

## CROSS SECTIONAL ANALYSIS OF ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER ATYPICAL BEHAVIOURS

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**Abstract:** In this study, we examined attitudes towards male and female atypical behaviour among males and females and two cohorts - born in the 1960s and in the 1990s. Gender atypical behaviours refer to behaviours that are not stereotypically associated with that particular gender. 137 participants rated the acceptability of gender atypical behaviours on a 7 point rating scale. Results indicated that age had a significant effect on attitudes towards atypical behaviours, with younger participants being more accepting. Younger females had the most accepting attitudes while older females had the least accepting attitudes. It was also found that among both males and females and across both cohorts, female atypical behaviours were more acceptable than male atypical behaviours.

**Keywords:** attitudes, cohort, cross sex behaviour, gender norms, gender

**Introduction:** While gender roles have traditionally been followed quite rigidly, recently there has been a lot of public discourse on gender issues. Ideas of what constitute gender roles and behaviours have also been changing. Concomitant to this, what is expected of a man and a woman have begun to diverge, and dissolve. These expectancies further get imparted to future generations and influence their social behaviours with respect to gender. These developing ideas have been manifested across a variety of situations in our everyday lives, including workplace and interpersonal behaviours.

Rapid gendered socialization takes place during adolescence, immediately after puberty, according to Hill and Lynch (1983). Thus, girls and boys face different socialization pressures and demands and may conform to these demands in different ways. This becomes a way for adolescents to acquire traditional or societal gender roles. Along with puberty, another significant change which occurs in adolescence and continues into adulthood is introduction into romantic relationships. This also serves to further differentiate social roles for males and females. This is known as the gender intensification hypothesis. Once gender roles are acquired, transgressions from these roles are important to examine. According to Hoyenga and Hoyenga (1993) gender schemata refers to cognitive orientations that lead individuals to process social information in sex-linked manner. Thus, the ways in which individuals perceive and evaluate gender role transgressions are largely dependent on the gender schemas that they hold.

Whether or not one conforms to gender stereotypes within one's close relationships can affect a couple's ability to communicate effectively and affect the longevity of their relationship (Tannen, 1990). In their study, Vogel et al. (2003) found that under conditions of emotional vulnerability, men and

women behave consistently with their gender stereotypes in romantic relationships. This is because under aversive states, like that of emotional vulnerabilities, people are more likely to behave in traditional normative ways than risky non-normative ways.

Gender has important implications in the workplace too. The role of women in the workplace has steadily been increasing over the last few years. However, even in 2009-10, the proportion of women in the labour force in India was 29% (Oxfam, 2014). There is still inequality which exists between men and women at the workplace. Occupational sex segregation is one of the major problems for working women. This often causes and maintains the wage gap, the differences in salaries paid to men and women workers. Women earn less than men in every country, largely because they are concentrated in 'female' jobs that pay less than 'male' jobs. Female jobs also tend to be less prestigious and autonomous than male jobs. However occupational sex segregation is a two-way process. Men are even less likely than women to aspire and work in gender atypical jobs. While proportions of women in several male-dominated jobs have increased over the past 20 years, predominantly female jobs have changed their sex composition very little, if at all (Williams, 1993).

In this context, we examine how deviations from gender linked behaviours affect perception and evaluation of individuals. The aim was to study the attitudes towards gender atypical behaviours of males and females, cross-sectionally and across male and female participants.

**Method:** One group consisted of participants within the age group of 18-30 years, while the other ranged from 41-60 years. Attitude was measured in terms of degree of acceptability of the atypical gender behaviours, on a 7 point Likert rating scale. Thus, older male, older female, young male and young

female participants rated the degree to which they felt the gender atypical behaviours of males and females were acceptable. Thus it was a 2 (gender: male vs. female) X 2 (age: young vs. old) independent groups design with 2 dependent variables (Atypical Male behaviours and Atypical Female Behaviours).

The questionnaire consisted of questions about gender atypical female behaviour (AFB), gender atypical male behaviour (AMB), in the areas of workplace and interpersonal behaviours. It consisted of statements depicting situations of males and females having engaged in gender atypical behaviour (Eg. Mohit generally gets bullied, but he never stands up for himself. Instead his girlfriend stands up to the bullies. How respectable do you think is Mohit's behaviour?). Participants were also asked to rate their fluency in English and their level of honesty and attentiveness while answering, on a scale of 1 to 7. The questionnaire was answered online by a sample of 171 participants, through snowball sampling technique. After screening out participants falling outside the specified age group, and those low on fluency in English, attentiveness and honesty, 140 responses were considered for data analysis.

**Results:** The data of 140 responses was screened for univariate outliers using Boxplot and multivariate outliers using Mahalanobis distance. After removing three univariate outliers, the young age group consisted of 38 females and 34 males, while the older age group consisted of 39 females and 26 males. The assumptions of normality, multicollinearity, homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices and linear relationship of DVs were met. A factorial MANOVA was conducted. There was no significant main effect of gender on the combined dependent variables,  $F(2,132) = 3.323$ ,  $p = 0.725$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda = .995$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.005$ . There was a significant main effect of age on the combined dependent variables,  $F(2,132) = 6.138$ ,  $p = 0.003$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda = .915$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.0085$ . There was no significant interaction effect between gender and age on the combined dependent variables,  $F(2,132) = 1.099$ ,  $p = 0.336$ ; Wilks'  $\Lambda = .984$ ;  $\eta^2 = 0.016$ .

Two independent groups two-way anova were used to analyse the data. With respect to the DV of AFB, there was no significant gender difference [ $F(1, 133) = 0.613$ ,  $p = 0.435$ ,  $g = 0.12$ .] between mean ratings of males ( $M = 5.191$ ;  $SD = 0.943$ ) and females ( $M = 5.299$ ;  $SD = 0.905$ ). There was a significant age difference with a moderate effect size [ $F(1, 133) = 5.76$ ,  $p = 0.018$ ,  $g = 0.43$ .] between mean ratings of older participants ( $M = 5.046$ ;  $SD = 0.838$ ) and younger participants ( $M = 5.438$ ;  $SD = 0.956$ ) with a moderate effect size. The interaction between gender and age was not significant [ $F(1, 133) = 1.737$ ,  $p = 0.190$ ].

With respect to the DV of AMB, there was no significant gender difference [ $F(1, 133) = 0.228$ ,  $p = 0.634$ ,  $g = 0.05$ .] between mean ratings of males ( $M =$

4.142;  $SD = 0.989$ ) and females ( $M = 4.192$ ;  $SD = 0.981$ ). There was a significant age difference with a moderate effect size [ $F(1, 133) = 10.849$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $g = 0.59$ ] between mean ratings of older participants ( $M = 3.877$ ;  $SD = 0.9$ ) and younger participants ( $M = 4.434$ ;  $SD = 0.954$ ). The interaction between gender and age was not significant [ $F(1, 133) = 1.307$ ,  $p = 0.255$ ].

Since there was no significant main effect for gender, multiple comparisons were not conducted with the respective pairs for gender. The Bonferroni t test was conducted for multiple comparisons with respect to age. With respect to AFB, there was a significant difference with a moderate effect size [ $t_{(133)} = 2.821$ ,  $p = 0.0055$ ,  $g = 0.672$ ] between mean scores of the young female group [ $M = 5.592$ ,  $SD = 0.791$ ] as compared to the old female group [ $M = 5.013$ ,  $SD = 0.926$ ]. There was no significant difference [ $t_{(133)} = 0.72$ ,  $p = 0.473$ ,  $g = 0.179$ ] for the young male group [ $M = 5.265$ ,  $SD = 1.097$ ] compared to the old male group [ $M = 5.096$ ,  $SD = 0.7$ ]. With respect to AMB, there was a significant difference with a large effect size [ $t_{(133)} = 3.370$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ,  $g = 0.836$ ] between mean scores of the young female group [ $M = 4.559$ ,  $SD = 0.901$ ] as compared to the old female group [ $M = 3.833$ ,  $SD = 0.931$ ]. There was no significant difference [ $t_{(133)} = 1.430$ ,  $p = 0.155$ ,  $g = 0.359$ ] for the young male group [ $M = 4.294$ ,  $SD = 1.005$ ] compared to the old male group [ $M = 3.942$ ,  $SD = 0.949$ ].

**Discussion:** Overall it was seen that age had an effect on both the DVs. Younger participants had more favourable attitudes towards gender atypical behaviour in general. For both the specific genders, male and female, this held true too, i.e. younger participants had more favourable attitudes towards AFB and AMB. It is known that different age cohorts are socialized in different ways about gender roles (Brewster & Padavic, 2000). What is acceptable for women and men is often related to different socio-historical trajectories- for example, there has been an influx of conversation about the diffusion of gender roles, and the idea of feminism and what it implies since the mid-1970s. This perhaps has made a difference in males' and females' gender schemata across different age cohorts.

According to Powell and Steelman (1982), mother's education affects their children's attitudes towards gender roles. Educational achievement of the mother is associated with children having more egalitarian gender attitudes and reduces the blind acceptance of gender myths and stereotypes. In our study even though the educational qualifications of participants' mothers were not examined, nationwide literacy rates for women during the 1950s (approximately when the older participants' mothers would have received schooling) were 8.9% and during the 1980s (approximately when the younger participants' mothers would have received schooling) were 29.8%

(Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India, 2014). This implies that the older participants are less likely to have egalitarian gender attitudes than the younger participants.

With respect to both AFB and AMB it was seen that young females hold the most favourable attitudes while older females hold the least favourable attitudes. An interesting finding was that least favourable attitudes towards AFB were still more favourable than most favourable attitudes towards AMB, i.e. the lowest mean score for attitudes towards AFB ( $M=5.01$ ) was higher than the highest mean score for attitudes towards AMB ( $M=4.55$ ). This means that females engaging in atypical female behaviour is more acceptable than males engaging in atypical male behaviours. The social status model, proposed by Feinman (1981) explains how gender role transgressions are differently viewed for different genders. According to this model, since men occupy a higher status than women in society (Deaux, 1976 as cited by Feinman, 1984), their transgressions to a lower status behaviour is perceived more unfavourably than transgression by females. This is because for females, the transgressions represent a shift from lower status to higher status behaviour.

Another explanation as to why AMB is perceived more negatively was given by Herek (1984; 1994). He uses McCreary's Sexual Orientation Model (1994) to explain the same. This model proposes that feminine-typed behaviour among males is perceived as being indicative of homosexuality while masculine-typed behaviour does not hold the same indication for women. And, because of socially unfavourable attitudes towards homosexuality, male transgressors of gender roles are perceived more negatively than female transgressors.

It was also found that there were no significant differences between older males and younger males for either AFB or AMB. On the other hand, for females, there were significant differences between older and younger participants for attitudes towards

AFB and AMB. This can be better understood by analyzing the two graphs. Thus the interaction effect, though not statistically significant, tells us that age and gender differentially interact to affect attitudes towards atypical behaviours. According to Thornton and Freedman (1979), young females are more accepting of new roles and attitudes, especially during periods of change. They have had less gender socialization experiences with respect to traditional roles and have to make decisions about their work and family. In contrast, older females have had more thorough gender socialization with respect to traditional roles, and considerable experience and investment in those roles. As a result, they are not as motivated as the younger females, to change their views and beliefs, especially during periods of change.

**Conclusion:** This is only a preliminary research study and further research should take into account the limitations of this study. Future researchers could check for the psychometric properties of the questionnaire. In this study, atypicality of behaviours was selected based on the researchers' perceptions and observations of what is gender atypical. Future work can verify whether these behaviours are indeed atypical of the gender. Overall, the questionnaire had 8 questions depicting atypical behaviours. Future research can expand on the atypical behaviours in these domains as well as include other domains.

As the conversation about gender and feminism gets louder in the country, it is important to quantitatively analyse whether our attitudes, behaviours and beliefs are actually changing. Since one's behaviour is commonly evaluated and associated with one's gender, it may have implications on one's self concept and self-esteem. How these evaluations and associations are made are especially of interest to us. While serious issues of gender inequality and oppression plague almost half the population, it is also necessary to systemically analyse our concepts of what it means to be a man or a woman in the 21st century.

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