

Comparative Study

Conformity to Masculine Norms and Relationship Satisfaction: A Comparative Study Among Younger and Older Couples

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how adherence to traditional masculine norms affects relationship satisfaction among couples of varying ages. It seeks to understand the impact of conventional gender expectations on romantic partnerships by examining the interplay between conformity to male standards and relationship satisfaction. Its primary goals are to analyze the correlation between adherence to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction, compare levels of conformity among older and younger men, and evaluate satisfaction levels among older and younger women. Analyzing data from 62 couples across different age groups, the study reveals a significant negative relationship between conformity to masculine norms (CMN) and relationship satisfaction (RS) in both age cohorts. Utilizing the Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS) developed by Brannon and Junni (1984) to measure CMN, and The Relationship Assessment Scale by Susan S. Hendrick, Amy Dicke, and Clyde Hendrick (1998) to gauge RS, this correlation suggests that increased adherence to male standards is associated with decreased relationship happiness, and conversely. The findings of the study suggest that conforming to traditional gender norms may impact the dynamics of romantic relationships and the overall happiness levels of couples.

Keywords: *Conformity to masculine norms, Relationship Satisfaction*

Gender norms, particularly those linked to masculinity, significantly influence the dynamics of human relationships, subtly shaping expectations, behaviors, and satisfaction levels. This study delves into the intersection of relationship happiness and adherence to male standards, unveiling the intricate interplay of interpersonal interactions and cultural expectations. Understanding the evolution of masculinity and its impact on contemporary partnerships requires a historical exploration of changing social norms and expectations. Through this lens, the study aims to elucidate how conformity to masculine norms affects relationship satisfaction across different age groups, recognizing the influence of generational perspectives and cultural contexts. The concept of conformity to masculine norms encompasses adherence to societal expectations related to masculinity, including behavioral patterns and emotional expressions traditionally associated with men. This conformity is not static but evolves over time, influenced by personal experiences, societal shifts, and changing perceptions of gender roles. By examining conformity to

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masculine norms, the study seeks to unravel its multidimensional nature and its implications for relationship satisfaction, acknowledging the intersectionality of gender, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic factors.

Relationship satisfaction is a complex, multifaceted construct influenced by emotional closeness, communication, and fulfillment of both practical and emotional needs within a partnership. This subjective experience is influenced by societal norms, cultural expectations, and individual life circumstances, evolving over time as relationships progress. By exploring the interplay between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction, the study aims to provide insights into the factors contributing to healthy, fulfilling relationships across diverse age groups and cultural contexts. Understanding how conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction vary across age groups requires a nuanced examination of intergenerational dynamics. Older couples may contend with entrenched ideals of masculinity shaped by historical customs, while younger couples navigate a more fluid landscape of gender expectations. By comparing older and younger couples, the study aims to uncover commonalities and differences in how conformity to masculine norms influences relationship dynamics and satisfaction, shedding light on the evolving nature of relationships in different social and historical contexts.

Scope and Significance of the Study

Understanding societal expectations placed on men is essential for grasping how these norms shape behavior within relationships. Analyzing conformity to masculine norms across various age groups allows for exploration of evolving societal expectations and their impact on relationship dynamics. Recognizing the link between adherence to traditional masculine values and relationship satisfaction highlights potential sources of conflict and dissatisfaction within partnerships. Research has linked conformity to masculine norms with mental health outcomes, underscoring the importance of understanding its influence on relationship satisfaction across different age cohorts. Insights into the interplay between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction can inform policies promoting more flexible gender norms and healthier relationship dynamics. Studying conformity to masculine norms contributes to promoting diversity and equality in relationships, challenging stereotypes, and fostering inclusivity in society. Examining the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction is crucial for advancing our understanding of gender dynamics, relationships, and their impact on mental health and societal well-being.

METHODOLOGY

Aim

The research aims to explore how conformity to masculine norms influences relationship satisfaction among both older and younger couples. Additionally, it seeks to compare levels of conformity to these norms between older and younger men and to investigate whether age plays a moderating role in this relationship. Moreover, the study intends to assess levels of relationship satisfaction among older and younger women.

Objectives

- To examine the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction among both older and younger couples.
- To compare the levels of conformity to masculine norms among older and younger men.

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- To compare the levels of relationship satisfaction among older and younger women.
- To explore the potential moderating effect of age on the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction

Hypothesis

- H01: There will be no significant relationship between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction among couples.
- H02: There will be no significant differences between conformity to masculine norms among older and younger men.
- H03: There will be no significant differences in relationship satisfaction among older and younger women.

Definition of Key Terms

- **Conformity to masculine norms:** Conformity to masculine norms refers to the degree to which individuals endorse and exhibit behaviours, attitudes, and beliefs traditionally associated with masculinity within a given cultural context.
- **Relationship Satisfaction:** This is a measure of how satisfied partners are with their relationship. It encompasses various aspects such as emotional intimacy, communication, sexual satisfaction, conflict resolution, and overall happiness with the partnership.
- **Younger Couples:** Couples in an earlier stage of their life together, typically ranging from their late teens to early thirties. These couples might be newly married, cohabiting, or in long-term relationships but not yet middle-aged.
- **Older Couples:** Couples who are in the middle or later stages of their life together, often defined as those in their late forties and older. These couples may have been together for many years and have experienced various life transitions.

Sample

The study sample comprises 124 individuals, both married and unmarried, from Kerala. Participants include both men and women, categorized into younger and older age groups.

Tools

- **Demographic details:** After giving their consent, the participants stated their name, age, socio economic status, educational qualification, marital status and gender.
- **Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS), Brannon & Junni's (1984):** The Male Norms Scale (MRNS) assesses respondents' agreement with 26 belief statements about men's expected behaviour. The items were derived from Brannon & Junni's(1984) scale measuring attitudes towards masculinity. The scale includes three sub-scales: Male Status, Toughness, and Anti-femininity. Higher scores indicate more traditional attitudes toward male gender norms. Items 19 and 25 were reverse coded. {Toughness (alpha 0.74) , status (alpha 0.81) , and anti-femininity (alpha 0.76)}
- **The Relationship Assessment Scale by Susan S. Hendrick, Amy Dicke, Clyde Hendrick, (1998):** RAS is an instrument used to measure general relationship satisfaction. The RAS is appropriate for use with any individuals who are in an intimate relationship, such as married couples, cohabiting couples, engaged couples, or dating couples. This instrument is 7 questions long. Its brevity increases its utility in clinical settings, and research has shown the scale to be correlated with measures of love, marital satisfaction, sexual attitudes, self-disclosure, commitment, and

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investment in a relationship. A=1, B=2, C=3, D=4, E=5. Items 4 and 7 are reverse scored. To calculate the total score, add up all of the items. The measure has demonstrated very good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.86$ [59])

Administration

The study's data were gathered from both married and unmarried couples who have been in relationships for over a year, residing in Kerala. The participants' ages ranged from 18 to over 65 years. Data collection was executed through convenient sampling methods, utilizing online platforms. Google Forms were distributed via various social media channels, including WhatsApp and Instagram. The online survey commenced with detailed instructions, participant eligibility criteria, and an informed consent form. Participants received an explanation of the study's objectives and were informed about their rights. They were made aware that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Informed consent was obtained through the Google Form before proceeding. Upon agreement, participants were directed to subsequent sections to provide demographic information, followed by the main questionnaire.

Statistical analysis

The statistical techniques selected were based on the objectives and hypothesis formulated. The statistical techniques used are as follows;

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation coefficient

It is a statistical measure frequently utilized in research to examine the relationship between two variables. This coefficient, often calculated using Karl Pearson's method, provides insights into both the strength and direction of the linear association between the variables under study. The correlation coefficient values range from -1 to +1, where a value of +1 indicates a perfect positive linear relationship between the variables, meaning that as one variable increases, the other also increases proportionally. Conversely, a correlation coefficient of -1 indicates a perfect negative linear relationship, implying that as one variable increases, the other decreases proportionally. A correlation coefficient of 0 suggests no linear relationship between the variables. In other words, there is no predictable pattern in how one variable changes in relation to the other. It's important to note that while the correlation coefficient captures linear relationships, it may not capture non-linear associations between variables. Therefore, it's essential to interpret the correlation coefficient in conjunction with other statistical measures and consider the context of the data and research questions at hand.

The independent sample t-test

It is a widely used parametric statistical procedure employed to ascertain the significance of differences between the means of two independent groups or samples. It assesses whether the means of two groups are statistically different from each other, taking into account both the variation within each group and the difference between the group means. The calculation of the t-value involves dividing the difference between the means of the two groups by the standard error of this difference. The resulting t-value indicates the size of the difference relative to the variability in the data. The significance of the t-value is determined by comparing it to a critical value from the t-distribution, which depends on the degrees of freedom. Degrees of freedom are calculated based on the sample sizes of the two groups and can be thought of as the number of independent pieces of information available to estimate variability. In the context mentioned, the t-test was applied to compare the levels of

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conformity to masculine norms between older and younger men, as well as to evaluate the differences in relationship satisfaction between older and younger women. By conducting such analyses, researchers can determine whether the observed differences are statistically significant, providing valuable insights into the studied phenomena and potential implications for understanding age-related or gender-related dynamics.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The present study is aimed at understanding the relationship and to see the effect of conformity to masculine norms on relationship satisfaction among younger and older couples, and to also see whether there is any gender-based difference in the conformity to masculine norms on relationship satisfaction among younger and older couples. The results of the Pearson product moment correlation and t-test conducted in order to test the hypotheses are mentioned below.

Table 1: Conformity to Masculine Norms Among Younger and Older Men

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig.
CMN	Younger men	61.871	18.659	60	5.893	0.00
CMN	Older men	86.548	13.978	55.606	5.893	0.00

Table 1 presents the mean, standard deviation, degrees of freedom, t-value, and significance for younger and older men regarding their conformity to masculine norms (CMN). Younger men had a mean CMN score of 61.871 with a standard deviation of 18.659, while older men had a higher mean CMN score of 86.548 and a lower standard deviation of 13.978. The significant t-value of 5.893 indicates a notable difference between the two groups. These findings suggest that older men tend to conform more to masculine norms than younger men, with less variability in the older group. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a significant effect of age on conformity to masculine norms. This analysis highlights potential generational differences in adherence to traditional gender roles and expectations.

Table 2: Relationship Satisfaction Among Younger and Older Women

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig.
RS	Younger women	29.419	3.981	60	6.232	0.00
RS	Older women	22.677	4.519	59.061	6.232	0.00

Table 2 outlines the mean, standard deviation, degrees of freedom, t-value, and significance for younger and older women in relationship satisfaction (RS). Younger women had a mean RS score of 29.419 with a standard deviation of 3.981, whereas older women had a lower mean RS score of 22.677 with a standard deviation of 4.519. The significant t-value of 6.232 indicates a marked difference between the two groups. These results suggest that younger women report higher relationship satisfaction than older women, with slightly more variability in the older group. The null hypothesis is rejected, indicating a significant difference in relationship satisfaction based on age. These findings imply that younger women tend to have higher relationship satisfaction compared to older women.

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Table 3: Correlation Between Conformity to Masculine Norms and Relationship Satisfaction

CMN	RS
Conformity to masculine norms	-0.389**
Relationship satisfaction	-0.389**

Note: Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 illustrates the correlation between conformity to masculine norms (CMN) and relationship satisfaction (RS) for both younger and older couples. The correlation coefficient of -0.389 signifies a moderate negative relationship, indicating that as conformity to masculine norms increases, relationship satisfaction tends to decrease ($r = -0.389$, $p < 0.01$). This result rejects the hypothesis that there is no significant relationship between CMN and RS.

DISCUSSION

Research by Felicity Holmes (2014) found that women's perceptions of their male partners' conformity to masculine norms predicted their relationship satisfaction both directly and indirectly. Similarly, Micah E. Brown (2019) demonstrated that higher conformity to masculine norms was significantly associated with lower relationship satisfaction among both male and female participants.

For younger couples, this negative correlation suggests that adherence to traditional masculine norms may negatively impact relationship satisfaction. Younger couples might be more influenced by societal expectations of gender roles, affecting their relationship dynamics and satisfaction levels. Similarly, older couples also show a negative correlation between CMN and RS, suggesting that traditional gender norms continue to affect marital happiness even as couples age and potentially become more entrenched in these norms. These findings indicate that older couples' relationships have likely been shaped by long-standing social conventions, impacting their satisfaction levels.

Several factors may explain this negative correlation. Adherence to traditional masculine norms might lead to communication barriers, reduced emotional intimacy, or unequal distribution of relationship responsibilities, all of which can adversely affect relationship satisfaction. In conclusion, this analysis indicates a significant negative correlation between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction for both younger and older couples. Addressing these dynamics is crucial for fostering healthy and fulfilling relationships across different age groups.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study explored the relationship between conformity to masculine norms (CMN) and relationship satisfaction (RS) among younger and older couples. The analysis identified a statistically significant negative correlation between CMN and RS across both age groups, indicating that higher conformity to masculine norms is associated with lower relationship satisfaction. These findings emphasize the importance of understanding how gender norms impact relationship dynamics.

The study, conducted in Kerala, involved 124 participants equally divided between younger and older couples. It utilized the Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS) by Brannon & Junni

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(1984) and the Relationship Assessment Scale by Susan S. Hendrick, Amy Dicke, and Clyde Hendrick (1998) to examine the correlation between CMN and RS across different age groups. The data were analyzed using t-tests and Pearson correlation coefficients.

Tenability of Hypotheses

Table 4: Tenability of Hypotheses Testing Relationships between Conformity to Masculine Norms, Age, and Relationship Satisfaction

Hypothesis	Tenability
There will be no significant relationship between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction in older and younger couples.	REJECTED
There will be no significant differences between conformity to masculine norms in older and younger men.	REJECTED
There will be no significant differences in relationship satisfaction between older and younger women.	REJECTED

Implications of the Study

The findings underscore the necessity of recognizing and understanding the impact of gender norms on relationship dynamics. By acknowledging how conformity to masculine norms influences relationships, individuals and couples can become more aware of societal expectations and their potential effects on relationship satisfaction. These insights are valuable for developing interventions aimed at promoting healthier relationships. Such interventions could focus on challenging rigid gender norms, fostering open communication, and promoting equitable relationship dynamics to enhance overall satisfaction.

Conducted within Kerala, the study emphasizes the importance of considering cultural contexts in understanding relationship dynamics. Cultural norms and values can influence the expression of gender roles and expectations, necessitating culturally sensitive approaches to intervention and support. Given the differing life stages and experiences of younger and older couples, tailored interventions may be required. For example, interventions for younger couples could address societal pressures related to gender roles, while those for older couples might focus on re-evaluating entrenched gender norms and fostering mutual support and understanding.

Limitations of the Study

- **Geographical and Sampling Bias:** The study's sample may not fully represent Kerala's diverse population or other regions due to its geographic focus. The convenience sampling method may also introduce bias, as volunteers might differ systematically from non-volunteers.
- **Generalizability:** Caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings beyond Kerala, as cultural nuances and socioeconomic factors unique to the region may limit broader applicability.
- **Instrument Limitations:** While the MRNS and the Relationship Assessment Scale are widely used, they may not capture the full complexity of gender norms and relationship dynamics. Other relevant factors, such as cultural attitudes, family dynamics, or individual personality traits, were not fully explored.
- **Age Grouping Simplification:** Grouping participants into "younger" and "older" categories may oversimplify the diversity within these age groups.

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Addressing these limitations in future research would strengthen our understanding of the relationship between conformity to masculine norms and relationship satisfaction across diverse cultural and regional contexts.

Scope for Further Research

This study opens avenues for further research to deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between gender norms and relationship satisfaction. Future studies could explore additional factors influencing relationship dynamics, examine longitudinal changes in relationship satisfaction, and investigate the effectiveness of interventions aimed at challenging traditional gender norms. Combining quantitative research with qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could provide a richer understanding of individuals' experiences with gender norms and relationship dynamics. Qualitative research can capture nuances, cultural variations, and individual perspectives that may not be fully addressed through quantitative measures alone.

By addressing research gaps and advancing our understanding of the complex interplay between gender norms and relationship dynamics, future research has the potential to inform more targeted interventions, policies, and practices aimed at promoting healthy and fulfilling relationships within diverse cultural contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

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