

## Gender Identity and Gender Attitude Among Youth

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### ABSTRACT

Despite there being a significant shift towards gender role attitudes over the past few decades, there still exists the traditional views and beliefs among individuals pertaining to the norms and stereotypes attached to the roles of men and women in society. Previous studies suggest that the inequality that results from the prescribed norms and stereotypes is deeply rooted among people, both individually and socially. The current study aims to focus on assessing the identity and attitude of an individual through the lens of gender. The participants in the present study comprised 46 female students, ages ranged 17-26 years, drawn from the Northeastern state of Tripura. The Gender Identity and Attitudes Toward Women scales have been used for the data collection. Mean, Standard Deviation, as well as Correlation, were calculated for analysis of results. Results showed that female participants had an average level of gender identity whereas they displayed strong gender role attitudes suggesting that they hold an egalitarian view regarding gender roles. Further interpretation of the results has been done in the discussion.

**Keywords:** *Gender, Gender Identity, Gender Role Attitude, Egalitarianism*

The more traditional way of assigning individuals as either male or female is through the concept of sex primarily based on their reproductive functions. Where sex is a biological orientation, gender is a social and cultural concept that gives an identity to an individual as either male or female. Gender becomes an essential component of people's identities when these social notions are ingrained in their psyche (Wood & Eagly, 2010, 2012). Gender identity plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's self-perception in terms of societal concepts of masculinity and femininity (Wood & Eagly, 2015). This influence is particularly evident in the early stages of socialization, as seen in the process of gender typing. During this developmental phase, children familiarize themselves with the concept of their gender and begin to internalize values, motives, and behaviors that align with the expectations associated with their identified gender.

The social identity theory propounded by Henri Tajfel (1979) posits that a person's sense of belonging is influenced by their group membership (females, feminists, family, social groups), and how they identify themselves. According to Tajfel (1979), categorising the world into the dichotomy of "us" vs "them" brings about a sense of belongingness as a group which also engenders a sense of pride and self-esteem as well as in-group favouritism

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and out-group derogation. In a study conducted on a sample of female undergraduate students, a positive correlation was found between implicit self-esteem and ingroup bias, and this relationship was moderated by the level of identification with being female (Farnham et al., 1999). Any group membership starts with an individual identifying himself/herself with a particular group or class. This process of self-identification instils a strong sense of feminist identity which may further be expedited through their contact with people close to them who also identify themselves as feminists i.e., friends and family (Reid & Purcell, 2004; Nelson et al., 2008). Social Identity theory further posits that an individual's attitude and behaviour are facilitated by group belongingness and aligning themselves with like-minded people (Deaux, Reid, Mizrahi, & Cotting, 1999; Leaper & Arias, 2011; Tajfel, 1982). Women who are associated with feminist influences start to emulate their way of thinking and develop a sense of strong feminist identity.

“Gender attitude” or “Gender Role Attitude” refers to the individual beliefs, and convictions about the gender norms or the role of men and women in society (Pulerwitz & Barker, 2007). The gender role attitude develops with gender role standards as a precursor which refers to a set of values, and beliefs that are deemed appropriate by the members of a particular sex. A traditional gender role attitude is described as the tendency to comply with the traditional way of living where a woman takes on an expressive role, taking responsibility for the family, being nurturant and caring and a man undertakes an instrumental role, being assertive, aggressive, earning for the family. A non-traditional or egalitarian gender role attitude entails equality in undertaking roles, where both men and women exchange equal responsibility for earning as well as maintaining familial functions (Scanzoni & Fox, 1980). In a previous study done on gender egalitarianism and women's well-being, there was a positive correlation found between gender role egalitarianism and human development (Kabeer, 2005) as well as it correlated positively with women's well-being and women's earning (Apparala et al. 2003; Stickney and Konrad 2007). In another study, it was found that the development of gender role attitudes starts in youth and is shaped by family background (Vella, 1994). Previous studies also suggest that having a working mother has a detraditionalizing effect on the gender role attitudes of offspring (Hoffman, 1989).

There have been many research works done on the relationship between feminism and mental health that has primarily emphasized self-efficacy and self-esteem. Self-efficacy is defined as the expectation that one has the potential required to effectively carry out a chosen goal (Maddux, 1991). Previous research points out that non-traditional or egalitarian gender role attitude is positively correlated with increased self-esteem (Heather & Jayne, 2008). In another study conducted on gender attitude and earnings, it was found that women who had significantly higher earnings had more egalitarian gender role attitudes than women who predominantly managed the household (Lisa & Konrad, 2007).

Therefore, the present study will help us understand the gender identity and gender attitude of youth and how they feel about the equal rights and roles of males and females in different facets of life (i.e., career, family, earning, etc.), whether traditional or more liberal. Moreover, the Northeast Region remains unexplored with very little or no research being done on a similar area. Therefore, by undertaking this study in the Northeastern state of Tripura, we aim to uncover a fresh and distinctive perspective on gender dynamics. This unexplored geographical context will provide valuable insights into the interplay of gender within diverse socio-cultural settings, contributing novel perspectives to the broader understanding with respect to other regions in the country.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample

The sample in the present study comprised female participants from the age group of 17-26 years. The participants were specifically chosen from the state of Tripura. A total of 46 females participated in the above study voluntarily. The data was collected through purposive sampling. The participants comprised mostly college and university students. The demographic details were presented which included name, age, gender, and state of origin. The mean and standard deviation of age were found to be 22.02 and 2.60 respectively.

### Instruments

*The following measures were used in this present study,*

- 1. Attitudes Toward Women Scale** (Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1972): The short version of the scale was used in data collection. The questionnaire consisted of 25 items. It is a Likert-type scale that contains statements about the rights and roles of women in different areas such as vocational, educational and intellectual activities, dating behaviour and etiquette, sexual behaviour; and marital relationships. Each statement has five options; Strongly Disagree=1, Disagree=2, Neutral=3, Agree=4, Strongly Agree=5.
- 2. Identity Scale** (Berry, 2005; Mishra, Bano & Tripathi, 2017): This scale was adapted in order to examine gender identity. It is a five-point Likert scale that measures the various ways people think of themselves and how they identify themselves i.e., as a male/female/other or as a part of a group/community. The questionnaire contains a total of eight statements with one statement having three sub-items. The responses to each statement are: Not at all=1, A little=2, Somewhat=3, Quite a bit=4, Very much=5.

### Procedure

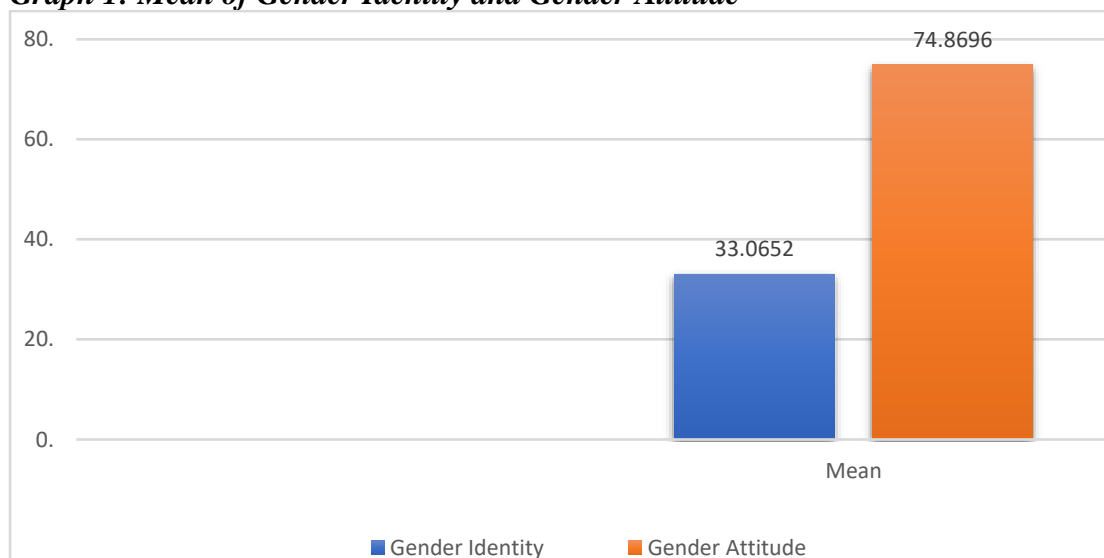
The data collection consisted of two separate questionnaires of which the first questionnaire assesses gender attitude and the second questionnaire assesses gender identity. Both questionnaires were typed into Google Forms and emailed to the participants along with the informed consent. Once they were done filling in the questionnaires, the researcher directly received the responses in the Google sheet sent by the respondents.

*Table 1: Sample items and score range*

Scales	Sample Items	Score Range
<b>Gender Identity Scale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I am proud of being a female</li> <li>I think of myself as female/male/others</li> </ul>	<b>10 ----- 100</b>
<b>Gender Attitude Scale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Swearing and obscenity are more repulsive in the speech of a woman than of a man.</li> <li>Telling dirty jokes should be mostly a masculine prerogative.</li> </ul>	<b>25 ----- 125</b>

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**Graph 1: Mean of Gender Identity and Gender Attitude**



### RESULTS

Graph 1 revealed that the female participants had an average level of gender identity (mean= 33.06, SD=6.60), as the mean score on the gender identity scale was close to the midpoint of the scale. In terms of gender attitude, the mean score of 74.86 suggests that they had a relatively positive attitude (mean= 74.86, SD=13.55) towards gender roles, as the scores closer to the high end of the scale indicate more favourable attitudes.

**Table 2: Correlations between Gender Identity and Gender Attitude**

VARIABLE	GENDER ATTITUDE	GENDER IDENTITY
GENDER ATTITUDE	---	.317*
GENDER IDENTITY	.317*	---

*Notes: P<0.05\**

#### Results:

The above table displays the correlation between two variables, "Gender Attitude" and "Gender Identity". The correlation coefficient between these two variables was 0.317\*, suggesting a moderate positive association between gender identity and gender attitude.

### DISCUSSION

The purpose of the present study is to examine gender identity and gender attitudes among youth. The findings of the study suggest that female participants showed strong gender attitudes which implies that the female participants believe in gender equality and tend to hold an egalitarian attitude towards the rights and roles of men and women. On the other hand, gender identity was found to be average among the participants. The reason behind the average gender identity might be because the participants do not feel like subscribing to the notion of adhering to a particular set of social and cultural norms expected from members of a particular group by society and therefore, they do not necessarily identify themselves with a member of any particular group. Here, normative influence may come into play as they might act in accordance with the social and cultural demands in public by complying with the prescribed norms imposed by society to fit in the group but they have a low private acceptance i.e., they do not necessarily believe that they should follow any set standards in order to prove their feminist identity (Swirsky & Angelone, 2015).

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The gender attitude of female participants was very strong. It might be because they strongly corroborate with more liberal or egalitarian viewpoints and strongly believe in gender equality and believe in equal rights for both men and women. In a study done on traditional vs egalitarian gender role attitudes, the level of education was found to play a significant role in the development of the gender role attitude of an individual (Boehnke, 2011). This finding supports the fact that females in the present study were found to have borne a strong sense of gender equality. It might be due to the very fact that the participants were either college or university students. With them being involved in higher education, they tend to have more interaction with people across the country which may further contribute to the development of a strong sense of equality among them.

Previous research done on feminist attitude and feminist identity posited that it is not imperative for an individual to support a feminist Identity in order to have a strong feminist attitude. An individual can hold a strong feminist attitude without having a strong feminist identity but it is necessary for a person endorsing a feminist identity to have a feminist attitude (Eisele & Stake, 2008). It can be explained that having gender equality is independent of how strongly one identifies with the norms that are expected of one's own gender. There are other factors which hold more importance for developing a strong sense of egalitarianism than identifying oneself as male/female/others such as level of education, strong parental influence (parents' expressiveness or instrumentality determines their children's view of the world), parents' socio-economic status. One's understanding of gender, when moderated by these above factors instils a strong sense of gender role attitude in an individual than gender identity alone does (Antill, Cunningham & Cotton, 2006).

The correlational analysis suggests a positive correlation between gender identity and gender attitude which points to the fact that those who have favourable attitudes towards gender have a stronger sense of gender identity. The finding is important because it highlights the connection between an individual's attitudes regarding the role and rights of males and females in society and their sense of self, which can have implications for various aspects of life, such as personal relationships and social interactions. For example, individuals who have strong gender identities may be more confident in expressing themselves, which may contribute to their overall well-being (Eisele & Stake, 2008). However, it is important to keep in mind that the design used in the study was correlation which limits the ability to draw conclusions about causation. Moreover, other factors may also be contributing to the relationship between gender attitude and gender identity. Further research needs to be done to explore the underlying mechanisms that may contribute to their relationship.

### *Limitations of the study*

- The sample is restricted to the participants of Tripura which might have led to the lack of generalisability. To have wider applicability, participants from various cities and states need to be included in future studies.
- The relatively small sample size in the current study may have led to a higher variability resulting in bias. To avoid bias, the sample size should be adequate.
- The self-report nature of the present study may pose a risk of response bias. A mixed-method design is encouraged for future studies.
- The present study was solely administered to female participants. A comparative study needs to be conducted between male and female participants in future in order to find out how both genders differ from each other in terms of gender identity and gender role attitudes.

### *The implication of the study*

Gender identity and gender role attitudes are complex multidimensional constructs which cannot yield an accurate picture of the gendered status quo of females if studied in isolation. There are many factors which need to be explored further in conjunction with these two variables viz., parental socialization, ethnicity, cultural context etc. The current study highlights the importance of examining gender attitudes and identity, as traditional beliefs and norms may still influence individuals' attitudes and behaviours despite societal progress towards gender equality. Future studies need to focus on the gender difference in gender identity and gender role attitude in order to compare the level of egalitarianism one group holds in comparison to their counterparts. Overall, this study provides insight into the gender attitudes and identity of a specific group of individuals and emphasizes the need for continued research and interventions to promote gender equality and challenge traditional gender roles and beliefs.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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