

Yongling Xue

**Gifted Women
from Potential to Achievement**



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Psychologie

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Part 1: Introduction

People may have many choices in life after they come to the world. But the gender to which they belong, the time when they were born, and the country where they are from is innate. It means that what kind of gender role one should play, what kind of historical background one runs into, and what kind of cultural environment one lives in existed before one was born. Male or female roles, traditional or modern times, eastern or western culture existed prior to birth. A person just plays a role in a certain period of time and a certain range of space.

1. Giftedness in Society

Historical background and cultural environment determines one's role playing. The expectations from society to the people in different historical stages and different cultures are different. The people's expectations to their own life in different historical stages and different cultures are also different. For example, in traditional China, men were expected to work hard, while women were expected to be thrifty in managing a household. Even those who came out of the traditional role expectation circle, still kept their traditional gender roles: she can be a lawyer or a manager outside but she is still a wife and a mother at home. A woman who lived in that traditional society seldom thought that she needed to work outside. To be virtuous and kindhearted is her moral excellence. Her pair of clever hands, for cooking and sewing, was the symbol of intelligence. She took this life style for granted and educated to her daughters and granddaughters just the same way. Few people asked her or she seldom asked herself: what other aspects was she good at or gifted? This example tells us that intelligence can be viewed as a cultural invention (anthropological metaphor, Sternberg 1990: pp.215-240) and can be inherited in the process of socialization from generation to generation (sociological metaphor, Sternberg 1990: pp.241-258).

What is gifted? This is an important and complicated question. It is important because the definition will guide the identification: who is regarded as gifted? It is complicated because there is a danger that one's definition and consequent identification will discriminate against some special groups of people. Girls are usually listed as one of the special groups (Colangelo and Davis 1997: pp.13-16). As to the children, the definition is tied to teaching programs. What types of giftedness should be developed? Who can be selected in the pool of the gifted? The principle of doing this is not to exclude too many who are really gifted (effectiveness) and not to include too many who turn out to be non-gifted (efficiency). Even if this is so, considering the potential for a child to become a gifted adult, a question is still raised: is gifted education wasted if a child does not utilize talent as an adult? Because outstanding adults often showed promise in children but many factors between childhood and maturity influence developmental outcomes. Identification is risky.

The definitions of giftedness in childhood and in adulthood are distinct from one another. The criterion of giftedness changes from potential (a mental ability which remain to be developed) to achievement (a mental ability which an individual displays) (Subotnik etc. 1995: pp.4-5). At what level must one achieve in order to be considered gifted, in what degree? And what are considered acceptable arenas for displaying such giftedness, in what fields? Similar to gifted education, this is associated with the question that a person's effort is recognized by others or not. Some scholars asked: why are there so few eminent women (Silverman 1995: pp.5-13)?

2. Achievement of Women

Reviewing the trace of women's growth, many of them were good when they were at primary school and high school. They were not poorer but some were

even better than the boys who sat in the same classroom. And then, many of them were still good when they entered the universities. The difference between boys and girls in the universities is that girls had their own preferred majors which may be differ from some of the boys'. What will they do after they graduate? If they could perform well in the past, it shows that they are gifted. If they are gifted, they should have the potential to develop further: from potential to achievement. The question is: what will they achieve then? This is the theme of the text. That means: (1) Do they have a goal to make an achievement? (2) Do they believe that they can reach the goal? (3) What are the reasons for them to be successful or to fail in reaching the goal? (4) Regarding gender, on what aspects are men and women the same or different? (5) Regarding culture, on what aspects are people from one country and another the same or different?

Back to the beginning of the introduction: people may have many choices in life but they can not choose the gender which they belong to, the time when they were born, and the country where they are from. What they can do is to live in a certain historical time and in a certain cultural environment. During this period, the people and the environment interact with each other. The environment may change slowly or rapidly, while the people may change as well. People are influenced by the environment and people may change the environment by their behavior. If one has a goal, one needs to think: is it realistic? What are the resources which I have to reach the goal? What is the environment surrounding me? Every one is independent in the society but no one can be isolated from the society. One can say that I prefer persisting in my old ways no matter what others say but at the same time he or she must use some mechanisms to defend himself or herself. If one is able to fine a life style and a social position which is congruent with oneself and the environment, and which is in keeping with one's own will and also acceptable by the society, one will feel satisfied and be successful.

3. The Structure of the Text

The text is divided into five parts. Part one is to introduce the theme and the background of the research. Part two is to summarize and discuss previous researches and theories concerning with the theme, to raise questions and assumptions of the research. Part three is to introduce the survey method of the research: investigation method, research objects, main variables, data collection, and data analysis. Part four is to describe the investigation results both from questionnaire and interview. Part five is to discuss and interpret the results comparing with previous researches and theories, then to summarize the discussion and to get the conclusion.