a beautiful girl who performs well arouse so much suspicion? In this case, beauty seems to be associated with weakness in other areas, a stereotype that affects a lot of people. For example, sexualized gender stereotypes (SGS) are often supported by adolescent girls. These stereotypes include the notion that girls can improve their social status by prioritizing their sexual attractiveness, which requires downplaying other traits such as intelligence. (Andrew A. Nelson, 2019) According to Andrew's experiment, the results show that high SGS approval is usually associated with poor academic performance, and this association is strongest in gender-typical girls. This stereotype has a strong and harmful impact on students' values. In addition, many different gender stereotypes exist around the world in all fields, such as work or sports.

On September 8, 2021, The State Council issued the Outline for the Development of Chinese Women (2021-2030). In the same year, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women was amended after extensive consultation. The revised draft added a gender equality evaluation mechanism in laws and policies with Chinese characteristics to further strengthen the role of women's federations. In light of these changes, this article will find out whether the law has changed existing gender stereotypes and perceptions of gender in Chinese society. This paper will start with the definition of gender stereotype, the gender stereotype in the previous

mass media, and the overview and investigation of the gender stereotype in Chinese news reports. This process will help people further understand the dangers of gender stereotyping and how to reduce it in their daily lives.

Limitations: Due to time and technology limitations, the sample size of this paper is 40. More studies on larger sizes are needed to further confirm the results. Moreover, such social research can be subject to potential bias.

2. Gender Stereotyping in News Reporting: Meaning and Content

2.1. Gender Stereotyping: An Overview

Before talking about gender stereotypes, it is important to have a proper understanding of gender. Gender is performative, performing your definition of your gender, and self-choosing. However, gender has extended to refer not only to individual identity and personality but also, at the symbolic level, to cultural ideals and stereotypes of masculinity and femininity and, at the structural level, to the sexual division of labor in institutions and organizations. (Ashraf Farah, Bund Ahmad Aijaz, 2016) Gender stereotypes are inaccurate, biased generalizations about different gender roles. There are two types of gender stereotypes. One is, about the characteristics exclusively explaining one gender, called descriptive. Another one is prescriptive which records the traits depicting how one gender should be. These stereotypes become common nowadays through the spread of different media and literature. They implicitly influence people's views from appearance to the relationship among genders such as beauty myth, rape myth, etc., and bring a difficulty to the inclusiveness of LGBTQ+ groups. Transgender people usually face a more challenging situation in all spheres of life, being easily abused or isolated, because they aren't fit into the categories of traditional gender roles. (Ashraf Farah, Bund Ahmad Aijaz, 2016)

One of the purposes of gender stereotypes is for the dominant group to find convenience in subordinates as it implicitly sets a barrier to people's abilities. Beauty myths are one example. It stresses the importance of beauty in women and sets more restrictions on appearance, although women have gained more power through the years. It's not biological or natural, but it stands out after material constraints on women are dangerously loosened. For example, the percentage of women having jobs had risen to 53.4 in 1984, and such a rise threatened the male-dominated power structures, so beauty myths started to gain influence by exploiting female guilt about their liberation and making women feel worthless. (Naomi Wolf, 1990) Females would require less power and more outside approval due to the effect of the beauty myth, which can stabilize the patriarchy. These kinds of stereotypes limit how women should perform in different situations and the standard of their behaviors. It leads to a common dilemma whether at home or work for females.

I collected two surveys online, one is China 2022 female career investigation, and another is Women @ Work 2022: a Global Outlook. They both show the unfair treatment of women in offices in different places. In 2022 in China, the average monthly salary of working women is 8,545 yuan, compared with 9,776 yuan for men, a difference of 12 percent. In higher education, 55.9% of working women hold a bachelor's degree or above, much higher than men (33.6%). Only 5.7 percent of workers say women are "leaders," while 51.5 percent say men are leaders, 10 times as many as women. 61.2% of women are asked about marriage in the interview, but only 32.3% of men are asked the same type of questions. This investigation reported lots of prejudice against women in the office such as appearance importance or main housework responsibility. For the global survey, 10% of the women have felt taken credit for or undermined by management due to their genders. The harassment rate for women at work reaches 59%. All those data above show gender stereotypes and discrimination towards women existing in the work commonly.

2.2. Gender Stereotyping in News Reporting and Media

This section will discuss the different gender stereotyping that exists in various forms of literature and media.

For tales, to retell better, stories reduce the complexity of social lives to stereotypical but easily memorized descriptions. Women are usually portrayed as dependent on men in pursuit of a happy, fulfilling life. It produces lots of gender roles in the tales called Cinderella complex, which perpetuates gender inequality through storytelling even across the culture. According to Huimin Xu's (2019) examination of 7226 books, 6087 movie synopsis, and 1109 movie scripts, most of them have this Cinderella Complex problem. Men use the verbs to define but the women's character is more focused on her appearance. Females' emotional dependency on men. For example, Ella's happiness is driven by Kit alone, whereas her happiness with Kit is less elastic to their interaction. Besides, the social force is supportive of the stereotype confirmation. The gender stereotypical movies are usually rated higher, and also the audience prefers the female dependency but not male vulnerability. All these descriptions overlook the ability of women to be a leader and further the gap in gender equity. (Huimin Xu, Zhang Zhang, 2019)

It is a similar situation on TV. Jorg Matthes (2016) gives seven assumptions to evaluate the gender stereotypes in TV ads: a predominance of male primary characters, a predominance of young-age women, a tendency of females or male primary characters appearing in certain ads, the frequency of one surrounding for women and men in ads, and the status of women in ads. In the seven countries, researchers investigate, all of them have stereotypical gender roles in different aspects. Although the stereotypes may be affected a little by cultural aspects, undeniably, there is a global pattern of gender roles still common in ads. Besides, the famous series, *The Friends*, has the same implicit gender problem. Fat Monica is depicted very differently from the other Monicas, losing all her dignity and herself. Fatness is a flaw in appearance and even in characteristics in the series' views of women's beauty. Aesthetic failing seems to be equal to a moral failing. Like Naomi stated in the beauty myth, attractiveness functions as a metaphor and a mandate over women's lives. (Megan Garber, 2018) Beauty should be a chance of luck instead of dedicated labor, but right now the sequence is reversed. Appearance is more important than what a woman has inside of her. It not only creates stereotypes about women's beauty but also causes people who without critical thinking gradually form the same view unconsciously.

Similar stereotyping can be found in news reporting, especially in respect of sexual violence. News is regarded as a formal and reliable information resource compared to fairy tales or TV ads. Nevertheless, the gender stereotypes problem is hidden under this type of discourse, too, which creates and sustains social ideologies.

From the analysis of a local South African newspaper about rape coverage myth, the author Stephanie Bonnes (2013) discovers that the news will reduce the serious level of rape by de-emphasis. The method is to humanize the perpetrator, create a linguistic separation between the perpetrator and the victim, or blame the outside factors. The headlines often have a passive voice and don't mention the perpetrator, placing the rapist's responsibility in the background. "Two women raped on Saturday." or "A girl is raped after school." It not only leads to the disconnection of the rapist but also lets people doubt the truth of the rape. Also, the distorted view of women rape victims believes that females bring sexual assault through their behaviors. Therefore, a female rape victim has to satisfy all the "correct precautions" to be the victim, otherwise, she deserves it. (Stephanie Bonnes, 2013) Whether it has involved alcohol or "inappropriate behaviors", like all the other crimes, the harm truly happened, so the existence of rape should not be downplayed or ignored. News reports like this reinforce gender stereotypes and further benefit the patriarchy as they are hidden from raping facts.

Gender stereotyping is also seen when reporting on intimate partner violence. In Hong Kong China, Lai-Ching Leung (2019) found out that the news appears to understate the fact that the victims of IPV are women more than men. The

actual rate of women victims to men in IPV is 7.1:1 but reported in news is only 0.6:1. It misleads people to believe that it's not common to see IPV for women and gives the illusion of gender equity. In IPV crime, the news always tries to reduce the men's culpability by stating their impulsion or their failure at work. However, it didn't state the basic reasons behind this: unemployed or low-income men use violence towards their wives because their self-esteem and superiority are in question. Therefore, they use coercive power to control their family members to withstand the masculinity crisis. (Lai-Ching Leung, 2019) Moreover, like the South Africa news report, the news in Hong Kong always tries to blame the victims instead of focusing on the truth of being abused. There are thousands of better methods of using violence to solve the family problem than beating, but the men still choose the worst one. It's not love anymore but only their selfish desire. In conclusion, most news, TV, and tales originated from a male perspective to enhance male dominance and excuse their violence toward women. They become the swords against gender equity and silence the survivors from seeking help.

3. Gender Stereotyping in News Reporting and Mass Media: Case of China

3.1 General Overview

The two laws revised and carried out are the Development of Chinese Women (DCW) and the Protection of the Rights and Interests of Women. The DCW tries to fully implement the new plan and formulate comprehensive and detailed phased targets and plans for protecting women's rights and interests. Another one improves the relief channels for women when their collective economic rights and interests are infringed upon in rural areas, and increases the legal liability for gender discrimination in employment and failure to take measures to prevent or stop sexual harassment. The revised draft emphasizes the importance of women's right to equal employment and property rights and the protection of women's personal and personal rights, such as sexual harassment. They aim to improve the women's current disadvantaged situation in education, economic, and personal rights.

Gender stereotypes are still common globally from previous analysis discourses in a town newspaper in South Africa, Hong Kong, and seven countries' advertisements. Discourse is the analysis of different types of production of knowledge. It includes cultural and societal aspects. Discourse analysis is divided into descriptive and critical. The descriptive analysis focuses on the use of linguistic rules such as grammar or word choice. A critical analysis examines the implicit rules beneath the discourse. (Bekalu, 2006) In this section, it is used as the base for examining discourse in news reporting.

The rape rate in China is approximately 22.7%, including 8.1 percent of non-partner rapes, 19.4 percent of partner rapes, and 1.7 percent of rapes against men. (Rache Jewkes, 2013) The IPV rate, it's about 34% for women and 18% for men who had ever been hit during their relationships; for those who had been in bleeding, bruises, swelling, or severe pain was 12% for women and 5% for men. (William L Parish, 2004) They are all comparatively high numbers.

Besides, China is still very superficial in the area of sex education and gender studies. About 59 percent of Chinese express they have sex education only at college. Sex education is not only guiding students to make better decisions about sex and relationship, but also trying to let students have a more comprehensive understanding of sex and gender. However, the lack of sex education can cause students to learn about improper sex from places like pornography. Pornography increases gender stereotypes by normalizing the descriptions of controlling men and subordinated women in sex, which is harmful to gender equality. (Kayla Louis, 2018) It teaches men to treat women violently, even as objects, and women to tolerate the abuse. (Melissa Farley, 2015) A study invested 304 pornographic scenes finds that 88.2% contain physical aggression and 48.7% contain verbal aggression. (Ana J. Bridges, 2010) Men who

watched sexually violent film show higher acceptance of both interpersonal violence and the rape myth compared to their counterparts watching neutral ones. (Mary Anne Layden, 2010).

Also, whether in school or work, there are lots of stereotypes. For example, men have a better understanding of math compared to women. Men have more natural leadership skills than women. Men should only have masculinity and women should have purely femininity, but if they disobey, they would be despised by the societal standard such as being called sissy or manly. However, not only because of sex education, but also reality, altogether make and stabilize the gender stereotypes. Eble and Hu (2022) show that children absorb gender stereotypes via exposure to peers whose parents believe boys are better than girls at mathematics – and that exposure leads to real learning gains for boys and losses for girls. In school admission, the lowest-scoring woman to get in did 40 points better than the lowest-scoring male applicant who was admitted, or the schools have a lower acceptance rate for women, especially for policy, which prevents women from pursuing their careers. (Joy Dong, 2021) According to Shisong Qing's investigation(2022), when other factors are controlled, traditional gender roles have a significantly negative impact on women's earnings but not men's. In conclusion, China has lots of different gender stereotypes and some are hindered or increased by reality.

3.2 Gender Stereotyping in Mass Media: Some Examples

I gathered 20 news reports of four different events from Weibo and official government news. This paper would mainly focus on collecting 2022 reports from news companies about rape and intimate partner violence toward women in China. I collect a total of 40 news reports. These news articles are about criminal cases and not prevention or propagation ones. The examination method consists of four aspects: use of the passive words, specific crime words (persons involved, be they perpetrators or victims; and action complained of, be it, rape, sexual assault, or sexual harassment), excuses to de-emphasize the perpetrators, and existence of the perpetrators in the title.

Tangshan Incident

Recently, shocking news about multiple men punching three girls at a BBQ restaurant appeared on June 10th. In the surveillance video, the man harassed a white-shirt girl by touching her back, and the girl was loudly questioning his behavior to defend herself, but then the man started to beat her with his friends came to help. In the process, the white-shirt girl's friends tried to help but all got beaten heavily by the men. However, at the first quick reporting, most news such as Feidian Video, Toutiao News, etc. wrote "6.10, Hebei, Tangshan, a surveillance video posted online shows the man walking up to the woman in white and trying to touch her back and being rejected, which then leads to a conflict in both sides. One woman who was wearing black went up to help and was slammed to the ground. The white-shirt girl was dragged by the men and his friends outside to keep beating."

The word choice "trying to touch her back and being rejected" appeared in Feidian Video and two different words are replacing it, one is "trying to flirt and being rejected" (Zhengguan News), and another is "flirting after drinking" (Daily Economic news). These three words de-emphasize the perpetrators' behaviors from harassment to light offensive behaviors, blame the victims by stating the girl's rejection, and excuse the perpetrators due to their drinking. "Conflict" also reduces that beating's influence and implies the problems on the women's sides, since conflicts are composed of two sides who disagree with each other. In the video, the girls didn't start any conflict but received a one-sided criminal assault from the men. For crime word use, in Feidian and Zhengguan Video, they didn't use proper crime words such as perpetrators but used men and women. It greatly decreased the order of severity of the fact. Daily Economic news is the only one that appeared with the word perpetrators and has a clear description of the behaviors -- provoking trouble and having a violent assault. On the title page, Daily Economic news shows perpetrators but another two only said men and women, but for Zhengguan Video the only one said that the woman rejected the flirt causing men to beat

her. It directly led the audience to think that it is the woman's fault for rejecting, which intensified the gender inequity and empowered men with more rights.

Nevertheless, all the report articles shown above are not from government news reporting. The official reporting is presenting the perpetrator's behaviors, using the word "harassment", and having the crime word used. However, it only focuses on the beating process and ignores the start of the whole event -- harassment. It didn't go deep to remind people about the gender inequity and the unfair treatment women are facing.

A female master murder case

"The second trial of a female master being killed by her pursuer will be held on April 15" This is the title that appeared on Zhengguan News, Hongxing News, and Fenghuang News. The title uses passive words and contains the murderer but the pursuer. It blurs his identity and gives excuses for his unacceptable behaviors. It also ignores the difficult situation the girl faced and gives the advantage to the male perpetrators by making people sympathize with them, which implies the dominance of male power. When the pursuers start to affect the life of persons they like, they no longer are pursuers but harassers and in this case, he is a killer. However, for Sichuan News (official radio news), it only appears the title was the death of a female master by her pursuer. Although it is less misleading than the first title, it is still written in passive tenses.

Sichuan rape incident

The third piece of news I found was about two people raping a girl from Sichuan. The title from a few news such as Hong Video or Xing video is that after drinking, a girl joked about wanting to have a bad man, and four of her friends called men to have sex with her. This title's purpose is to catch more people's attention since these news reports are not official ones. It didn't appear the personal crime words or even the raping crime, instead appearing as a joke. This action first creates a bad impression on the girl because it emphasizes her drinking and her will for men, and also would cause people to treat this news informally as the tone is casual. Also, the jokes divided people's attention from the seriousness of this crime and de-emphasize the rapists. In the official news like Hubei News or Hongya police, they all show the words of rape, but still, have the explanation of jokes to explain the four friends' behaviors. Nevertheless, whether official news reports or not, they all overlook the problems of friends' problems. They are the ones primarily causing the Sichuan girl to get raped since they started calling the man. It should remind everyone to be careful with friends because you will never know what they are going to do.

Sexual harassment and rape in Guizhou

The last one about raping is a man who picks the locks and rapes a woman several times who used to be his ex-girlfriend. The title for all news reporting is "after breaking up, the man picks the locks and rapes his ex-girlfriend several times." As almost all the news shown above, it has no crime words used, only men and women. Breaking up means two people turn into strangers. The sequence for this crime should first be the rape and then the relationship between the two people as a supplement, but when the news shows the relationship in the headline, it confuses the audience with the correct importance and de-emphasize the seriousness of the crime. Moreover, the reasons given by Shicha Video, Safe DaZhou (police officer), Guizhou Police, Safe Luzhou (police office), and Sohu News (one of the biggest news in China) is the man could not put down after breaking up, so he had the idea of hurting his ex-girlfriend. This is just to find a reason to excuse the man, but in fact, it is also a kind of invisible gender inequity, power inclined to protect man, and also the reason makes people doubt the true reason behind their break up instead of the case.

Official accounts news reporting

There are eight biggest news reports in China. I examined almost 15 pieces of news about rape or IPV from two government-controlled newspapers, Guangming Newspaper and People Newspaper. For People and Guangming Newspaper, it has clear criminal words used in both context and titles, no passive words used and satisfies all the rules

in the discourse examination. However, that official news focuses more on education, prevention, and the current whole situation about IPV or rape instead of individual cases. On People's News, only 3 out of 29 news report is about IPV incidents, and 21 out of 26 is about rape incidents. IPV is a really common thing that happened in China, but the news didn't give enough attention to it as a rape crime. For Guangming Newspaper, only 5 out of 25 are about real rape crimes, and 7 out of 30 are for IPV. Government news reporting is more comprehensive and gender-equality compared to other news companies, but it also fails to let people recognize the oftenness of sex crimes happening in life and the reasons behind it.

4. Conclusions, limitations, and Recommendations

I first examine the relationship between gender stereotypes and legal changes in China by providing an overview of the existence of gender stereotypes in different media and literature, an overview of gender stereotypes in China in general, and an explanation of the changes in Chinese women's laws, and a case study of Chinese news coverage in 2022. In sum, the official newspaper has dispelled gender stereotypes, but it has failed to recognize the deeper problems behind them, reporting too little on the true incidence of rape and IPV. Other small and medium-sized news companies show more gender stereotypes and downplay the emphasis on perpetrators. The Chinese government pursues gender equality, which can be seen in news reports, but the reality is different as it is reflected in other news companies. There are still widespread misconceptions about gender in China. Therefore, as a next step, the government should implement words about gender stereotypes in news reports, because these words will subtly influence people's thoughts and further promote the gap between the sexes.

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