

Gender Identity and Guilt-Shame Proneness as Predictors of Prosocial Behavior in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated the relationship among masculinity, femininity, guilt-shame proneness and prosocial behavior in Indian young adults. Using a cross-sectional survey design, data was collected from 100 participants (41 males, 59 females) through convenience sampling. The measures used for the study were the Indian Gender Role Identity Scale (IGRIS), Adult Prosocialness Scale (APS) and Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP). Pearson's correlational analysis, linear regression analysis and independent t-test were used to analyze the data. Results showed that masculinity and femininity significantly predicted prosocial behavior (16% and 27% variance, respectively). Females scored higher on the prosocialness and guilt-shame proneness scale than males. Femininity was found to be positively associated with guilt-shame proneness. However, it was noted that guilt-shame proneness has no relationship with masculinity and prosocial behavior. The study challenges the stereotypical notions and previous research findings. The current findings hold implications for tailoring interventions and educational curriculum to enhance prosocial behavior and support a more guilt-shame prone population. Future research should use large representative samples to understand the complex relationship among the variables further.

Keywords: *Masculinity, Femininity, Guilt-Shame proneness, Prosocial behavior*

Prosocial behaviour is a standard part of our day-to-day life. Prosocial Behavior is "voluntary behaviour intended to benefit others" (Eisenberg et al., 2006). Such behaviours may include helping, comforting, sharing, cooperating, donating, and defending others (Dovidio et al., 2017). Factors like empathy, perspective taking, attention, and perceiving the situation if someone needs help also play a crucial role in explaining prosocial behaviour. Another factor, like gender, can also be considered one of the determinants of Prosocial behaviour. However, the researchers have different opinions regarding gender being one of the determinants. Some studies show significant gender differences in prosocial behaviours, and found that females are more prosocial than males (Eisenberg & Fabes, 1998; Erdle et al., 1992; Aggarwal & Pratibha, 2022; Silke et al., 2018) whereas other studies state the opposite that males are more prosocial than females (Feinman, 1978; Eagly & Crowley, 1986; Albanesi et al., 2007; Jaureguizar et al., 2013; Barchia & Bussey, 2011). However, some studies show no relationship exist between gender

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and Prosocial Behaviour (Chadha & Misra, 2006; Boice & Goldman, 1981; Ma, 2005; Kumru et al., 2012). The differences in prosocialness of the individuals may result from cultural and individual differences. Gender roles can play a significant role in society as these are the shared beliefs applied to individuals depending upon their socially identified sex.

Generally, masculinity is associated with strength and power, while femininity is associated with love and care. Studies suggest that men conforming to traditional masculine role norms, i.e., having aspects of toxic masculinity like fostering domination, violence, homophobia, etc., are less likely to engage in helping behaviors even in emergencies (Popat & hunter, 2015; Ingram, 2019) while femininity seems not to affect helping behaviour (Tice et al., 1985). However, other studies showed contrasting findings, such that high masculine honour beliefs are associated with the perception that men should intervene and help (Saucier et al., 2022). Although, there are a studies suggesting no relationship exists between conformity to masculinity role norms and helping behaviour (Koon, 2013; Luria et al., 2014; Marti-Vilar et al., 2019). On the other hand, Ma (2005) found that both masculinity and femininity are associated with prosocial behaviour. Moreover, a new category of masculinity referred to as hybrid or caring masculinity is emerging with the changing world. It rejects adherence to a few harmful traditional masculine norms, is more flexible in its understanding of masculinity and embraces being touched to their feminine side (Eisen & Yamashita, 2017). Also, as we progress towards the future, the notion of gender equality is strengthening, and the female workforce is increasing; females have acquired multiple higher positions in various departments, which signifies a reduction in the rigidity of gender identity roles and beliefs. Thus, the current study aims to investigate the relationship between gender identity roles, i.e., masculinity and femininity and the Prosocial behavior of young adults.

Guilt and shame can be other predictors of Prosocial behavior because emotion theorists believe such human emotions have an adaptive function, helping the survival of the human species (Campos et al., 2004). Guilt is a moral emotion, generally regarded as a negative feeling occurring when a person cannot meet his/her internalised moral standards (Carlo et al., 2012). Moreover, few researchers suggest that some people are predisposed to feel guilty because of having a lower threshold and are believed to have higher guilt-proneness, a personality characteristic (Cohen et al., 2012). Research findings suggest that guilt and guilt-proneness are positively associated with prosocial behaviour as it may predispose the person to think, feel and act ethically, which may have a significant effect on their helping behaviour, and it was found that females show higher guilt-proneness (Cohen et al., 2012; Torstveit et al., 2016; Fang et al., 2019). Shame is also a moral emotion that can be defined as an unpleasant feeling experienced by people failing to meet the demands or moral standards of others. Studies show that shame is negatively associated with prosocial behavior (Roos & Hodges, 2013).

The review of the studies shows the inconsistency among the results regarding the gender differences in prosocial behavior and role of gender identity in prosocial behaviour. It shows that the explanation regarding how gender is related to prosocial behavior has not been resolved. Most of the studies are conducted in Western countries (Lampridis & Papastylianou, 2014; Einolf, 2001; Eagly & Crowley, 1986), which questions their generalizability to Indian population while the few Indian studies are conducted, but they are either very old (Chadha and Misra, 2006) or uses very low sample size which is unrepresentative of the population (Aggarwal & Pratibha, 2022; Abdullahi & Kumar, 2016) which put question mark on the reliability of their research findings. Studies have also

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suggested that the Indian population scores high on Guilt and shame proneness (Anolli & Pascucci, 2005). Therefore, the present study aims to clarify the relationship and minimise the research gaps in literature by examining the relationship among gender identity, i.e., masculinity-femininity, guilt-shame proneness and Prosocial Behaviour of Indian young adults.

Objectives

1. To compare the Prosocial behaviour of male and female young adults.
2. To compare the Guilt and shame proneness of male and female young adults.
3. To assess the relationship among masculinity, Guilt-shame proneness and Prosocial Behaviours.
4. To assess the relationship among femininity, Guilt-shame proneness and Prosocial behaviour.
5. To study the relationship between guilt-shame proneness and Prosocial behaviour.

Hypothesis

1. There is no significant difference between the prosocial behaviour of male and female young adults.
2. There is no significant difference in Guilt and Shame proneness between male and female young adults.
3. There is no significant relationship of masculinity with Prosocial behaviour and guilt-shame proneness.
4. There is no significant relationship of femininity with prosocial behaviour and guilt-shame proneness.
5. There is no significant relationship between guilt-shame proneness and Prosocial behaviour.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The current study is a correlational study that examines the relationship among gender identity, guilt-shame proneness, and prosocial behavior.

Sample

The sample consisted of 100 Indian participants aged between 18 and 25 years, comprising 41 males and 59 females (Age: $M= 21.7$ years, $SD= 1.46$).

Procedure

The investigator collected participant data using the redcap, a secure web application for building and managing surveys and databases. All the participants were briefed about the present study, its scope and possible outcomes. After their voluntary approval of informed consent their responses were collected and used in research analysis. The measures used for the study were the Background questionnaire, Indian Gender Role Identity scale (IGRIS), Adult Prosocialness scale (APS) and Guilt and Shame Proneness scale (GASP). Participants were not compensated for participating in the study. The participant's data is kept confidential and anonymous, no identifiers collected, ensuring that the participants are not harmed during the research process.

Measures

- **Background measure:** The background questionnaire asks about the participant's gender and other demographic information.
- **Guilt and Shame Proneness Scale (GASP):** It was used to measure guilt-proneness and shame-proneness among young adults. It is developed by Cohen and his colleagues in 2011. The measure consists of 16 items, with 7-point Likert scale responses ranging from (1) very unlikely to (7) very likely. The scores are calculated by summing all the items. Within the current sample, the GASP reported an alpha coefficient of 0.75.
- **Adult Prosocialness Scale:** It was used to assess the prosocialness among young adults. The scale was developed by Caprara and his colleagues in 2005. It consists of 16 items that respond on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from (1) never/almost never true to (5) almost always/ always true. The alpha coefficient was found to be 0.88 for the current study.
- **Indian Gender Role Identity scale (IGRIS):** It assessed the psychological masculinity and femininity among young adults. The scale was originally constructed by Bem (1974) and was culturally adapted by Basu in 2010. The scale comprises three dimensions with 10 items each: masculinity, femininity, and neutrality. The scale consists of 30 items judged on a 7-point Likert scale to describe oneself. The masculinity and femininity were the only subscales of IGRIS used for the study. A reliability estimate of 0.81 was reported for the masculinity dimension and 0.7 for the femininity dimension in the current study.

Operational definition

- Guilt and shame proneness is operationally defined as the score received by the participants in the Guilt and Shame Proneness scale.
- Prosocialness is operationally defined as the score received by the participants in the Adult Prosocialness Scale.
- Masculinity is operationally defined based on the score received by the participant on the masculinity dimension of the Indian Gender Role Identity scale.
- Femininity is operationally defined based on the score received by the participant on the femininity dimension of the Indian Gender Role Identity scale.

Statistical Analysis

The researcher used the Jamovi software (Version 2.3) to conduct the descriptive analysis and the reliability and Shapiro-Wilk normality test. Parametric statistical analysis was employed for the study. Independent sample t-test was used to check for gender differences. Pearson's correlation was conducted, and linear regression analysis was employed separately to test if variables of masculinity, femininity or guilt-shame proneness predicted prosocialness among young adults.

RESULTS

The sample consisted of 100 participants comprising 41 males and 59 females, with a mean age of 21.7 years ($SD=1.46$). Descriptive statistics (see Table 1 below) indicate the average and standard deviation of the measure of masculinity ($M= 49.7$, $SD= 8.92$), femininity ($M= 49.6$, $SD= 7.67$), Guilt and shame proneness ($M= 78.8$, $SD= 11.7$) and prosocialness ($M= 64.9$, $SD=7.86$). The Shapiro-Wilk analysis was conducted to check for the normality, and it revealed that all variables are normally distributed.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics with Shapiro-Wilk test of Normality

Measures	N	Mean	SD	W	p
Masculinity	100	49.7	8.92	0.98	0.34
Femininity	100	49.6	7.67	0.99	0.91
Prosocialness	100	64.9	7.86	0.97	0.08
GASP	100	78.8	11.7	0.98	0.51

Note. * $p < .05$; M, mean; SD, standard deviation; α , Cronbach’s alpha; W, Shapiro-Wilk coefficient; GASP, Guilt and shame proneness

The Pearson correlation (see Table 2) indicates that masculinity has a significant relationship with prosocialness ($r=0.40, p<0.001$) while showing an insignificant relationship with guilt-shame proneness. Femininity showed a significant relationship with both prosocialness ($r=0.52, p<0.001$) and guilt-shame proneness ($r=0.23, p<0.05$). Results found no significant relationship between guilt-shame proneness and prosocialness.

Table 2 Relationship of masculinity, femininity, guilt-shame proneness and prosocialness among young adults

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Masculinity	—	0.39**	0.40**	-0.18
2. Femininity		—	0.52**	0.23*
3. Prosocialness			—	0.11
4. GASP				—

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .001$; GASP, Guilt and shame proneness

Linear regression was employed separately to test if variables of masculinity and femininity predict prosocialness levels. Results (see Table 3) indicate that masculinity is a significant positive predictor ($\beta=0.4, p<.001$) of prosocialness. The coefficient of determination ($r^2=0.16$) showed that variation of masculinity can explain 16% variation in prosocialness. The model is adequately fit ($F = 19.5, p < .001$). Results (see Table 4) further indicate that femininity is a significant positive predictor ($\beta=0.52, p<.001$) of prosocialness. The coefficient of determination ($r^2= 0.27$) showed that variation of femininity can explain 27% variation in prosocialness. The model is adequately fit ($F =36.8, p <.001$). It can be concluded that both masculinity and femininity are the predictors of prosocialness.

Table 3 Regression analysis predicting prosocialness (DV) from masculinity (IV)

Predictor	β	t	p	r^2	F	p
Masculinity	0.4	4.42	< .001	0.16	19.5	< .001

Note. DV= Prosocialness

Table 4 Regression analysis predicting prosocialness (DV) from femininity (IV)

Predictor	β	t	p	r^2	F	p
Femininity	0.52	6.06	< .001	0.27	36.8	< .001

Note. DV= Prosocialness

The independent *t*-test was conducted to check for gender differences in all measures (see Table 5). The results indicated that there is a significant difference based on gender among the sample for all variables, masculinity ($t(98)= 2.26, p<0.05$), femininity ($t(98)= 2.55, p<0.05$), guilt-shame proneness ($t(98)= 4.15, p<0.01$) and prosocialness ($t(98)= 2.89,$

$p < 0.01$). Results suggest that males have more masculinity than females while females have more Femininity, prosocialness and guilt-shame proneness than males.

Table 5 Differences in masculinity, femininity, guilt-shame proneness and prosocialness among males and females

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
Masculinity	Male	52.1	9.87	2.26	0.02*
	Female	48.1	7.86		
Femininity	Male	47.3	8.02	-2.55	0.01*
	Female	51.2	7.06		
Prosocialness	Male	62.2	8.39	-2.89	0.005**
	Female	66.7	6.98		
GASP	Male	73.5	11.94	-4.15	< .001**
	Female	82.6	9.96		

Note. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; GASP, Guilt and shame proneness

DISCUSSION

For the purpose of understanding a complex phenomenon such as prosocialness, we investigated the relationship among gender identity, guilt-shame proneness and prosocialness. We found the gender differences in prosocialness of young adults and females were found to score more on the prosocialness scale than males, as pointed out by other researches (Aggarwal & Pratibha, 2022; Lampridis & Papastylianou, 2014; Kumru et al., 2012; Silke et al., 2018). Based on the current study results of independent t-test analysis, the females scored higher on guilt-shame proneness scale than the males. Findings of the current study are consistent with those of Roos et al. (2014), Torstveit et al. (2016) and Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik (2015). The gender differences in prosocial behaviour and guilt-shame proneness could be explained with difference in socialization and the upbringing of the boys and girls and their learning about the gender roles and expectations, where males are taught to be more assertive while females to be more caring which is related with the empathy (Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik, 2005; Hogg & Vaughan, 2011; Kochanska et al., 2002). Adhering to their roles more rigidly as they reach adulthood. Women are more aware and attuned to the possible effect of their behaviour on others compared to boys (Gilligan, 1977; Robertson et al., 2007; Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik, 2005) and are more sensitive to others' well-being and feelings, which, in turn, may explain the lower threshold of females for feeling guilty (Katchadourian, 2010). Moreover, domains like empathy and perspective taking, where females score higher than males, are positively associated with prosocial behavior and guilt-shame proneness (Abdullahi & Kumar, 2016; Fang et al., 2019; Torstveit et al., 2016), which may explain these gender differences.

The current results of linear regression analysis found that masculinity was a significant predictor of prosocial behavior contributing 16% variance and femininity was also significant predictor of prosocial behavior contributing 27% variance in the prosocial behavior of young adults, these findings were similar to Ma (2005). It appears that gender roles attributes whether masculine or feminine are supposed to be prosocial in nature. However, these results are contrary to previous studies (Tice et al., 1985; Katherine et al., 2019; Carlson, 2008; Leone et al., 2016; Luria et al., 2014; Koon, 2013; Marti-Vilar et al., 2019). The current findings can be explained by the assumption that traits of masculinity do not inherently conflict with the prosocialness of young Indian adults. Indicating a shift in societal perception of masculinity, resulting in its flexibility and expression of the prosocial

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behavior. Additionally, cultural or societal norms and expectations regarding masculinity continue to evolve, influencing how it intersects with prosocial behavior. The present study also showed that masculinity was not associated with the guilt-shame proneness, resulting in partially accepting hypothesis 3 while femininity was found to be positively associated with the guilt-shame proneness similar to previous studies (Benetti-McQuoid & Bursik, 2015), rejecting hypothesis 4. The feminine traits like nice, affectionate, sympathetic, and etc., understanding and their expression influenced by cultural and societal norms may be leading it to be more strongly associated with prosocial behaviour and guilt-shame proneness.

It was also found that guilt-shame proneness is not associated with prosocial behaviour, accepting hypothesis 5. However, these findings contradict the previous findings (Fang et al., 2019; Torstveit et al., 2016; Gulseven et al., 2022; Roos & Hodges, 2013). This implies that factors other than guilt-shame proneness may play a more substantial role in influencing prosocial actions of Indian young adults and guilt and shame may not be moral emotions as we believe and cause the people to engage in prosocial behaviour instead there may be other motivational functions playing a significant role in driving acts of prosocialness.

Implications and Limitations

The major implication of the study was challenging the stereotypical notions and highlighting the importance of embracing a wide range of expressions of masculinity and femininity. Understanding that females are more guilt prone could be useful in designing interventions or support systems for individuals who struggle with these emotions. The gender differences in prosocial behavior implies tailoring social programs and community initiatives to consider different gender-based inclinations towards prosocial behavior which can enhance their effectiveness.

The major limitations can be derived from the low sample size, online survey method, use of convenience sampling and correlational design in our investigation. The study sample did not have any non-binary participants, which is also one of the limitations. The current study variables could not predict prosocialness by a large percentage. Thus, we encourage future researchers to replicate the study with larger and more representative samples to better understand the relationship among gender identity, guilt-shame proneness, and prosocialness and explore other factors contributing to prosocialness among the population.

CONCLUSION

This study delves into the complex interplay between gender identity, guilt-shame proneness, and prosocial behavior. It establishes that females exhibit higher levels of prosocial behavior compared to males, aligning with prior research. Additionally, females demonstrate greater guilt-shame proneness, consistent with earlier findings. The research showed that both masculinity and femininity were significant predictors of prosocial behavior, thus challenging stereotypical notions, highlighting the importance of embracing a diverse range of gender expressions. Interestingly, guilt-shame proneness was not found to be significantly associated with prosocial behavior, indicating that other motivational factors may play a more substantial role. These findings hold significant implications for tailoring interventions and educational curricula to enhance prosocial behavior, contributing to more inclusive and accepting societies. The study calls for future research with larger and more representative samples to further understand these intricate relationships.

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Conflict of Interest

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