

# ***Research on the Impact of Shanghai High School Uniforms on Gender Education***

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**Abstract:** At present, school uniforms are almost an indispensable part of the Chinese education system, and they have many functions as an external tool to assist schools in managing students. The original design of the school uniform is educational and domesticated. At a time when school uniform culture is prevalent, gender education has also begun to germinate in China. The physiology and psychology of high school students are still in a positive dynamic development, so the school uniform should not only protect the student's body but also be responsible for the budding gender cognition and psychology of the student. This paper uses observation, literature research, a case study and descriptive research to study the role of Shanghai high school uniforms in gender education through a case analysis of the design of school uniforms in Minhang Middle School in Shanghai. The results show that Shanghai school uniform design has both advantages and disadvantages, but there are generally major shortcomings in gender diversity, gender equality, and adolescent gender awareness. Shanghai high school uniforms should be more diverse to increase choice for sexual minorities, while weakening masculinity and femininity designs to reinforce students' awareness of gender equality.

**Keywords:** gender education, school uniform, high school education, gender awareness, teenage psychology

## **1. Introduction**

School uniform is an inseparable link in China's education system, and it influences many aspects of students' education as a clothing culture [1]. Sociologist Joanne Entwistle has proposed that human beings, as social animals, share a common language and values that bind all members of society, and clothing is the symbol of our belonging [2]. As a hidden educational tool, school uniform forcibly classifies students into male and female with a mandatory representation, ignores the existence of sexual minority students, and uses the social function of clothing to act on the self-perception of sexual minority students, inhibit their gender expression, make them reject and contradict in their hearts, and create a low-acceptance atmosphere for gender diversity. However, even if the popularity of gender education in China has developed, there is still little research on school uniforms and gender education in society, and there are still a large number of blanks. From the perspective of school uniform, this study reveals the critical significance of current high school uniform design in Shanghai for gender education, promotes school optimization of school uniform design, enhances gender

education awareness, is conducive to the development of healthy and inclusive psychology among adolescents, and promotes gender knowledge, which to a certain extent breaks the limitations of traditional gender roles.

## 2. Case Analysis of Minhang High School Uniform



Figure 1: Sport schoolwear of inhang high school.

### 2.1. PE Schoolwear

As is shown in Figure 1, the sportswear design of Shanghai Minhang Middle School mainly uses soft cotton as a fabric, providing students with a comfortable sense of sportiness. In terms of fit design, compared with the design of boys' waists and shoulders, the tight design of girls' tops with a waist and narrow shoulders highlights the curves of the body more, but at the same time has certain restrictions on the convenience of movement. In terms of color, men's and women's sportswear adopt the same two neutral colors of dark blue and gray, and the fashion design is also identical.



Figure 2: Formal dress of Minhang high school.

### 2.2. Formal Dress

As what as presented in figure2, the formal clothing design of Shanghai Minhang Middle School mainly refers to the uniforms of Japanese universities, divided into men's and women's clothing by gender. Men's clothing consists of a classic black blazer, white shirt, black trousers, and tie, which is

classic Western formal wear. The jacket design includes shoulder pads. The women's jacket consists of a black blazer, a brown plaid skirt and a bow tie. The jacket design is cinched at the waist and is more snug-fitting. The collar is trimmed with white lines to distinguish it from men's blazers. The length of the skirt is designed at the upper knee of the girl, the material is linen, the warmth is poor, and there is no safety pants design [3]. Both sport schoolwear and formal dress are designed to reflect the school's rationalisation and structuration requirements, so that the formal beauty on the surface is built in the comprehensive performance of psychology and psychology such as human movement, safety, hygiene, and comfort.

### **3. Influence on Gender Education from Multiple Angles**

#### **3.1. Gender Diversity**

Sport schoolwear offers both male and female students the same design. Although this decision of the wearing may cut down on the possibility of exhibiting individual characters among both sexes, it also erases the differences brought by sex-opposite design. And comfortable athletic school uniforms remove the wearer's judgment. The indistinct design also provides an open environment for gender minority students to further explore themselves. As for students who are still figuring out their genders, this indiscriminate uniform eliminates gender stereotype from clothing, offers freedom and respect to allow them to think without limitations [4]. No matter what gender a student considers or guesses themselves is, people who interact with them are not able to subjectively define them through appealing. It provides gender minority students an opportunity to explore themselves with less environmental intervention. First impression of bi-gender theory no longer pushes psychological pressure on students because, under the same clothes, no gender will be defined and no stereotype will be coined. Such variety in sports schoolwear promotes and protects gender diversity. Gender minority students may receive huge comfort from it.

However, formal dresses appeal an opposite image. Compared to gender-neutral sport uniform, formal dress follows the Chinese traditional concept of gender and provides students with clothes that correspond to their biological sex without compromise [4]. Through uniform clothing, norms and standards, such as students' thoughts and consciousness, it subtly influences students and regulates their bodies and minds. Formal dress exhibits society's requirement for decent appearance. It not only relates to what image is preferred by the public but also forms the students' concept of proper dressing. Students are required to dress in clothes defined by their biological sexes for any important school events, and there is no third option between male and female [5]. This lack of options can easily instill in students the notion that other genders are unfit to exist in public [6]. Such feelings may give birth to shamelessness and gender anxiety in students who are or figuring out whether they are other genders besides male and female. They may force themselves to pretend to be a traditionally accepted gender. That is both harmful to gender diversity and teenage mental health. Formal dress disciplines students to follow Chinese gender recognition while suppressing their natural sense of gender. Since China has long neglected gender and sex education, such discipline could only enhance students' stereotypes of gender diversity and related concepts, even if it's their right to be who they really are.

#### **3.2. Gender Equality**

Uniforms are also used to represent a school's cohesiveness, levels of discipline, respect for authority, and high achievement; a school's hierarchy of priorities [5]. Students in sports schoolwear are portrayed as athletic. The material applied by the school for the sports suit is proper for supporting ideal mobility. The addition of a cinched waist and narrow shoulders to women's sports uniforms, on the other hand, causes them discomfort. This design, which tightens the clothing and restricts mobility,

sacrifices the mobility sportswear should have to highlight the curves of women's figures. According to the design theory of sportswear, the design of women's sports school uniforms is illogical. It is unfair for girls to wear such sports-restricting clothing and engage in sports activities with boys [7]. At the same time, the inconvenience of clothing not only has a negative effect on girls' athletic performance, but also creates a long-standing gender bias: men are better at sport than women. Women's clothing has a significant disadvantage when compared to men's clothing in some popular sports activities such as basketball, football, and other popular sports that require loose and appropriate clothing to allow athletes to move their bodies, creating an unequal stratification point and gender inequality [8]. Chinese society has long combined men with dynamics, women with dynamics, and the gender stereotype that men are inherently superior to women in sports is ingrained in traditional beliefs. However, this erroneous prejudice subtly disciplines women to exercise less, compete less with men in sports, and force the interpretation of feminine traits from the perspective of the muscular such as docility and grace on women, forcing them to constantly suppress their sports desires and sports talents in order to conform to stereotypes, which is a great disadvantage for gender equality education.

Formal school uniforms further demonstrate the lack of awareness and backwardness of modern high school uniforms in gender equality education. Female students are required to wear plaid skirts above the knee in formal school settings. Such clothing designs sports school uniforms to highlight body curves, and even expose women's bodies to a greater extent. Legs without clothing cover not only expose women's body parts, but also at the same time impose further moral restrictions on the wearer's behavior. Girls need to pay attention to their various postures all the time: standing posture, sitting posture, and walking posture. Once the movement is too large, they will face the situation of having their private parts exposed. In the face of such a mandatory dress code that tests women, the public will hardly empathize with women facing various inconveniences and be considerate of such a challenging way of dressing. On the contrary, society imposes decency on female students as their natural responsibility and arbitrarily evaluates whether schoolgirls in skirts are 'lady' on the basis of subjective opinions. Men's pants are completely free of this issue, whether it's activity or exposure cisis [9]. Male students' dress, although orthodox, emphasizes stereotypical masculinity, which is the same as female students' formal wear using skirts to emphasize femininity. The design of formal wear that highlights gender temperament attempts to reduce gender to a biological problem, and its design not only incorporates the long-standing stereotype of male rigidity and female submissiveness from a patriarchal perspective, but also ignores the needs of other non-cisgender students. This uniform system not only hinders the liberation of women from traditional gender roles, but also quietly suppresses sexual minorities. This is a significant impediment to gender equality education.

### **3.3. Teenage Gender Awareness and Self-Gender Identification**

As mentioned above, both sport schoolwear and formal uniform leave little choice for gender minorities [10]. Living in such an environment will reduce teenage's gender awareness because they have no opportunity to get in touch with one. Identical sport uniforms hide gender minorities people, which can easily create an atmosphere that this group doesn't exist. Only when students recognise that gender is not binary will they return to their hearts to determine what gender he/she/they want to be [11]. While consistent clothing reduces the likelihood of LGBTI students being discriminated against and respects their privacy, it does not create an inclusive environment where students with low self-esteem are aware of the fact that their gender is legitimate. Formal uniforms force students to match themselves to dualistic templates, greatly suppressing students' freedom and opportunities to explore themselves. In summary, the current setting of Shanghai high school uniforms is not conducive to students' appropriate gender awareness, and it is not helpful for students to confirm their gender.

#### 4. Accessible Suggestions for Future Uniform Design

According to the analysis of the above part, this study finds that the biggest problem in the design of high school uniforms in Shanghai is a lack of autonomy and selectivity. In order to reduce the existence of campus discrimination, it is understandable to design school uniforms in a uniform style, but the division of school uniforms depends entirely on biological gender, and there is no awareness of gender diversity. High schools should design and introduce a third alternative to extreme males or females, such as designing a uniform suitable for the LGBTQ group or a gender uniform to enrich the variety and expand the freedom of choice of students. At the same time, this study recommends eliminating the cut of sports school uniforms that conforms to women's curves and replacing them with the same loose style as men's sports uniforms to eliminate gender inequality. Finally, if the school spirit and the economic strength of the students' families allow it, it is recommended to introduce a policy of students' self-designed school uniforms on high school campuses through the display of school uniforms, creating a truly personalized, open, and inclusive campus atmosphere.

#### 5. Conclusion

Through the case study of Minhang Middle School, this study analyzes the present influence on school uniforms that can be related to gender education. We can find that Shanghai school uniform design has both advantages and disadvantages in gender education, but generally lacks respect and flexibility for multi-gender students, and does more harm than good to high school students' gender education. Shanghai universities should break down the monolithic stereotype of gender, provide students with a more diverse choice of uniform styles within an acceptable range, and increase the choice of more neutrality or individuality in addition to men and women, so as to strengthen students' gender awareness and respect for LGBTI students.

However, this study lacks generalizability and has limitations. This paper only selects the school uniform of Minhang Middle School as an example. It is hoped that future research can expand the scope of the study.

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