



Challenging Norms: A Study on Traditional Gender Roles, Egalitarianism and Feminist Ideals in Modern Society

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Abstract

Gender roles shape societal expectations, dictating how individuals "should" behave based on their gender, while feminism challenges these norms, advocating for equality across all genders. This study delves into the dynamic relationship between traditional gender roles and feminist ideologies, aiming to dismantle stereotypes and promote equity in personal, professional, and social spheres. Through a sample of 25 young adults aged 18–25 from Mohali, Punjab, the research

uncovered significant differences in perceptions of gender roles related to work, social life, marriage, and family among university departments. Midwifery students and upper-class students exhibited more egalitarian views, yet a persistent traditional outlook on gender roles was observed among most participants. The findings also highlighted a limited understanding and acceptance of feminism among youth, suggesting a gap in awareness. To bridge this gap, the study emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to address individual beliefs and societal structures, fostering a deeper understanding of feminism and driving long-term change towards gender equity.

Keywords: *Feminism, Gender Roles, Young Adults*

Introduction

From boardrooms to classrooms, gender roles still determine who leads, who follows, and who is heard. These roles, rooted in societal expectations and internalized beliefs, sustain inequalities and reinforce stereotypes about how men and women "should" behave. Feminism, as both a political and social movement, seeks to challenge these norms by dismantling patriarchal systems and addressing oppression and marginalization. At its heart, feminism advocates for equal rights and opportunities, empowering women and marginalized genders in all areas of life—from professional settings to personal decision-making.

Feminism is far from a single, uniform idea; it is a diverse and evolving ideology that tackles various dimensions of gender inequality. Key issues include reproductive rights, wage equity, political representation, and combating gender-based violence, such as domestic abuse and harmful practices like female genital mutilation. Feminism also emphasizes intersectionality, understanding how gender intersects with race, class, sexuality, and other factors to create unique

experiences of oppression. Intersectional feminism broadens the movement's scope, ensuring it addresses the needs of all marginalized groups.

Despite significant progress, violations of gender role expectations still face criticism and penalties (Prentice & Carranza, 2002; Rudman & Glick, 2001). These roles persist because they are embedded both in societal norms and in individuals' internalized identities (Wood & Eagly, 2010). This dual embedding sustains stereotypes, such as the notion that women are inherently warm and nurturing while men are naturally strong and assertive (Blair & Banaji, 1996; Rudman & Glick, 2001).

Feminism's influence has been transformative, disrupting traditional gender dynamics and enriching society by challenging stereotypes and advocating for equality. The current paper examines the evolution of feminism, its theoretical and practical contributions, and attitudes toward gender roles in contemporary society. By exploring historical and theoretical contexts, this research aims to analyze feminism's role in deconstructing gender roles, understanding youths' attitudes towards gender roles, and fostering a more inclusive future.

Feminism

Nahal (1991) in his book "Feminism in English Fiction" defined feminism "as a mode of existence in which the woman is free of the dependence syndrome. There is a dependence syndrome: whether it is the husband or the father or the community or whether it is a religious group, ethnic group. When women free themselves of the dependence syndrome and lead a normal life, my idea of feminism materializes."

Price (2009), in *Feminism Frameworks: Building Theory on Violence against Women*, states that, "feminism is a method of analysis, a standpoint, a way of looking at the world from the

perspective of women. It questions government policies, popular culture, ways of doing and being and asks how women's lives are affected by these ideological and institutional practices.”

According to Raina (2020) 'Feminism' is a wide range of political movements, ideologies and social movements that share a common goal to define, establish, and achieve political, economic, personal and social equality of sexes.

Bettencourt, Vacha-Haase and Byrne (2011) explored attitudes toward feminism in 245 U.S. college students and their older relatives. Results indicated that older adults held more conservative views on feminism, religiosity, and political orientation compared to younger adults. For young adults, feminism attitudes were influenced by gender and political orientation, while for older adults, religiosity and political orientation were key factors.

Cree and Dean (2015) built on findings from a study from 2013 of social work students' attitudes towards feminism in the UK. They further used social media to gather opinions of students across 7 universities in the UK and their results revealed that students' views on feminism are diverse and differ significantly from those of older educators. It emphasizes the need to critically examine what feminism means in academic contexts to foster deeper discussions on power, agency, and structure, enhancing teaching and learning.

Gender Roles

Blackstone (2003) in *Gender Roles and Society* states that, “gender roles are based on the different expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender. Gender roles are the product of the interactions between individuals and their environments, and they give individuals cues about what sort of behavior is believed to be appropriate for what sex. Appropriate gender roles are defined according to a society's beliefs about differences between the sexes.”

According to Cheung (1996) Gender roles are prescribed in traditional Chinese societies where stereotypic gender roles are socialized primarily in the family, and reinforced by other social institutions. The only place delegated to women was in the family where they would play the instrumental and supportive roles of managing the home and supplying male heirs. The patrilineal continuation of the family and the cultural tradition of reserving inheritance to sons and not to daughters have resulted in greater values attached to sons in the Chinese family.

Nadeem and Khalid (2018) wanted to determine students' opinion on gender roles. They studied a sample of 126 intermediate students (63 boys, 63 girls) from Beaconhouse National University, Lahore and were administered the Islamic Attitude Towards Women Scale (Khalid & Freize, 2004) and Career Aspirations Scale (Gray & O'Brien, 2007). The study found that men held more conservative gender role attitudes and had lower career aspirations compared to women. Women were more likely to choose non-traditional, male-dominated careers. Egalitarian gender attitudes were linked to higher career aspirations and non-traditional career choices for both genders. These findings highlight a shift in gender roles and women's social status in Pakistan, showing a strong connection between career aspirations and women's social empowerment.

Aysegul Unutkan et al. (2016) wanted to determine students' opinions on gender roles. They studied 846 students of Dumlupinar University, School of Health. Their results indicated that 43.3% of students viewed feminism as advocating female superiority, while 31.9% saw it as promoting social equality. Male students held more traditional views on work and marriage, whereas both genders had more egalitarian opinions on social and family life. Differences were noted across academic departments, with midwifery students and senior-year students showing more progressive views. The results suggest that many students lack a comprehensive

understanding of feminism, highlighting the need to enhance gender awareness through university societies promoting equity.

Purpose

Various studies are present in different cultures about determining attitudes towards gender roles. On the other hand, attitudes towards gender roles differ between cultures. The purpose of this study is to develop a valid and reliable instrument to determine the attitudes of young adults towards feminism and gender roles in India.

Hypothesis

There will be a significant relationship between adherence to traditional gender roles and perceptions of marital gender roles with these associations reflecting a contrast to feminist ideals of egalitarianism and equality

Method

Sample

A sample of 25 college students in the age range of 18-25 years was taken from Mohali, Punjab.

Measures

Gender Roles Attitude Scale (ZEYNELOöLU, TERZø2öLU, 2011): The instrument was developed to determine university students' attitudes towards gender roles. It has 5 subscales measured on a 5-point Likert scale. There are eight items in the 'egalitarian gender roles', 'female gender roles', 'marriage gender roles', 'traditional gender roles' subscales, and six items in the

‘male gender roles’ subscale. The students’ responses were scored as 5 for ‘completely agree,’ and 1 for ‘absolutely disagree.’ The traditional attitude sentences regarding gender roles were scored on a reverse scale to the positive sentences: 1 point for ‘completely agree,’ and 5 points for ‘absolutely disagree.’ The highest possible score from the scale was 190 and the lowest was 38.

Procedures

The participants were informed about the purpose of the research and the questionnaires were filled face to face. Each participant was thanked for their cooperation and any queries they had about the tests were cleared. Standardized psychological tests were administered to the participant.

Analysis of Data

Results

Table 1: *N, Mean and Standard Deviation*

	Egalitarian	Female Gender	Marriage Gender Roles	Traditional Gender Roles	Male Gender Roles
N	25	25	25	25	25
Mean	35.7	24.2	16.9	17.5	11.5
Standard deviation	4.61	3.70	5.24	6.79	4.08

Table 2: *Correlation between Egalitarian, Female Gender, Marriage Gender Roles, Traditional Gender Roles and Male Gender Roles*

	Egalitarian	Female Gender	Marriage Gender Roles	Traditional Gender Roles	Male Gender Roles
Egalitarian	—				
Female Gender	0.075	—			
Marriage Gender Roles	-0.288	0.149	—		
Traditional Gender Roles	-0.180	0.390	0.651***	—	
Male Gender Roles	-0.236	0.463*	0.571**	0.567**	—
Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$					

Discussion of Results

The results found that traditional gender roles demonstrate a significant positive correlation with marriage gender roles ($r = 0.651$, $p < .001$) The results suggest that individuals

who support traditional gender roles are likely to hold stereotypical views about gender roles within marriage.

Male gender Roles were also found to be positively correlated with the female gender roles ($r=0.463$, $p < .05$). The results suggest that individuals who strongly endorse traditional male roles are also likely to endorse traditional female roles. Further male gender roles were also significantly positively correlated with marriage gender roles ($r=0.571$, $p < .01$) and with traditional gender roles ($r=0.567$, $p < .01$). The results suggest that individuals who hold traditional views about male roles in society are more likely to support traditional roles within marriage. Additionally, the results also conclude that views about male roles are deeply embedded in traditional notions of gender.

Thus, the results conclude that traditional and marriage specific gender roles influence each other, reflecting that broadening societal norms impact interpersonal dynamics within marriage. Male and female roles correlate, suggesting that individual views of gender roles are framed by traditional ideology rather than independent roles of males and females. Further, the correlation between male roles, traditional roles and marriage roles highlights the centrality of male dominated narratives in defining broader gender expectations.

Therefore, the results contrast feminist ideals by highlighting the continuity of traditional gender norms which supports predefined roles of men and women in both societal and marital contexts. Feminism advocates for egalitarian relationships and rejects the rigid categorization of roles based on gender. Toller, Suter and Trautman (2004) examined relationships among gender role identity, support for feminism, nontraditional gender roles, and willingness to consider oneself a feminist in a sample of 301 college students. Their results found that female participants positively correlated with nontraditional gender role attitudes. For male participants, high femininity on the SIS was positively associated with identifying as a feminist and having a

supportive attitude toward the women's movement, whereas high masculinity on the PAQ was negatively correlated with identifying as a feminist.

Conclusion

The strong relation suggests that traditional and marital gender roles are deeply rooted in societal constructs. The results highlight the persistence of traditional gender norms which are often at odds with feminist ideals of equality. The strong correlation suggests that societal expectations still influence perceptions of gender. Feminism challenges these norms by advocating for the rigid roles set by society, emphasizing shared responsibilities in relationships and fostering an equitable society.

It is suggested that efforts need to be made to promote gender equity and address traditional views holistically. Furthermore, encouraging open dialogues about marital and societal roles needs to be taken to understand the impact of traditional norms on relationships.

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