

EXAMINING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ATTITUDES TOWARDS GENDER ROLES AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS HOMOSEXUALITY: A PRELIMINARY INVESTIGATION

MEGHNA BASU THAKUR

Abstract: A considerable research has been carried out on the Western populations examining the relationship between gender role attitudes and attitudes towards homosexuality (e.g., Kerns & Fine, 1994), gender differences in gender role attitudes (Baber & Tucker, 2006) and attitudes towards homosexuals (Herek, 1994, 2000b, 2002; Kerns & Fine, 1994; McDevitt, Sheehan, Lennon, & Ambrosio, 1990). Not much is known about this in the Indian context; thus, the current study seeks to investigate the aforementioned dimensions in the Indian context. Participants who were undergraduate students completed the following instruments: Social Roles Questionnaire; SRQ- Baber & Tucker, 2006) and Attitudes towards Homosexuality Scale (Kite & Deaux, 1986). Data obtained from 60 respondents underwent statistical analysis. Findings indicate a significant association between attitudes towards gender roles (transcendent and traditional) and attitudes towards homosexuality. However, no significant gender differences were obtained with respect to gender role attitudes and attitudes towards homosexuality. The findings obtained in the current study have been examined in the light of relevant literatures along with their potential implications.

Keywords: Gender Roles, Transcendent, Traditional, Homosexuality.

Introduction and Review of Literature: Gender constitutes one of the important domains researched in the area of social sciences, with many scientists arguing over the gender differences versus similarities (Helgeson, 2016). Understanding the distinction between sex and gender assumes paramount importance: sex is a biological construct that is comparatively stable, whereas gender is a sociocultural construct that is characterized by fluidity (Helgeson, 2016). Societies across the globe have been known to assign roles based on one's biological sex and expect this to be fulfilled during the socialization process (Bem, 1981). Gender schema theory (Bem, 1981), an important process theory of gender development, asserts that sex typing occurs partly due to integration of self-identity into the gender schema. This theory further states that gender schema becomes a benchmark for evaluating oneself (in other words, influences self-esteem) and results in an individual modulating his/her behavior in accordance with the cultural expectations of masculinity and femininity. It thus appears that gender schema theory aligns with the social constructivist paradigm. For Lorber (2001), dichotomization of gender identity is central to gender inequality.

Additionally, Kerns and Fine (1994) have offered an interesting account of gender socialization model to account for differences in gender role attitudes across the two sexes. According to this model, heterosexual males stand a greater chance of upholding conventional gender role attitudes than females on account of three factors. Firstly, males are exposed to more intense gender socialization compared to

females. Secondly, conventional modes of gender socialization confer greater power and status to males than females. And finally, heterosexual males are more likely to view non-acceptance of homosexuals as central to their gender role orientation when compared to heterosexual females.

This brings us to another topic, namely, attitudes towards homosexuals. Kite and Deaux (1987) indicate that our attitudes towards homosexuals are largely influenced by our perceptions of gender roles. They cite an instance where lesbian women were thought to possess attributes typical of military women. In the eyes of Randy Shilts (1993; p. 496), "Although clerks/typists were as likely to be a lesbian, they were rarely suspect. Husky women were suspicious, petit women were not." Additionally, homosexuals are often the targets of sexual prejudice (Herek, 2000a). This sexual prejudice is associated with factors such as high levels of authoritarianism, holding a fundamentalist ideology, and political party affiliation (see Herek, 2000a).

There is a sizeable research available that describes the relationship between gender role attitudes and attitudes towards homosexuality. Kite (1994) sees attitudes towards homosexuals as subsumed under attitudes towards gender roles. Furthermore, mKerns and Fine (1994) found that conventional gender role orientation was significantly positively correlated with unfavorable attitudes towards homosexuals. Their study, interestingly, found males to display more unfavorable attitudes towards gays compared to women, but no significant gender differences emerged with respect to the attitudes towards lesbians. Specifically, they found the association

between gender and attitudes towards gays to be influenced by conventional gender role attitudes. With respect to gender differences, a substantial body of literature indicates men to demonstrate more unfavorable attitudes towards homosexuals compared to females (e.g., McDevitt, Sheehan, Lennon, & Ambrosio, 1990; Herek, 1994). Herek (2000b, 2002) found heterosexual males to demonstrate more hostile attitudes towards gays than towards lesbians. Additionally, Baber and Tucker's (2006) study found men to hold more gender-conventional attitudes and less gender-transcendental attitudes compared to their female counterparts.

Not much research has been conducted in the Indian context to examine the association between gender role attitudes and those towards homosexuality and the associated gender differences. The current study is thus guided by the following three hypotheses:

1. There will be a significant positive association between gender role attitudes and attitudes towards homosexuality.
2. Males will display more unfavorable attitudes towards homosexuals compared to women.
3. Males will display more gender conventional attitudes and less gender-transcendental attitudes compared to women.

Methodology:

Sample: The sample comprised 60 undergraduate students from a suburban college in Mumbai. With respect to gender, the sample comprised 30 females (50%) and 30 males (50%). The average age of the study sample was 20.02 years (Mean= 20.32 SD= .89), with the respondents' ages ranging between 18 and 22 years.

Measures:

- *Demographic Sheet and Informed Consent Form.*
- *Attitudes towards Gender Roles.* This was measured using the Social Roles Questionnaire (SRQ; Baber & Tucker, 2006). This scale evaluates respondents' perception of gender roles and consists of 2 subscales: gender-transcendent and gender-linked. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for these two scales were found to be .745 and .795, respectively.
- *Attitudes towards Homosexuality.* This was measured using the Social Roles Questionnaire (Kite & Deaux, 1986). This scale evaluates respondents' perceptions of homosexuals and includes a unidimensional component, reflecting favorable or unfavorable attitudes towards the target group. In the current study, the Cronbach's alpha for these two scales were found to be .872.

Procedure: Data was collected online by using google forms. Prior to filling up survey forms, respondents were given information about the ethical issues involved in research (see American

Psychological Association, 2010) in the informed consent form. The obtained data was then subjected to appropriate statistical analyses.

Statistical Analysis: Descriptive statistics (e.g., mean and standard deviation) for the relevant variables were obtained. The relationship between these variables was examined using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation. Gender differences on the attitudinal variables were examined using a one-way ANOVA.

Results and Discussion: Descriptive statistics such as Mean and Standard Deviation have been represented in Table 1. Table 2 indicates the associations between the two dimensions of attitudes towards gender and attitudes towards homosexuality. From this table, it can be inferred that gender-transcendent dimension exhibits a significant negative association with gender-linked dimension ($r=-.648, p<.01$), whereas it demonstrates a significant positive association with attitudes towards homosexuality ($r=.641, p<.01$). On the other hand, gender-linked dimension was found to be significantly negatively correlated with attitudes towards homosexuality ($r=-.545, p<.01$). Age did not have a significant with any of the attitudinal variables examined in the current study. Furthermore, based on the one-way ANOVA conducted, gender differences on each of these attitudinal variables, viz. gender-transcendent, gender-linked, and attitudes towards homosexuality were not found to be statistically significant although in the expected direction.

The significant negative correlation between gender-traditional attitudes and attitudes towards homosexuality as well as a significant positive correlation between gender-transcendent attitudes and attitudes towards homosexuality is in line with prior research by Kerns and Fine (1994). Although prior research has indicated women to score significantly higher on gender-transcendental attitudes compared to men and men to score relatively higher on gender-traditional attitudes compared to women (e.g., Baber & Tucker, 2006), the findings obtained in our study were not statistically significant although in the expected direction. Similarly, no evidence was obtained with respect to significant gender differences in attitudes towards homosexuality, although in the expected direction. This is unlike prior research which has indicated men to demonstrate more negative attitudes towards homosexuals (particularly gays) than women (e.g. Kerns & Fine, 1994; McDevitt, Sheehan, Lennon, & Ambrosio, 1990; Herek, 1994, 2000b, 2002). It needs to be understood that the current study was conducted with an undergraduate sample which has been sensitized to gender-related issues as a part of the formal course curriculum.

The study encountered limitations at several levels. The small sample size precludes the possibility of having the findings generalized to the larger student community. ‘Social desirability bias’ (Fisher, 1993) could have guided the participants’ responses. Personality variables (e.g. androgyny/ masculinity/ femininity) and sexual orientation can be examined

in the prospective studies, which will offer a holistic understanding of the phenomenon. Nevertheless, the study lays crucial implications for mental health professionals to devise psychosocial interventions aimed at bringing about attitude change with respect to gender roles and sexual orientation.

Appendices:

Table1. Descriptive Statistics

| Variable | Mean | Standard Deviation |
|---------------------------------|-------|--------------------|
| Age | 20.32 | 0.89 |
| Gender-Transcendent | 19.40 | 2.87 |
| Gender-Linked | 18.62 | 5.25 |
| Attitudes towards Homosexuality | 77.78 | 10.00 |

Table2. Overall Correlations between the Age, Attitudes towards Gender Roles and Homosexuality

| | Gender-Transcendent | Gender-Linked | Attitudes towards Homosexuality |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Age | | .041 | .076 |
| Gender-Transcendent | -.044 | -.648** | .641** |
| Gender-Linked | | | -.545** |

**p<.05

Table3. Mean Scores, ‘F’ values and significance level with respect to the Attitudes towards Gender and Attitudes towards Homosexuality

| | Male (n=30) | | Female (n=30) | | ‘F’ | Sig. |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------|---------------|------|------|------|
| | Mean | SD | Mean | SD | | |
| Gender-Transcendent | 19.17 | 3.05 | 19.63 | 2.71 | .392 | .53 |
| Gender-Linked | 19.50 | 5.54 | 17.73 | 4.88 | 1.72 | .20 |
| Attitudes towards Homosexuality | 76.80 | 11.56 | 78.77 | 8.24 | .58 | .45 |

p not significant

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Meghna Basu Thakur, Head and Assistant Professor
Department of Psychology, R.D. National College, Bandra, Mumbai- 400050