

Effect of Age and Sex on Perception of Gender Role

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed to explore the gender role on male and female between two age groups. Data was collected from 156 participants between the age groups of 20-30 years and 40-50 years covering two sexes, male and female through online questionnaire using Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). Participants were asked to rate themselves on a 7 pointer likert scale. Then, the traits of each dimension, i.e., masculinity, femininity, and androgyny were calculated separately. Data was subjected to unpaired t-Test. There was no significant difference ($P>0.05$) in the perception of gender role between two age groups among all dimensions of BSRI. There was a significant difference ($P<0.05$) in the perception of gender role on masculinity dimension between male and female within 20-30 years age group. The significant differences ($P<0.05$) on the perception of gender role between male and female within 40-50 years age group were recorded on all dimensions. The present study suggested that different sexes under 20-30 and 40-50 years of age groups influenced in perceiving the gender role.

Keywords: Gender, Gender Role, Gender Role Stereotype, Masculinity, Femininity, Androgyny, Sex

Of late the perception of gender role between the people is an important concern in the modern society in regards to gendered practices and norms that produce inequality between men and women. Gender stereotype theory suggests that men are generally perceived as more masculine than women, whereas women are generally perceived as more feminine than men. Gender is one of the first social categories that children learn in today's societies, and thus knowledge of gender stereotype is evident from early childhood (Steffens and Viladot, 2015). In nearly all societies, men and women, boys and girls, have a different status and play different roles. They behave differently, dress differently, and have different attitudes and interests, including different leisure activities. Though it is traditionally believed that these differences between males and females are biologically or genetically determined, recent research has revealed that they are socially constructed to a large extent, or based on the perception of gender. Although, Sex and gender appear to be similar, but they are quite distinct concepts. Sex denotes to the biological attributes of female and male. These categories are distinguished by genes, chromosomes, and hormones. On the other

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hand, gender has a social, cultural and psychological, rather than biological connotation (Costa et al., 2001). Gender refers to subjective feelings of maleness or femaleness (i.e., femininity or masculinity), irrespective of one's sexual identity (Basow, 2010). Masculinity refers to an individual's perception of himself as male both physically and psychologically. Femininity refers to an individual's perception of herself as female physically and psychologically timid (Grammer et al., 2003). Thus, gender role refers to the socially constructed normative behaviors ascribed to a given gender that in turn is attached to a particular biological sex.

People tend to associate the preference of activities and responsibilities of an individual based on their sexual orientation. The concept of gender roles refers to set of societal norms dictating what types of behaviors are generally considered acceptable, appropriate, or desirable for a person based on their actual or perceived sex. The term gender role was first used by John Money and colleagues in 1954, during the course of their study of intersex individuals, to describe the manners in which these individuals expressed their status as a male or female in a situation where no clear biological assignment existed (Janssen, 2018). The World Health Organization (W.H.O.) defines gender roles as socially constructed roles, behaviors, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women (W.H.O., 2015). However, debate continues as to what extent gender and its roles are socially constructed or non-biologically influenced, and to what extent socially constructed may be considered synonymous with arbitrary or malleable (Francis, 2000; Henry, 2009). Sometimes, these pre-defined gender roles are very strictly imposed on a person, known as gender stereotyping. Gender stereotype is a generalised view or preconception about attributes, or characteristics that are or ought to be possessed by each gender or the roles that should be performed by them (Cardwell, 1999). In contrast, gender stereotyping is the practice of applying that stereotypical belief of the preconceived gender roles to a person. It defines a person's dressing style, choice of games and toys, choice of sexual attraction and physic (Ignico, 1990). Apart from the strict boundary of gender role, a person can define his or her gender role in various other ways. An individual's gender depends on one's gender identity. Gender identity refers to a person's subjective or internal sense of being masculine or feminine or even both. It can be described as a psychological as well as a psychological experience (Morrow and Messinger, 2006). Besides, the traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity, there are several other types in which people identify themselves. People who identify themselves differently from their ascribed sex are broadly categorized as transgender.

In 1974, American psychologist Sandra L. Bem, a proponent of androgyny theory, recognized that an individual could express both feminine and masculine characteristics and constructed a sex-role inventory. Bem (1974, 1975) argues that masculinity and femininity represent independent clusters of socially desirable instrumental and expressive traits and an individual may internalize both of these traits. Thus, an androgynous person possesses similar levels of feminine and masculine traits (Antill and Cunningham, 1980). But, contrary to the concept of androgyny, agender is the term used to refer to people who do not identify with any of the gender identity. These people usually describe themselves as gender neutral and they do not identify themselves as either male or female (Vargo, 2011). Gender queer is an umbrella term that may not align with heterosexual or homosexual norms. It is used to express a non-binary gender identity. A queer gender may fall outside, in between, or fluctuate among the binary gender categories of man and woman. Queer gender people often experience their gender as fluid. Gender fluid can also refer to people who often remain flexible about their gender identity rather than restricting oneself within a single gender

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identity (Hailey, 2015). Besides, a person's gender identity may also differ in terms of their sexual orientation. A cysgender person's gender identity is similar to his/ her ascribed sex, and he/ she is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted towards his/her opposite sexed person (Aultman, 2014). But a man who is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted toward another man is identified as a gay. Similarly, when a woman is emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted towards another woman she is identified as a lesbian. Bisexual, on the other hand, refers to people who are emotionally, romantically and sexually attracted to both men and women. Some systems of classification, unlike the W.H.O., are non-binary or gender queer, listing multiple possible genders including transgender and intersex as distinct categories (Sykes, 2006). Androgyny, for example, has been proposed as a third gender (Maccoby, 1966). Other societies have claimed to identify more than five genders (Richards *et al.* 2017), and some non-Western societies have three genders – man, woman, and third gender (Will, 2000). The gender research enables us to examine and challenge social norms around what it means to be a woman or man in society, and to pursue justice and equality for all, which should be fundamental facets of the development. In the present study, of particular interest is to explore the perception of gender role between the people of two different age groups to figure out how gender categories are entangled in other categories and practices.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

The present study was conducted on 156 Indian participants, who belonged from two age groups, viz. 20-30 years and 40-50 years covering two sexes, male and female as shown in Fig. 1. The participants were from middle or upper middle socio-economic status. Their minimum qualification was graduation or perusing graduation. Data was collected from the participants across different states of India.

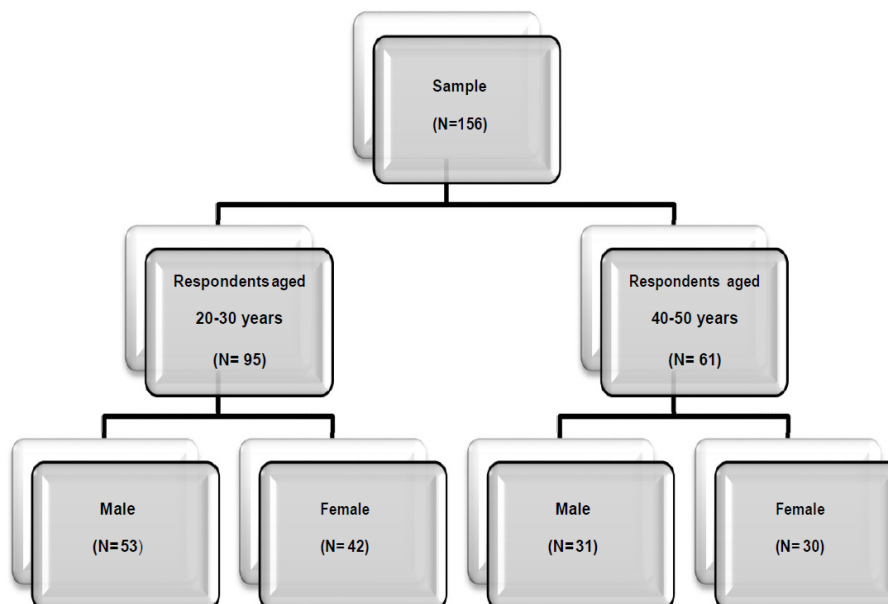


Fig. 1 Sampling of 156 Indian participants

Variables

In the present study, age and sex were the independent variables, which were analyzed to find the perception of gender role among people. Thus, gender role acted as the dependent variable.

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Tools used

The research was conducted using Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI). Sandra Bem formalized the questionnaire to examine psychological androgyny and provided empirical evidence to show the advantage of a shared masculine and feminine personality versus a sex-typed categorization. BSRI is a measure of masculinity, femininity and androgyny. It's used to search gender role. It assesses how people identify their gender psychologically irrespective of their sex. BSRI follows a scale consisting of 60 questions, each question indicating one trait and it uses a 7 pointer likert type scale, where 1 indicates never or almost never true, and 7 indicate almost always true. The scale has 20 masculine items, 20 feminine items and 20 filler items.

Reliability and validity

BSRI is a self-report inventory, how reliable the assessment depends on accuracy of participants to rate themselves. An androgynous score is the result of extremely masculine qualities along with feminine qualities and an undifferentiated score is the result of extremely low masculine qualities and feminine qualities. Bem reports coefficient alphas of 0.78 for femininity scales and 0.87 for the masculinity scale. BSRI is also demonstrated high test-retest reliability (Bem, 1981).

Procedure

Data collection

Data was collected over the online medium through Google form questionnaire having 60 questions using BSRI. The participant was asked to read the consent form and then agreed to participate as subject. After the data collection, the data was compiled and scoring was done.

Scoring

The traits of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny were calculated separately. A sexed typed score was the result of scoring above the median in one of the domains between masculinity or femininity and low on the other. Scoring above the median in both masculinity and femininity indicated an androgynous personality. Whereas, scoring less than the median in both masculinity and femininity was indicated as undecided personality.

Statistical analysis

Data under different age groups as well as sexes were analyzed using unpaired *t*-Test.

RESULTS

The comparison of two age groups based on different dimensions of BSRI is presented in Table 1. There was no significant difference ($P > 0.05$) between two age groups based on all dimensions of BSRI, i.e., muscularity, femininity and androgyny. There was a noticeable change in people's perception of their gender role, while considered sex scores of 20-30 years age group and sex scores of 40-50 years age group. The comparison of two sex groups within 20-30 years of age group on different dimensions of BSRI is presented in Table 2. There was a significant difference ($P < 0.05$) in masculinity dimension between males and females within 20-30 years age group. However, no significant difference ($P > 0.05$) was registered either in femininity or in androgyny dimensions between males and females within 20-30 years age group.

Different dimensions of BSRI between two sex groups of 40-50 years of age group are shown in Table 3. There was a significant difference ($P < 0.01$) in masculinity as well as femininity dimensions of BSRI between males and females within 40-50 years age group

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and again in androgyny dimension of BSRI, males and females differed ($P < 0.05$) significantly within 40-50 years age group

Table 1: Different dimensions of BSRI between two age groups

Dimension	STATISTICS	AGE GROUP		t-test value
		20-30 years	40-50 years	
Masculinity	Mean	93.58	97.16	0.16
	SD	15.68	15.57	
Femininity	Mean	101.01	104.0	0.18
	SD	13.22	13.88	
Androgyny	Mean	96.04	95.0	0.50
	SD	9.99	9.05	

Table 2: Different dimensions of BSRI between two sex groups of 20-30 years

Dimension	STATISTICS	Sex Group		t-test value
		Male	Female	
Masculinity	Mean	96.45	89.95	0.049*
	SD	14.00	17.05	
Femininity	Mean	99.23	103.26	0.13
	SD	14.17	11.69	
Androgyny	Mean	95.96	96.14	0.93
	SD	10.87	8.89	

(* $P < 0.05$)

Table 3: Different dimensions of BSRI between two sex groups of 40-50 years

Dimension	STATISTICS	Sex Group		t-test value
		Male	Female	
Masculinity	Mean	105.35	88.70	0.00**
	SD	12.42	14.00	
Femininity	Mean	98.23	109.97	0.0006**
	SD	14.53	10.38	
Androgyny	Mean	97.19	92.73	0.05*
	SD	7.26	10.22	

(* $P < 0.05$, ** $P < 0.01$)

DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to explore the effect of age and sex on perception of gender role among subjects covering age groups of 20- 30 years and 40- 50 years. No significant difference ($P > 0.05$) between two age groups based on all dimensions of BSRI, i.e., muscularity, femininity and androgyny (Table 1) might be due to the factor of societal changes over time that have diminished the impact of age on gender role identity.

Even if the overall difference was not significant, there could still be variability in people's perception of their gender role within each age group, while considered sex scores of 20-30 years age group and sex scores of 40-50 years age group. Though no significant difference ($P > 0.05$) was registered either in femininity or in androgyny dimensions between males and females within 20-30 years age group, there were significantly different sex scores ($P < 0.05$) in masculinity dimension between males and females within 20-30 years age group (Table 2). No significant difference ($P > 0.05$) either in femininity or in androgyny dimensions

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between males and females within 20-30 years age group indicated people were coming out of traditional perception of gender role. As a result, the traditional distinctions in femininity and androgyny dimensions might be less pronounced within this age group. Societal attitudes towards gender roles have been evolving over time. Thus, there may have shift in what is considered traditionally femininity or androgyny. Younger individuals with 20-30 years age group might have more flexible views of gender roles, which could lead to no difference in self-perception. Under changing situations of socio-economic status, parenting style, family structure and educational level, both men and women perceived themselves to have feminine characteristics (yielding, cheerful, sympathetic, caring, submissive etc) as well as androgynous characteristics (helpful, unpredictable, trustful etc). It indicated that the younger people of this age group did not stick to their traditional gender roles (Kawakami et al., 2000; Fortin, 2005; Bosson et al., 2018). Media play a significant role in shaping perception of gender roles. Cultural influences, including the values and beliefs of the society in which the individuals live, can affect how individuals perceive and express femininity and androgyny. If the cultural context emphasizes gender equality and fluidity, this can contribute to the absence of significant differences. Younger generations are exposed to different media influences than older generations and it can affect the views of the younger generations on different dimensions of gender roles. The participants in this age group of 20-30 years are probably downplaying in gender differences for femininity and androgyny dimensions. Besides, the BSRI may not be sensitive enough to capture subtle differences in femininity and androgyny dimensions within 20-30 years age group. It may be possible that a more context-specific measurement tool is needed to detect differences.

A significant difference ($P < 0.05$) in the masculinity dimension between some males and females within 20-30 years age group (Table 2) suggested that there were meaningful variations in how individuals in this specific age group perceived masculinity, as measured by the BSRI, due to variations across cultures and social norms. It indicated that men perceived themselves as more masculine, by adopting traits like independence, aggressiveness; self-reliance, athletic, forceful, analytical, strong personality etc. childhood conditioning have taught men to be strong and assertive (Stangor and Ruble, 1987). Men were rather expected to express negative emotions like anger, disgust, aggressiveness etc instead of positive emotions like, joy, delight, euphoric etc (Jakupcak *et al.*, 2003). On the contrary, women were free to express their emotions and were mostly expected to depend on their male counterparts for financial and non-financial needs.

A significant difference ($P < 0.01$ or $P < 0.05$) in masculinity, femininity and androgyny dimensions of BSRI between males and females within 40-50 years age group (Table 3) suggested that there were substantial variations in how individuals of different genders perceived or expressed these dimensions of gender role identity within this specific age group. Probably, people of 40-50 years age group identified themselves more with their own gender and stuck to their traditional gender role. The social and cultural context in which the individuals in the age group of 40-50 years nurtured during childhood were greater aligned with traditional gender norms. The individuals in the 40-50 years age group likely grew up a period when traditional gender roles were more strongly emphasized. These individuals might be socialized into more rigid gender roles during their formative years leading to significant differences between males and females. Unlike the younger generation, which showed more fluid in femininity or androgynous views of gender perception, individuals in this age group might still adhere more closely to traditional gender norms. Society defines men to take the responsibility of the family (Witz, 1992). Hence, they must be assertive, dominating, with strong personality and etc. On the contrary,

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women are expected to stay at home, contribute to her family and take care of her children. Thus, women are expected to be submissive, caring, nurturing, cheerful etc (Gustafsson *et al.*, 2019). Comparing these present results with the existing research on gender roles and identity in similar age cohorts suggested that men under 40-50 years age group preferred to stick to their traditional gender roles. Similarly, a woman could only be identified as to perform primary job of nurturing and caring of her family.

CONCLUSION

The present study suggested that different age groups of people under study did not influence in perceiving the gender role. However, different sexes under 20-30 and 40-50 years of age groups had significant influence on perception of their gender role. A significant difference in masculinity dimension between males and females within 20-30 years age group indicated that men perceived themselves as more masculine by adopting male traits, while no difference either in femininity or in androgyny dimensions between males and females within 20-30 years age group suggested that some people of this age group did not stick to their traditional gender roles. A significant difference in masculinity, femininity and androgyny dimensions between males and females within 40-50 years age group showed that people at older age group identified themselves more with their own gender and remained stick to their traditional gender role. To gain a deeper understanding of these variations, it is important to explore the specific factors within the masculinity, femininity and androgyny constructs that are driving the differences among men and women in different age groups and possibly conduct further qualitative research for gathering valuable insights into the perceptions of gender roles among individuals within a particular age group.

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Conflict of Interest

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