

# Empirical Research on Gender Difference and Objective Factors of Adolescents' Acceptance to "Neutral"

WEI Tongru, CUI Jinquan

Department of Ideological and Political Education, North China Electric Power University, P.R.China,  
071003  
wtr69@qq.com

**Abstract:** Based on the interaction and regression analysis to the survey data of six provinces, we found that the female adolescents' acceptance to 'neutral' is significantly higher than male adolescents; adolescents' acceptance to 'neutral' has positive correlation with their parents and people around; male adolescents' acceptance to 'neutral' has significant positive correlation with the media acceptance to 'neutral' and negative correlation with the number of male role models which were established by schools; the higher family expectations to children, the higher acceptance level to 'neutral' by female adolescents. Based on these, we propose to pay more emphasis on female adolescents' gender roles guiding; put gender roles education into the formal school education system; give full play to the positive gender education guiding role of the family and the media, and other suggestions.

**Keywords:** Adolescents, 'Neutral', Gender difference, Objective factors, Linear regression model

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, 'neutral' adolescent has become a worldwide trend and youth culture phenomenon. From 'neutral' idol winners in Chinese TV show to South Korea's 'Pretty Boys', 'neutral' gender has been increasingly challenging the traditional gender roles' development model. More and more adolescents start to take the attitude of acceptance and recognition of neutral and directly reflect in the individual's own behavior.

## 2 Text

### 2.1 Background and questions

Over 30 years ago, the world-renowned futurist Alvin Toffler had predicted that 'gender neutral' would become a major trend in world. In 1974, American psychologist Sandra ·Bem used the 'Bem Sex Role Inventory' (BSRI) for the first time divided the degree of human sexuality into 'Androgyny, Masculine personality, Feminine personality, Neutral (not typical) personality'. By the research, Bem found that masculinity and femininity are not opposite, but two relatively independent trait. When the individuals' characteristics clearly demonstrate consistent with their biological sex characteristics in the same class, they are typically male (or female) personality; and when an individual' gender characteristics are contrary to their biological sex, their male (or female) personality is misplaced. Androgyny, which is regarded as the best gender temperament in individual development by Bem, refers to whether the individual is male or female; he has two kinds of significant gender traits. When an individual has neither significant masculinity, while not highlight femininity, this individual is classified as neutral (not typical) personality.

From the perspective of socialization, 'neutral' refers to adolescents in society do not have typical gender features<sup>[1]</sup>. In the gender roles and behavior, the neutral adolescents do not reflect the obvious nature of gender no matter they are male or female. From acceptance, approval to strengthen neutral gender and attitude, and then perform outside into the corresponding neutral behavior is a social development process. In this process, young people will inevitably suffer from the combined effects of objective factors, such as family, school, community, etc. Adolescents are in the most important transition period, to get reasonable guidance and education is the key to make the neutral adolescents

absorb and neutralize comprehensive sex traits of excellent quality based on developing gender trait in consistent with the physical sex characteristics, which can promote the healthy development of their personality role. On the contrary, if adolescents are failure to obtain timely and appropriate gender roles guide and help when faced with adversely interfere with objective factors, the recognition of neutral can easily lead to confusion of gender roles and behavioral norms and thus greatly increase the conflict and stress between adolescents' self-identity and social acceptance.

In recent years, Chinese scholars' research on gender role difference in adolescents has made some achievements. In the types of adolescents' gender characteristics, Li Shaomei (1998) used BSRI to study on 319 college students, whereby identity the college gender into androgynous, masculine, feminine, and undifferentiated four types<sup>[2]</sup>. In terms of gender roles distribution, Lu Qin, Su Yanjie (2004) used the revised Bem Scale and new Chinese Personality Scale as the research tool for the investigation of 600 undergraduate students. The results showed that the gender roles distribution of adolescents is mainly in androgyny and undifferentiated, the typical type has declined<sup>[3]</sup>. As to the reason of neutral, Pang Wei (2009) from the perspective of adolescent subjectivity proposed that by the affection of the psychological traits of the pursuit of personality and blind conformity, adolescents can easily in appearance, and the psychological level of personality and temperament begin to accept and recognize neutral, and ultimately reflect into their behaviors<sup>[4]</sup>. Lin Xiaoshan (2009) from the perspective of social constructionism noted that the youth neutral trend is a product of the transformation of the social structure; the widespread is the result of manipulation of consumer ideology<sup>[5]</sup>. In the study of personality patterns and mental health of adolescent relationships, Li Fei, Li Baoqiang (2007) used Bem Sex Role Inventory questionnaire survey found that neutral female students have the low level of confidence on gender<sup>[6]</sup>. In terms of young people's acceptance of neutral, Zhang Yanxia (2009) conducted a sample survey of 805 high school students in Zhengzhou; Kaifeng Cities to come to those middle school students have a high degree of acceptance with the individual temperament with heterosexual gender, and a higher acceptance level than opposite sex students on neutral personality<sup>[7]</sup>. Overall, the current research on the problem of neutral has focused on the differences between adolescents' personality traits and neutral distribution of gender roles, the reason of neutral trend, gender education and other mental health problems. The research is partial macroeconomic and lack group differences on neutral acceptance, such as the micro level. Meanwhile, the empirical research on neutral is narrower, the sample size is small, and the research is mainly based on multi-use questionnaire of Bem Sex Role Inventory, which is limited on theory and summarized description, does not get in-depth regression on the factors of neutral affection.

Based on the above background, from the gender differences in adolescents, we select the acceptance of 'neutral' by adolescents as the research perspective to analyze the group differences of adolescents' acceptance of neutral. Using the multiple linear regression method, we from the levels of family, school and society to get the empirical research on the multidimensional objective factors on the acceptability of neutral, which can play an important role in guiding young people to establish a correct concept of gender roles, and promoting the healthy development of gender differences.

## **2.2 Data, model and variables**

### **2.2.1 Data description**

The data used in this study was from the survey in 2012 on the acceptance of the 'neutral'. The survey places relate to the Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi, Zhejiang, Guangdong six provinces. The 3,500 questionnaires were distributed out and recovered 3,435 copies, excluding invalid questionnaires; the effective rate of questionnaire was 97.1%. The survey mainly follows the multi-level, random population sample program; take a stratified random sampling method, which covers the specific content such as adolescents' personal information, neutral acceptance, psychological description, family, school and social factors of the four plates. After data recovery, we used EpiData statistical software and the SPSS17.0 statistical analysis software to describe statistics and regression analysis.

In the sample of surveyed youth groups, the proportion of male adolescents accounted for 62.5%, female

was 37.5%; the mean age of adolescents was 22.35; mean years of education was 15.47; the proportion of young people from city accounted for 44.7%, towns were 22.4%, 32.9% adolescents were from rural areas; one-child ratio was 48.1%, 51.9% was non-child; 81.5% of the adolescents study the specialty of science, arts professionals accounted for 15%, the proportion of professional sports, art, etc. was 3.9%; in marriage status, 97.6% of adolescents were unmarried; as to the school location, the first-tier cities in the proportion were 31.9%, second-tier cities were 27.2%, third-tier cities was 40.9%; in schools' proportion of men and women, the male to female ratio 1:1 accounted for 13.1%, greater than 1:1 and less than 1:10, the school was 30.1%, greater than 1:1 than 10:1 school was 49.7%.

### 2.2.2 Model selection

The consideration of affection on adolescents' neutral acceptance in questionnaire is mainly from families, schools, and society. The multiple linear regression models are applied to two or more factors as independent variables to explain the dependent variable number of changes. Multiple linear regression models' basic principle is:  $Y = b_0 + b_1X_1 + \dots + b_kX_k + e$ .  $b_0$  is a constant,  $e$  is a random disturbance.  $b_1, b_2 \dots b_k$  were the overall regression parameters<sup>[8]</sup>.

### 2.2.3 Variables selection

In the development process of gender roles, young people will inevitably suffer from the combined effects of family, school, community, etc. Considering all aspects of the representations on adolescents' neutral acceptance, we make the following variable selection. On the dependent variables, we select 'acceptance of neutral' as the dependent variable. As the variables, considering family, school, society, and operating these 3 levels into 12 specific variables. Select the 'division of family roles', 'communication status of family members', 'parental attitudes toward neutral', 'family expectations' to control household factors; choose 'school location', 'school teachers' ratio of men and women', 'Teachers to establish role models', 'school class cadre proportion' to control the school factors; select 'media neutral image', 'the acceptance to the neutral by the people around', 'friendship', 'friend sex ratio' to control the social factors.

## 2.3 Empirical analysis

### 2.3.1 Descriptive analysis

#### A. The variable description

According to the distribution of independent variables selected with the corresponding values shows that the division of roles in the family, the proportion of 'men outside the women inside' was 52.2%, the role of the division of labor 'almost' accounted for 44.1%; as to the family members' communication situation, adolescents who 'often' communicate with families accounted for 47.2%, 'sometimes' was 32.8%, 'occasionally' communication accounted for 18.8%; for parents' attitude to neutral, 'exclusion' of neutral was 52.2%, 'accept' accounted for 47.8%; on family expectations, high expectations of households were 65%, 'general' accounted for 31.5%. As to school, the proportion of male teachers higher than female teachers in schools accounted for 30%, female higher school teacher ratio was 33.7%; on establishing the model, in the class, the girls' model number established more than boys accounted for 38.2%, male role models more schools were 20.3%; on class cadre ratio, male more than female was 35% in schools, fewer women than men was 25.9%. As to society, neutral image processed by media accounted for 48.8%, vilified by media to demonize 12.6%; in terms of neutral acceptance by people around, young crowd 'inclusive' neutral was 60.2%, 'exclusion' neutral accounted for 39.8%; on friend relations, 'better' relationship with friends of adolescents was 72.8%; among these, in circle of friends more same sex with adolescents were 50.3%; the essentially 'flat' proportion of the sex was 38.2%.

#### B. Sex and the difference of adolescents' acceptance of 'neutral'

We select the sex as the demographic perspective, interact the acceptance of 'neutral' to analyze the group difference of adolescents' acceptance of 'neutral'.

Interaction results showed that there is significant correlation between sex and neutral acceptability. On behalf of the adolescents' acceptance of neutral, all five indicators have passed by chi-square test. The differences of the adolescents' acceptance of neutral are obvious, female adolescents have more

acceptances on neutral dress, degree showing, and friendship choice on emotional and psychological level.

First, for neutral appearance and dress, female adolescents would be more likely to choose neutral attire than male adolescents.

Second, for the performance of the neutral characteristics, the degree of acceptance of female is much higher than male adolescents. Male adolescents' neutral acceptance is largely confined to appearance; nearly one-third of male adolescents could be 'unacceptable' to either neutral appearance or character, especially for people who have neutral temperament, the degree of acceptance of male adolescents were significantly worse than female adolescents.

Third, the choice differences of making friends by adolescents are obvious.

Females are more willing to conduct friendships with neutral person and feel good, while males are more exclusive to neutral groups.

**Table 1 The interaction of adolescents' sex with acceptance to neutral**

The degree of the acceptance to neutral	Dress with neutral tendency	Sex	Never	Hardly	Less	Sometimes	Often	Total
		Female	11.0	26.3	27.8	29.8	5.1	100.0
		Male	47.5	32.5	27.8	4.2	1.9	100.0
		Total	33.8	30.1	19.1	13.8	3.1	100.0
		N=3400 $\chi^2 = 161.931$ p=0.000						
	The degree of the acceptance	Sex	Appearance	Character	Neither			Total
		Female	32.5	57.6	9.8			100.0
		Male	30.4	38.4	31.3			100.0
		Total	31.2	45.6	23.2			100.0
		N=3400 $\chi^2 = 44.938$ p=0.000						
	Make friends with neutral	Sex	Strongly disagree	Relatively disagree	General	Relatively agree	Strongly agree	Total
		Female	5.1	28.6	47.5	17.3	1.6	100.0
		Male	17.9	24.2	45.4	10.6	1.9	100.0
		Total	13.1	25.9	16.2	13.1	1.8	100.0
		N=3400 $\chi^2 = 26.734$ p=0.000						
	Appreciate the neutral	Sex	Strongly disagree	Relatively disagree	General	Relatively agree	Strongly agree	Total
		Female	7.8	26.3	45.1	17.6	3.1	100.0
		Male	23.5	29.6	39.1	6.6	1.2	100.0
		Total	17.6	28.4	41.3	10.7	1.9	100.0
		N=3400 $\chi^2 = 45.629$ p=0.000						
Feel good to communicate with the neutral	Sex	Strongly disagree	Relatively disagree	General	Relatively agree	Strongly agree	Total	
	Female	5.1	21.2	51.4	19.6	2.7	100.0	
	Male	12.5	27.5	45.4	13.2	1.4	100.0	
	Total	9.7	25.1	47.6	15.6	1.9	100.0	
	N=3400 $\chi^2 = 18.383$ p=0.001							

### 2.3.2 Regression analysis

Putting the degree of adolescents' acceptance to neutral and the 12 variables into the multiple linear regression models, the result is in Table 2.

A. The influence by family

The research has found that 'parental attitudes toward neutral' has significantly positive influence on adolescents' acceptance to neutral, the more degree of parents' acceptance have, the more degree of adolescents would get; 'family expectations' only has significantly negative influence only on female adolescents, the higher expectations the family put on female, the more degree of acceptance to neutral that female have. This may be related to the family's education ways are the same as male adolescents. On the high pressure of competition in society, families expect the girls could have the same ability with boys to get more chances. With this education system, the degree of the adolescents' acceptance to neutral has become higher and higher. Finally, the 'division of family roles' and 'communication status of family members' do not have obvious effect on adolescents.

B. The influence by school

The research showed that 'teachers to establish role models' has significantly negative effect on male adolescents in accepting neutral. With the models' increasing, female adolescents would decrease the degree of acceptance to neutral. In today's education system of school, 'excellent models' are still mainly among the male adolescents. Then, the male models' thinking methods and behaviors would significantly affect other male adolescents to learn, which decreasing the male adolescents' degree of acceptance to neutral. 'School location', 'school teachers' ratio of men and women', and 'school class cadre proportion' do not have significant effect on adolescents.

C. The influence by society

The variable of 'the acceptance to the neutral by the people around' has obviously negative influence on adolescents' acceptance to neutral. The lower degree of the acceptance to neutral accepted by people around, the lower acceptance's degree the adolescents have. Adolescents live on the group where the habits are almost the same; they always take the same attitude and behavior under the pressure. This emotion and group recognition are the important reason that affecting adolescents' acceptance degree to neutral. The 'media neutral image' only has positive effect on male adolescents. The more excellent the neutral image is, the more dislike neutral gender that male adolescents would be. The 'friendship' and 'friend sex ratio' do not have significant effect on adolescents' acceptance to neutral.

**Table 2 The regression of the adolescents' acceptance to neutral**

Group	Variable	Regression coefficient	Standard error	T Value	Saliency
Male adolescents	Division of family roles	0.024	0.160	0.549	0.583
	Communication status of family members	0.063	0.187	1.452	0.147
	Parental attitudes toward neutral	0.323	0.178	7.140	0.000
	Family expectations	-0.068	0.203	-1.568	0.118
	School location	-0.064	0.179	-1.489	0.137
	School teachers' ratio of men and women	0.060	0.189	1.367	0.172
	Teachers to establish role models	-0.149	0.177	-3.409	0.001
	School class cadre proportion	0.016	0.181	0.358	0.720
	Media neutral image	0.105	0.232	2.417	0.016
	Acceptance to the neutral by people around	-0.223	0.158	-5.024	0.000
	Friendship	-0.002	0.191	-0.044	0.965
	Friend sex ratio	-0.034	0.253	-0.777	0.438
N=2125 R <sup>2</sup> =0.596 Sig=0.000 p<0.05					
Female	Division of family roles	-0.025	0.202	-0.410	0.682

adolescents	Communication status of family members	0.055	0.282	0.903	0.367
	Parental attitudes toward neutral	0.196	0.233	3.156	0.002
	Family expectations	-0.135	0.275	-2.221	0.027
	School location	-0.048	0.239	-0.783	0.434
	School teachers' ratio of men and women	-0.016	0.264	-0.251	0.802
	Teachers to establish role models	-0.041	0.222	-0.671	0.503
	School class cadre proportion	0.063	0.251	0.998	0.319
	Media neutral image	0.047	0.271	0.773	0.440
	Acceptance to the neutral by people around	-0.194	0.188	-3.184	0.002
	Friendship	0.049	0.269	0.809	0.419
	Friend sex ratio	-0.093	0.276	-1.555	0.121
N=1275 R <sup>2</sup> =0.599 Sig=0.000 p<0.05					

### 3 Conclusions

#### 3.1 Research conclusions

With the foregoing analysis, we can draw the following conclusions.

- A. There are significant sex differences on adolescents' acceptance to 'neutral', female adolescents' acceptance is significantly higher than male adolescents.
- B. Adolescents' 'neutral' acceptance has significantly positive correlation with their parents and the attitude of the crowd surrounding. The higher neutral acceptance parents have, the higher the degree of the adolescents get.
- C. The degree of 'neutral' acceptance of male adolescents has been significantly associated with media publicity and guidance and schools' model establishment. The more male role models the schools establish, the lower level of neutral acceptance the male adolescents have; the more frequently media reports 'neutral image', the higher level of neutral acceptance the male adolescents have.
- D. Female adolescents to accept the 'neutral' level is significantly associated with family expectations. The higher expectations the family put on female, the more degree of acceptance to neutral that female have.

#### 3.2 Reflections

- A. Pay attention to sex differences between groups of young people, especially the guiding on female adolescents' gender role.

As the neutral phenomenon has become increasingly evident, the adolescents' neutral is no longer just the degree of the differences between the personality and behavior, but on the internal significant differences among youth groups, which is the sex difference on acceptance to neutral. For this purpose, clarifying adolescents' unique physiological and psychological characteristics, considering and paying emphasis on the sex difference on acceptance to neutral by adolescents is necessary to re-examine the adolescents' gender roles education, and to resolve the problems of neutral adolescents. Meanwhile, we should notice the sex differences on female adolescents' acceptance to neutral and strengthen the guiding of the gender roles on female adolescents to make them establish a correct concept of gender roles and attitudes.

- B. Parents should begin to establish correct gender roles attitude, combining the characters in development process of adolescents to gradually teach them the social expectations of gender attitudes. Especially in the education of female adolescents, family education should be improved moderately, while respecting the physiological and psychological differences between men and women sex premise, combing male and female good qualities to conduct the gender roles education on female adolescents.

- C. Put the gender roles education into school formal education system to achieve systemic gender roles

education. With particular emphasis on differences in school's gender roles education, to make young men and women can be in full play to their advantages physiological on the basis of sex, and combine the good qualities in heterosexual character to promote the comprehensive development of adolescents' gender personality. For example, introduce the 'dual nature' classes in education to guide the complete gender roles development of adolescents; reinforce class interaction and extracurricular practices to promote communications between male and female adolescents, with this to teach adolescents how to appreciate and learn the advantages of the opposite sex and make up their own weaknesses, to promote the healthy development of adolescents' gender roles.

D. Give full play to the positive role of the media guidance, providing a healthy and objective media environment for adolescents to develop gender roles. Media plays the important role on adolescents' gender roles; we should strengthen the management and supervision of promotional content to ensure the authenticity and objectivity of information dissemination; while actively promoting the concept of proper gender roles, using multi-channel penetration on various groups around the adolescents to affect adolescents' self-consciousness of gender roles from other ways.

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