

Masculinity and Femininity among Working Women in Indian Urban Culture

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KEYWORDS Gender Role. Bem Sex Role Inventory. Urban Working Women

ABSTRACT How humans view the appropriate roles for either gender has generated a great deal of discussion among social scientists. This study was conducted to examine the validation of gender roles and their status. The Bem Sex Role Inventory Short Form (BSRISF) was administered to cross-section of ninety urban working females. Analysis after categorization in three groups viz., Younger (20-35 years), Middle (36-50 years) and Older group (51-65 years) was done. It was found that masculine characteristics- "Defend my own beliefs", "Independent", "Have leadership quality", "Willing to take risk" and total score of masculine characteristics were significantly higher in younger group. However, all feminine characteristics except one, "Sympathetic", were found non significant among different groups. Findings strongly support the cross-sectional validity on feminine characteristics of the BSRISF among working urban females in India.

INTRODUCTION

"Gender roles" are the attitudes, behaviors, rights, and responsibilities that a society associates with each sex (Holt and Ellis, 1998). Age, race, and social class further define individuals' roles, which influence how men and women interact and the attitudes and behaviors expected of each (Lindsey, 1994). Masculine and feminine roles are not opposite ends of the same continuum but are instead two separate dimensions. A person may be described as "masculine," as "feminine," as "androgynous," i.e., having characteristics of both, or as "undifferentiated," that are, having neither strong masculine nor strong feminine characteristics (Bem, 1977). People who are androgynous are believed to be more effective because they can perform both the "instrumental," directive, or masculine roles and the "expressive," nurturing, or feminine roles (Powell and Butterfield, 1989).

We use the terms "traditional" and "conservative" to describe the belief that men's and women's roles are distinct, and the terms "modern" and "liberal" to describe the belief that roles are not ascribed according to sex. According to the traditional point of view, men are more assertive, competitive, decisive, confident, ambitious, and instrumentally oriented, whereas women are more nurturing, empathetic, helpful, sympathetic, gentle, affectionate, and expressively oriented (Lueptow et al., 2001). Traditional gender roles emphasize separate spheres of influence for women and men, with women inside the home and men outside the home (Duncan et al., 1997). A modern, or liberal,

view of gender roles is that both men and women may engage in behaviors that have traditionally been ascribed to either sex (Blee and Tickamyer, 1995). According to the liberal view, women may occupy leadership positions in the workplace, be autonomous, and also be nurturing. Similarly, men may provide childcare at home, and still remain achievement-oriented in the workplace.

The traits associated with masculinity and femininity are human qualities, therefore, both men and women engage in behaviors that are considered "masculine" or "feminine." That is, masculinity and femininity may vary within an individual regardless of the person's biological sex. Bem suggested that androgynous individuals (i.e., those who have both masculine and feminine traits) may draw upon both masculine and feminine behaviors. Androgynous individuals' behaviors may vary more as a function of situational demands because of their more extensive behavioral repertoire.

India has been going through a period of fast urbanization, industrialisation and westernisation for several decades. Therefore, it is necessary to replicate these studies and upgrade the knowledge of gender stereotypes in India. The aim of the present study was to compare three cross-sectional groups and status of traditional gender roles in working urban Indian women.

METHOD

Sample: A total sample of ninety working females were randomly drawn from urban areas

of Haryana, Rajasthan, and Delhi in India. Three groups: Younger group, 20-35 years (Mean and SD= 28.5±3.99), Middle group, 36 -50 years (Mean and SD= 42.16 ± 3.84), Older group 51-65 years, (Mean and SD = 54.57±2.45) were taken. They were highly educated, Graduates or post-graduates. They belonged to middle socio-economic strata.

Tool: Bem Sex Role Inventory Short Form (BSRISF) was used for data collection. This test is a 30 item adaptation of Bem's original inventory designed to investigate masculinity and femininity as independent dimensions of sex role identity. Respondents were asked to rate themselves as to how well ten stereotypically masculine adjectives (e.g. assertive, has leadership abilities, dominant etc.), ten stereotypically feminine adjectives (e.g. affectionate, compassionate, warm etc.), and ten neutral adjectives describe them. Respondents indicate how well each item describes them on a 7-point scale with endpoints "never or almost never true" (1) and "always or almost always true" (7). Scores on the BSRISF are purported to measure the respondent's degree of masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated sex role identity. Subscales on the BSRISF correlate highly with those of the original version, with coefficients ranging from .87 to .94. Internal consistency and reliability are generally considered acceptable with estimates ranging from .75 to .87. It is generally accepted that the 30 item short form of the Bem Sex Role Inventory is psychometrically superior to the original version, and can be used when assessing sex role identity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics

to calculate means, standard deviations, and F-values to examine the significance levels of differences among three age groups using ANOVA. Percentages of masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated sex role identity were also calculated in all age groups.

Current findings lead us to the understanding that females are showing change in feminine and masculine characteristics over different generations. As shown in the Table 1, masculine characteristic: "Defend my own beliefs" was significantly different among these groups. Mean and standard deviation for younger group was 5.83±1.15, for middle group was 4.5±1.57 and it was 4.47±1.74 for older group. F-value on this characteristic was 8.05 and significant at 0.01 level. So this characteristic was found significantly higher in the younger group. Same trend was observed for other masculine characteristics: "Independent" (F= 3.15, p<0.05), Have leadership quality (F= 4.67, p<0.01), Willing to take risks (F= 5.26, p<0.01) and total of all masculine characteristics (F= 5.96, p<0.01). Means of these significantly different characteristics were observed and found higher in younger group than other two groups. It indicates that new generation females possess significantly higher masculine characteristics as compared to old generations. However rest of the masculine characteristics showed non-significant differences among different age groups but same trend except two (Strong personality and Forceful), higher means of younger group, was observed throughout the study.

Researches have consistently shown that men hold more traditional roles than women. Masculine characteristics have been more socially approved than feminine characteristics. Pennell and Ogilvie (1995) reported that masculine roles are always associated with greater power than

Table 1: Mean, S.D. and F- values of masculine characteristics among different age groups

S. No.	Masculine Characteristics	M ± S.D. (20-35yrs)	M ± S.D. (36-50yrs)	M ± S.D. (51-65yrs)	F-value
1.	Defend my own beliefs	5.83±1.15	4.5±1.57	4.47±1.74	8.05**
2.	Independent	5.57±1.45	4.57±1.92	4.47±1.92	3.15*
3.	Assertive	4.93±1.44	4.20±1.56	4.27±1.68	2.02
4.	Strong personality	5.67±1.12	5.07±1.36	5.67±3.36	0.75
5.	Forceful	3.50±1.61	3.57±1.17	3.63±1.77	0.06
6.	Have leadership quality	5.07±1.54	4.03±1.87	3.83±1.56	4.67**
7.	Willing to take risks	4.80±1.4	3.57±1.83	3.57±1.83	5.26**
8.	Dominant	4.27±1.53	3.43±1.83	3.37±2.06	2.28
9.	Willing to take a stand	5.17±1.37	5.00±1.59	4.90±1.77	0.22
10.	Aggressive	3.80±1.52	3.83±1.53	4.17±1.97	0.43
	Total	48.40±8.34	41.27±7.22	43.67±8.80	5.96**

** Significant at 0.01 level * Significant at 0.05 level

Table 2: Mean, S.D. and F- values of Feminine characteristics among different age groups.

S.No.	Feminine Characteristics	M.±S.D. (20-35yrs)	M.±S.D. (36-50yrs)	M.±S.D.(51-65yrs)	F-value
1.	Affectionate	6.37±0.72	5.83±1.15	5.83±1.29	2.44
2.	Sympathetic	5.90±0.99	5.07±1.55	4.90±1.77	3.96*
3.	Sensitive to needs of others	5.93±1.11	5.87±1.07	5.37±1.65	1.69
4.	Understanding	5.90±1.09	5.53±1.57	5.97±1.20	0.95
5.	Compassionate	5.30±1.18	5.03±1.16	5.20±1.52	0.32
6.	Eager to soothe hurt feelings	5.20±1.35	5.00±1.58	4.60±1.75	1.14
7.	Warm	5.00±1.49	4.87±1.36	4.70±1.73	0.29
8.	Tender	5.33±1.35	5.20±1.29	4.80±1.79	1.04
9.	Love children	6.43±0.77	6.27±1.14	6.30±1.21	0.21
10.	Gentle	5.43 ± 1.30	5.27±1.36	5.43±1.59	0.14
	Total	56.17±7.27	54.43±7.05	53.67±8.34	0.86

* Significant at 0.05 level

feminine roles. In addition those individuals who show masculine traits generally receive more respect from others (Burnett et al, 1995). A second reason why women hold more liberal views of gender roles may be because women’s activities have changed more dramatically in the last century than men’s have. Kagitcibasi and Sunar (1992) have reported different reasons of changes in gender roles and stereotypes. For example, international and regional migration, increasing educational opportunities, the emphasis on secularism, the newly acted civil code of equal property division, the recognition of the value of housewives’ unpaid labor, and the increased protection of the rights of working women. Twenge’s (1997) did meta-analysis of 63 studies using the BSRI which showed that women’s self-ratings on masculinity have been increasing steadily and gender differences in self-ratings on the masculinity dimension have been decreasing overtime.

It is evident from Table 2 that except, “Sympathetic”, means of all feminine characteristics were found non-significant. Means and standard deviations for “Sympathetic” characteristic were 5.90±0.99, 5.07±1.55 and 4.90±1.77 for younger, middle and older groups, respectively. Means of other six feminine characteristics out of ten have shown higher mean scores in younger group than middle and older groups. However all characteristics except “Sympathetic” have been non-significant. Present results are supported by different studies. Basow (1984) concluded in his study that gender stereotypic traits are universal.

Masculine, Feminine, Androgynous, and Undifferentiated characteristics among females were identified with the help of median values calculated (Table 3). Females having scores above

median value in masculine characteristics and scores below median value in feminine characteristics were identified as masculine. Females having scores above median value in feminine characteristics and below median value in masculine characteristics were named as feminine. However, females having scores above median value in masculine as well as feminine characteristics were called as androgynous. Further, females having scores below median value in masculine as well as feminine characteristics were identified as undifferentiated.

Percentages of Masculinity, Feminity, Androgyny, and Undifferentiated characteristics are calculated among different groups, as shown in Table 3. Looking at masculinity, it was observed that more percentage (37%) of younger as well as middle group females showed masculinity as compared to lower percentage (26%) of older group females. When feminity is taken into account, data highlights that higher percentage (52%) of middle group females showed feminity than younger and middle group females (24%). It was found that in the case of androgyny, considerably high percentage (44%) of younger group females showed androgyny while only 18% older group females showed androgyny. More percentage (40%) of older group females showed undifferentiated characteristics as compared to lower percentage (27%) of younger group females.

Table 3: Masculinity, feminity, androgyny and undifferentiated among different groups.

Groups/ characteristics	Mascu- linity	Feminity	Andro- gyny	Undiffen- ciated
Younger Group	37%	24%	44%	27%
Middle Group	37%	52%	38%	33%
Older Group	26%	24%	18%	40%

Holt and Ellis (1998), they also note that the magnitude of difference between desirability ratings “for a man” and those “for a woman” has decreased in the 25 years since the development of the BSRI. This is a pilot study with a relatively small sample. Therefore, the findings in this study are preliminary and should be considered with great caution. Further study is strongly recommended to investigate the applicability of BSRI items on larger samples. There is still much to be learned about the gender role ideology and recent trends of the BSRI items in Indian culture.

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