

Gender Role Belief and Feminism: Exploring the Perspective of Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

Gender role expectations exist in every country, ethnic group, and culture and have an impact on how people behave and how they view feminism in general. Religious convictions and ideologies also have an impact on these behaviours and attitudes. If religious doctrine favours conventionally established gender norms, it encourages gendered behaviour and sexist views. The aim of the current study is to investigate how religious fundamentalism and sexist attitudes affect young people's perspectives on gender roles beliefs and feminism. For this purpose, a sample of 80 students was selected in the age group of 18-24 years. The participants were selected through purposive sampling and snowball sampling. The obtained data was analysed by applying t test and multiple regression analysis. Results revealed that there is significant difference in gender role beliefs and attitude towards feminism in male and female participants. The results further showed that both religious fundamentalism and sexist beliefs turned out to be relevant predictors of gender role beliefs and feminism.

Keywords: *Gender Role, Feminism, Religious Fundamentalism, Sexist beliefs, young adults*

Gender role beliefs are the behavioural and cultural beliefs about how men and women should behave, dress, communicate and present themselves in the society. In certain social contexts, gender roles provide guidance on regulatory conduct, which is typical, should be, and thus "probably effective" for each sex. The general convictions about responsibilities and behaviours considered appropriate for women and men are among the important internalised social and cultural values. People with traditional gender roles support the role of women as caretakers in their homes and in their families. Acceptance of traditional gender roles which believes in superiority of male, is against the very thing feminism is fighting for. Gender roles, according to feminism, serve to maintain patriarchy and set limits on women's lives. Feminism is the belief that genders should be socially, economically and politically equal. Studies reveal that traditional gender role beliefs are believed to be more strongly endorsed by men than women (Larsen and Long, 1988; Brewster and Padavic, 2000).

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Religious fundamentalism also seems to instigate traditional gender role. It is seen that religious fundamentalists, have convergent cognitive processing styles (Hunsberger, 1996), which means that followers may not adapt or change their views to incorporate new knowledge. The traditional hierarchy taught by fundamentalist religious groups is from God to man and from man to woman, with women's roles defined as that of helpmate and mother (Kosmin & Lachman 1993).

Other than religion, present study aims to see how sexism affects young people's perspective towards gender role and feminism. Sexism is explained through the theoretical framework of ambivalent sexism which posits that it has two components i.e., hostile sexism and benevolent sexism. According to this framework of ambivalent sexism, male dominance in economic, political, and social institutions encourages hostile sexism, which portrays women as inferior and inept. Sexual reproduction, on the other hand, makes men and women intimate and highly interdependent with one another, resulting in benevolent sexism, which portrays women as needing to be protected. Women are given this protection and affection in exchange for adhering to traditional gender roles. The sexual double standard is more likely to be seen in benevolent sexism rather than hostile sexism. While hostile sexism is more overtly expressed, benevolent sexism is expressed covertly.

The present study purports to infer the gender differences in gender role beliefs and attitude towards feminism as well as how both are influenced by religious fundamentalism and sexist beliefs. Earlier gender roles were difficult to change because they were deeply rooted in the social upbringing and were influenced by religious texts up to great extent. Due to education and sensitive parenting young people seem to be much more liberal in outlook and actively involved in endorsing equitable treatment of others. So, the present study wants to see if this liberal social scenario has affected their beliefs or they are still convinced with traditional gender roles. Though few previous researches have indicated that females reported lower endorsement of traditional gender role beliefs than male participants (Vijver, 2007) and studies on generational influence on attitude towards feminism indicated that older adults were more conservative than younger adults (Bettencourt et al., 2011), there is little research done exploring gendered relation on the young population. Also, not much research is present on how individual's views on feminism and gender role beliefs are affected by fundamentalism and sexist beliefs. Only a few studies have examined sexist attitudes in adolescent samples; among these, the suggestion is that both hostile and benevolent sexism may increase in prevalence from early to late adolescence (Daniels and Leaper, 2011), so the present study aims to predict its impact to determine if young adults' beliefs on gender roles and feminism are influenced by religion and sexist beliefs.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

- To explore the predictors of gender role beliefs and attitude towards feminism, by placing religious fundamentalism, hostile sexism and benevolent sexism (subcategories of ambivalent sexism) as predictors.
- To examine the gender difference in the gender role beliefs and attitude towards feminism of young adults.

Hypothesis

- Religious fundamentalism, hostile and benevolent sexism will significantly predict gender role beliefs.

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- Religious fundamentalism, hostile and benevolent sexism will significantly predict attitudes towards feminism.
- There will be significant gender difference in gender role beliefs of young adults.
- There will be significant gender difference in attitude towards feminism in young adults.

Sample

A total of 80 Delhi university students (40 males and 40 females) aged 18 to 24 (mean age=21) were included in the study. Snowball sampling and purposive sampling were used to select the participants. Purposive sampling is a sample collection method in which the researcher chooses a sample based on what they believe is relevant to the study's goal. Snowball sampling is a technique for selecting new participants in which existing participants help recruit new participants, and this process continues until the researcher's sample requirement is met.

Test materials used for data collection

In the present study following four test measures were used:

- **Gender Role Belief Scale (GRBS):** This scale was created by Kerr and Holden in 1996. It is a 20-item questionnaire that evaluates people's gender role beliefs. The items are answered on a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly agree, 4=undecided, 7=strongly disagree). This scale proposes that those with higher score will promote more feminist gender ideology and then those with lower scores are presumed to promote traditional gender ideology. The scale was shown to have convergent validity with a measure that included 150 questions about gender role beliefs and participant reactions to descriptions of two type of women (one traditional, one feminist). The scale's test-retest reliability and alpha reliability were both .86.

Attitude towards Feminism

This measure was developed by Smith, Ferree and Miller (1975). It consists of 20 items which deals with approval or rejection of feminism's core beliefs. The items are in Likert format, with 5 response alternatives ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. The higher scores indicate negative attitude towards central beliefs of feminism and lower scores indicate positive attitude towards central beliefs of feminism. It is a short, reliable measure that contains a single strong factor explaining 37% of the variance. Its correlates include activism in, and subjective identification with, the women's movement.

Religious Fundamentalism

Altemeyer and Hunsberg developed the Religious Fundamentalism Scale in 1992. It is a revised version of the original scale that evaluates one's religious beliefs without being influenced by any particular religion or set of religious beliefs. The scale contains 12 statements that rate the participants on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, with 1 indicating "Strongly Agree" and 5 indicating "Strongly Disagree." The higher the score, the more religious fundamentalism there is. The scale's reliability was satisfactory (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.70$, $M = 2.89$, $SD = 0.87$).

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory

To measure sexist beliefs Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI) was used. It is a 22-item questionnaire divided into two subscales: hostile and benevolent sexism. Ambivalent sexism does not have a total score. The participants are presented with a series of statements about

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men and women in modern society and their relationship. Sexist attitudes toward women are more likely to be adopted if the mean scores for each dimension are higher.

The Hostile Sexism and Benevolent Sexism subscale scores, have acceptable internal consistency reliability (with alphas averaging in the .8 to .9 range). The predictive validity studies of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory suggest that hostile sexism was significantly and consistently linked to negative evaluations and stereotypes of women, whereas benevolent sexism was significantly and consistently linked to positive evaluations and stereotypes of women.

Procedure

The purpose of this study was to see the gender difference and regression in gender role beliefs and attitude towards feminism. For regression, religious fundamentalism, hostile sexism and benevolent sexism were entered as predictors. Religious fundamentalism and subcategories of ambivalent sexism i.e., hostile sexism and benevolent sexism are Independent variables and gender role beliefs and attitude towards feminism were dependent variables. The sample consisted of 80 people, with the target age group being 18-24 year old Delhi university students. Purposive sampling and snowball sampling were used to select the participants. Initially, the sample was screened for religious faith, and only those young people who believed in religion were chosen. Their consent was taken and they were also requested to give their honest responses. Then, along with the introduction and purpose of the study, a Google form containing questionnaire items from all four scales were sent to the participants. The results were then analysed with the help of independent t-test and multiple regression.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

In the regression analysis gender role beliefs and attitude towards feminism were taken as the dependent variable. Religious fundamentalism and subcategories of ambivalent sexism i.e., hostile sexism and benevolent sexism were entered as predictors.

Table 1 Multiple regression equation for gender role beliefs among males and females

	Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F
		B	Standard Error	Beta				
Males	(Constant)	146.52	7.12		20.57*			
	RF	-.35	.12	-.37	-2.79*	.71	.46	7.83*
	Hostile	-.26	.17	-.20	-1.52	.71	.46	2.33
	Benevolent	-.65	.24	-.34	-2.69*	.71	.46	7.29*
Females	(Constant)	145.63	4.26		34.15*			
	Religious Fundamentalism	-.17	.08	-.29	-2.01	.74	.52	4.04
	Hostile	-.10	.19	-.09	-.54	.74	.52	0.29
	Benevolent	-.70	.24	-.46	-2.85*	.74	.52	8.15*

* $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$

Table 1 shows the regression equation for males and females. For males, religious fundamentalism ($\beta = -.37$, $F = 7.83$, $p < 0.05$) and benevolent sexism ($\beta = -.34$, $F = 7.29$, $p < 0.05$) turned out to be relevant predictors of gender role beliefs. Hostile sexism does not predict gender role beliefs ($\beta = -.20$, $F = 2.33$, $p > 0.05$).

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For females only benevolent sexism ($\beta = -.46$, $F= 8.15$, $p<0.05$) turned out to be relevant predictors of gender role beliefs. Religious fundamentalism do not predict gender role beliefs ($\beta = -.29$, $F= 4.04$, $p>0.05$) also hostile sexism do not predict gender role beliefs ($\beta = -.09$, $F= 0.29$, $p>0.05$). Results support hypothesis in which it was expected that religious fundamentalism, hostile and benevolent sexism will predict gender role belief.

These results are in line with other studies where both religious devoutness and benevolent sexism contributes in traditional gender role beliefs. Morgan (1987) showed that religious devoutness was the most important variable when it comes to predicting all dimensions of gender-role attitudes. Another study by Johnsson (2016) revealed that religion either instils or attracts those with traditional gender role beliefs. Personal religious belief systems can influence behaviours and the perceived nature of those behaviours—as positive, negative, feminine, masculine, godly, or ungodly. This explanation is also supported by the sanctification paradigm, which states that people place a higher value on and put more effort into upholding roles that they believe have spiritual or divine significance (Mahoney et al., 2005; Oates, Hall, & Anderson, 2005). As far as benevolent sexism is concerned most women are subjected to it. This sexism stereotypes women as affectionate, delicate, and sensitive. Men are often focussed on fulfilling their traditional gender roles as providers in intimate relationships, and fail to notice their benevolent sexist acts as oppressive (Glick & Fiske, 2001; Good & Sanchez, 2009). As a result, the actions of both genders within the framework of benevolent sexism affect each other—with men taking care of women and women relying on men to take care of them—to the point where motivation to change an oppressive regime of traditional gender roles is reduced (Becker & Wright, 2011).

Table 2 Multiple regression equation for attitude towards feminism among males and females

	Predictor Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient		Standardized Coefficient	t	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F
		B	Standard Error	Beta				
Males	(Constant)	11.28	6.40		1.76*			
	RF	.20	.11	.22	1.80	.74	.52	3.24
	Hostile	.74	.15	.57	4.67*	.74	.52	21.82**
	Benevolent	.17	.21	.09	.80	.74	.52	0.64
Females	(Constant)	18.18	3.82		4.74			
	RF	.16	.08	.32	2.02	.67	.40	4.09
	Hostile	.33	.17	.38	1.92	.67	.40	3.70
	Benevolent	.05	.22	.04	.23	.67	.40	0.05

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Table 2 shows the regression equation for males and females. For males, hostile sexism ($\beta = .57$, $F= 21.82$, $p<0.01$) turned out to be relevant predictors of attitude towards feminism. Religious fundamentalism ($\beta= .22$, $F= 3.24$, $P>0.05$) and benevolent sexism ($\beta= .09$, $F= 0.64$, $P>0.05$) do not predict attitude towards feminism. However, in case of female no significant predictors emerged for feminism. As only hostile sexism emerged as relevant predictor for men so, results partially supports hypothesis in which it was expected that both religious fundamentalism and sexism (hostile and benevolent) will predict feminism. Men may fear that feminism will lead to them losing power, influence, impact, authority, and control, as well as economic opportunities so they counteract by endorsing hostile sexism towards women. In a study by Gervais and Hoffman (2012) the results revealed that compared to women participants, men participants were lower on internal motivation to respond without sexism, higher on hostile and benevolent sexism and less warm toward feminists.

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Table 3 Mean scores, SD and t value of male and female participants on gender role belief scale.

Participants	N	SD	Mean Score	t Value
Males	40	17.72	105.85	-4.72*
Females	40	10.67	121.30	

* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, two tailed test

Figure 1 The below figure shows the gender difference in the mean scores on gender role belief scale

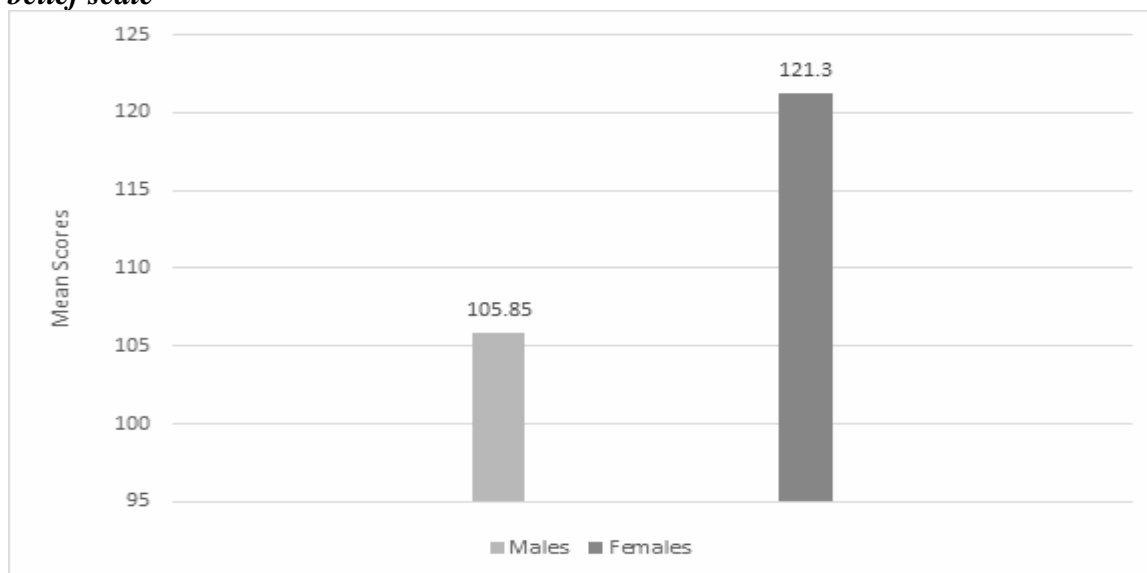


Table 3 represents the gender difference in gender role beliefs. The two tailed t tests ($t = -4.72$, $p \leq .05$) indicate a significant difference in gender role beliefs between male and female participants. The mean score of females is 121.3 and mean score of male is 105.85 which indicates that females are comparatively higher on feminist gender ideology (higher score indicates high feminist ideology) than males. Male reported higher on traditional gender ideology because as we go towards low scores traditional gender ideology increases. Hence, results supports hypothesis in which it was hypothesized that young adult will differ in gender role belief. A study by Dicke (2019) is in line with this result, analyses revealed significant gender differences in the endorsement of traditional gender role beliefs. Female participants reported lower endorsement of the traditional gender role beliefs in adolescence and higher educational attainment in adulthood than male participants. There are various reasons which might enhance male's belief in traditional gender role. Younger men are more likely to feel peer pressure and in order to appear masculine they may comply with already existing social norms. A survey by Insight by Marketing (2020) also revealed that when it comes to the roles of men, majority of participants believed that a man's primary duty is to financially provide for the family and men were more likely to agree to this statement than women.

Table 4 Mean scores, SD and t value of male and female participants on attitude towards feminism scale.

Participants	N	SD	Mean Score	t Value
Males	40	16.89	44.30	4.40*
Females	40	8.55	31.10	

* $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.01$, two tailed test

Figure 2 The below figure shows the gender difference in the mean scores on attitude towards feminism

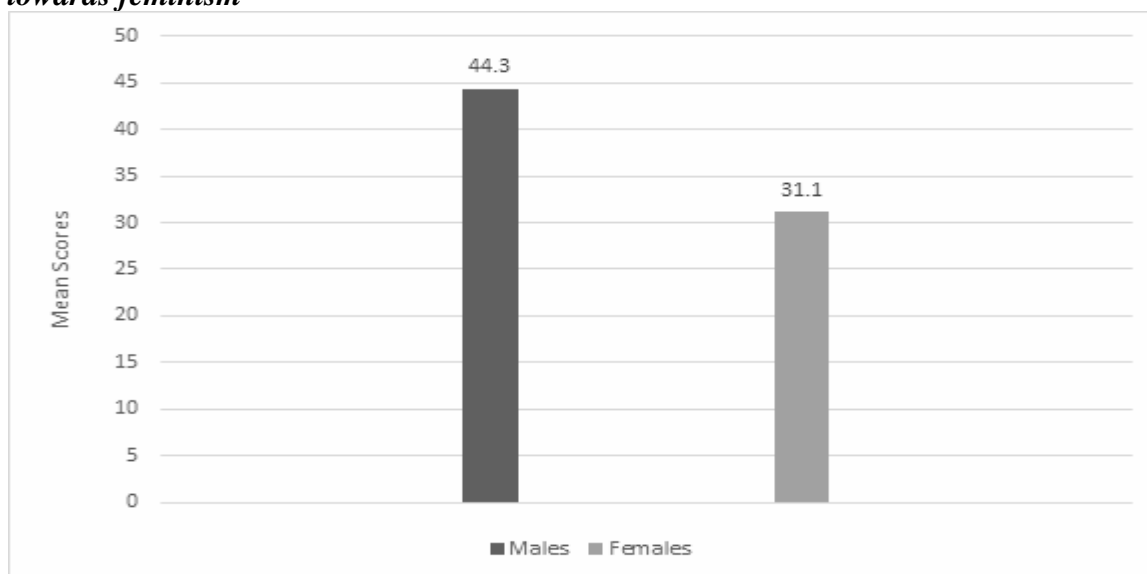


Table 4 represents the gender difference in attitude towards feminism. The two tailed t tests ($t = 4.40, p \leq .05$) did indicate a significant difference in attitude towards feminism between male and female participants. The mean score of males is 44.3 and that of females is 31.1 respectively. Higher scores of males indicate negative attitude towards central beliefs of feminism and lower scores of females indicate positive attitude towards central beliefs of feminism. So, male is higher in negative attitude towards feminism as compared to females, supporting the hypothesis in which we expected significant gender difference in young adults. Men who are extremely masculine might be hesitant to identify as feminists or in other words masculine men may consider the term "feminist" to be incompatible with their traditional masculine identity. A study conducted by Twenge and Zucker (1999) also found similar results. It discovered that students mocked and challenged the masculinity of a hypothetical feminist man. Another reason men reject the feminist label is that the word "feminist" still has a female connotation (Williams & Wittig, 1997).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Present study reflects that there indeed is a difference between men and women in the way they advocate gender role beliefs and feminism attitude. It also found that both sexism and religion affect young adult's perspective about gender specific roles and feminist beliefs. Findings indicate the need to have in-depth understanding of various variables such as religion, social norms, culture etc. and their role in shaping youth's belief system. Present study could not collect larger and diverse samples in relation to age, education levels, and occupation, also participants with diverse language, cultural backgrounds and sexual orientations to gain in-depth understanding of factors influencing gender role and feminism. Future research into these relationships can explore other potential confounding variables like socioeconomic status, mass media influence as well as a look into the specific aspects of religion that may be more closely linked to these ideologies than others.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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