

Attitude Towards Gender Role and Self-Esteem among Adolescents and Young Adults

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The study explores the relationship between gender attitudes (Egalitarian and stereotypical) and self-esteem among adolescents and young adults, aiming to understand how attitudes toward gender roles correlate with self-worth and self-evaluation of an individual. Data was gathered from 30 participants, aged 16-22, through an online survey employing the Attitude Towards Women Scale and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Preliminary analysis indicates that participants with more egalitarian gender attitude report higher self-esteem, suggesting a positive association between progressive gender attitudes and self-regard. Conversely, those endorsing stereotypical views on gender roles appear to show lower levels of self-esteem. These findings support the hypothesis that gender attitudes significantly relate to self-esteem, potentially shaping how individuals perceive themselves in relation to societal expectations. Further research with larger samples is recommended to validate these findings and explore their broader implications in educational and familial settings.

Keywords: Gender attitude, Self-esteem, Adolescents, Young Adults.

Gender constitutes a core dimension of human identity, shaping individuals' social positioning, interpersonal relationships, assigned roles, and the expectations placed on them across various aspects of life (Silva & Alves, 2020). Prior to the 1970s, gender was primarily viewed through a biologically essentialist lens, with masculinity and femininity seen as fixed, opposing traits determined by biological sex (Roszak, 2010). However, from the 1970s onward, a paradigm shift occurred with the rise of social constructionist thought, which redefined gender as a socially and culturally shaped identity rather than an innate characteristic (Hoffman et al., 2000). The conceptualization of gender has evolved significantly over time, moving beyond traditional binary frameworks. Beyond biological distinctions, it encompasses cultural norms, social expectations, and psychological perceptions that shape both personal and collective experiences. Many individuals construct their self-identity in relation to their understanding

of maleness or femaleness, highlighting the significant role gender plays in shaping self-concept and social positioning (Lewin, 1984).

Gender identity, the deeply held sense of being male, female, or others, is shaped through complex socialization processes that begin in early childhood and continue throughout adolescence and adulthood (Carter, 2014). Theories of gender identity, such as identity theory and identity control theory, emphasize that individuals internalize societal norms and expectations, which influence their self-perceptions and interactions (Stryker et al., 2000; Burke & Stets, 2009). For example, Identity Control Theory suggests how people aim to keep their gender identity consistent by behaving in ways that match social expectations. These behaviors are shaped by feedback—positive or negative—from important people in their lives. The theory explains that individuals compare how they see themselves in specific situations (reflected appraisals) with their

internal sense of who they are (identity standards). When there is a mismatch, it creates discomfort, prompting them to change their behavior to restore alignment. This ongoing process helps maintain stable gender identities (Burke & Stets, 2000).

Adolescence is identified as the crucial period for establishing identity – defining values, beliefs, and goals – which is essential for productive adulthood in love and work (Erikson, 1968). During this formative stage, individuals not only explore their personal aspirations but also begin to position themselves within the broader social world. One of the ways individuals develop a gendered understanding of the world is through the internalization of societal guidelines of what roles and behaviors are appropriate for a girl or boy, giving rise to gender norms. These implicit social guidelines influence multiple facets of life, including access to education and career pathways, the allocation of power and resources, and overall well-being (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Through social interactions and engagement within communities, these gender norms become further reinforced, influencing individuals' gender attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to gender (Cislaghi & Heise, 2020).

Gender attitude refers to an individual's beliefs and perceptions regarding gender roles and norms, ranging from stereotype-driven views to more egalitarian perspectives that advocate for gender equality (Boehnke, 2011). Stereotypical gender attitude reflects the belief that men should be dominant, assertive, and breadwinners, while women should be nurturing, submissive, and primarily responsible for domestic duties. Gender egalitarianism, on the other hand, encompasses both equality in societal and professional domains and the equitable distribution of roles and responsibilities within the household (McDaniel, 2008).

Research across various studies highlights several key factors influencing gender role attitudes among adolescents and adults. Notably, adolescent boys in Bangladesh exhibit significant differences in their gender attitudes, with girls generally holding more egalitarian views. Additionally, it was found that adolescents from wealthier households and urban settings tend to hold less traditional gender views (Streatfield et al., 2023). Earlier studies have also shown that holding egalitarian beliefs helps reduce gender gaps in household responsibilities, as men tend to take a more active role in domestic work (Bianchi et al., 2000; Cunningham, 2001). Additionally, studies indicate that stronger gender egalitarianism is linked to greater acceptance of women in the workforce and the perception that employment is compatible with motherhood (Thornton, 1989). Higher educational attainment consistently emerges as a strong predictor of egalitarian beliefs across genders (McDaniel, 2008; Boehnke, 2011; Streatfield et al., 2023). Previous studies have also shown that greater gender equality is associated with higher rates of female enrollment in higher education (Bradley & Ramirez, 1996). In addition, parents with egalitarian beliefs are more inclined to support their children's education equally, giving both sons and daughters more balanced access to learning opportunities (Thornton, Alwin & Camburn, 1983; Dryler, 1998). In addition, parents with egalitarian beliefs are more inclined to support their children's education equally, giving both sons and daughters more balanced access to learning opportunities (Thornton, Alwin & Camburn, 1983; Dryler, 1998).

On a broader societal scale, increased gender egalitarianism has been associated with advancements in women's status across key sectors, including employment, education, and politics (Boehnke, 2011). These societal shifts not only promote equal

opportunities but also influence individuals' self-perception and psychological well-being. For instance, higher self-esteem has been linked to better mental health outcomes, as it contributes to greater psychological resilience (Stinson et al., 2008).

Self-esteem is undoubtedly considered one of the most extensively researched concepts in contemporary social sciences. According to Orth and Robins (2014), self-esteem refers to a person's subjective perception of their own value and significance. Recent empirical research extensively documents the positive impact of higher self-esteem across various aspects of life, with numerous studies highlighting its beneficial effects. However, studies exploring gender differences in self-esteem have yielded mixed findings, with some indicating higher self-esteem among males (Burnett et al., 1995), while others report no significant difference (Hensley, 1977).

Interestingly, in a large-scale cross-cultural study conducted by Bleidorn et al. (2016), the findings revealed that self-esteem follows a consistent trajectory across age groups, indicating that self-esteem generally increases from late adolescence into middle adulthood before stabilizing and slightly declining in older age. Moreover, the gender gap in self-esteem was found to be more pronounced in economically developed and gender-equal societies, whereas more collectivist cultures exhibited smaller disparities. These results emphasize that socioeconomic conditions, cultural values, and societal expectations may shape self-esteem differences between men and women.

Moreover, a large body of research suggests that the gender gap in self-esteem may be largely influenced by societal evaluations of traditional gender roles. Studies indicate that the stereotypically male role, which emphasizes agency, confidence,

and assertiveness, is generally more valued in Western societies compared to the stereotypically female role, which is associated with warmth, nurturance, and communal traits (Taylor & Hall, 1982). Consequently, men may experience higher self-esteem due to increased societal validation and reinforcement of agentic qualities (Rudman & Fairchild, 2004). In contrast, women exhibiting agentic behaviors often encounter social backlash and negative judgments, which can negatively impact their self-esteem (Eagly, Makhijani & Klonsky, 1992; Heilman et al., 2004). This indicates that self-esteem is closely tied to the level of societal approval and reinforcement of gendered behaviors, further perpetuating gendered differences in self-worth. These discrepancies highlight the importance of taking into consideration cultural and social contexts in shaping self-esteem trajectories.

Method

Sample

The study included a total of 30 participants, comprising 10 male students ($M = 21.20$, $SD = 0.69$) and 20 female students ($M = 20.25$, $SD = 0.57$), with ages ranging from 16 to 22 years. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, targeting young male and female participants enrolled in secondary schools and universities. Demographic data included participants' names, ages, gender, educational background, place of birth, and parental education levels.

Measures

The Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES; Rosenberg, 1965) was used to assess participants' global self-worth by evaluating both positive and negative self-perceptions. The scale consists of 10 items designed to measure an individual's overall sense of self-esteem and self-worth. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert

scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5), with higher scores reflecting greater self-esteem.

The Attitude Towards Women Scale (AWS; Spence, Helmreich & Stapp, 1972) was employed to assess participants’ gender attitudes. This scale comprises 25 items that examine various aspects of men’s and women’s rights and roles across different domains, including vocational pursuits, education, intellectual activities, dating norms and etiquette, sexual behavior, and marital relationships. Participants responded to each item using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (1) to “Strongly Agree” (5). Higher scores on the scale indicate a more egalitarian attitude, while lower scores reflect a more conservative perspective on gender roles.

Procedures

Invitations to participate were distributed via email, social media platforms, and institutional networks. The invitation included a brief description of the study, eligibility criteria, and a link to the online questionnaire. Before accessing the questionnaire, participants were required to read an informed consent form embedded within the Google Form. The form outlined the study’s purpose, the voluntary nature of participation, potential risks and benefits, and confidentiality assurances. Participants could only proceed with the survey after providing electronic consent by selecting an agreement checkbox. The questionnaire was administered via Google Forms and distributed online. The questions were structured in a clear and logical sequence to ensure ease of completion. Since the study was conducted online, participants were allowed to complete the questionnaire at their own pace without any time restrictions. To maintain ethical standards, participants were given the option to withdraw from the study at any point without providing justification.

They were also encouraged to contact the researchers via email if they had any questions or needed clarification.

Table 1. Mean, SD, and t-value of gender attitude between male and female participants

Variables	Male (n = 10)		Female (n = 20)		Total = 30
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t(28)
GenderAttitude	74.50	13.62	90.45	19.99	-2.26*

p<0.05*

Table 1 presents mean, SD, and t-value on the measure of gender attitude between male (n= 10) and female (n = 20) participants. The findings indicate a statistically significant difference in gender attitude scores between the two groups. Female participants (M = 90.45, SD = 19.99) exhibited significantly higher gender attitude scores compared to their male counterparts (M = 74.50, SD = 13.62). The independent samples t-test (t (28) = -2.26, p < 0.05) was calculated which further confirms that this difference is significant at the 0.05 level, suggesting that female participants demonstrate a more egalitarian stance on gender roles compared to male participants.

Table 2. Mean, SD, and t-value of Self-Esteem between male and female participants

Variables	Male (n = 10)		Female (n = 20)		Total = 30
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t(28)
Self-Esteem	28.40	6.09	31.25	7.38	-1.05

p>0.05

Table 2 presents the mean, standard deviation (SD), and t-value for self-esteem scores across male and female participants. The results indicate that female participants (M = 31.25, SD = 7.38) reported higher self-esteem compared to male participants (M =

28.40, SD = 6.09). However, the independent samples t-test ($t(28) = -1.05, p > 0.05$) revealed that this difference was not statistically significant, suggesting that self-esteem levels were relatively similar across genders within this sample.

Table 3. Pearson's correlation value on measures of Gender Attitude and Self-esteem

Variable	GenderAttitude	Self-Esteem
GenderAttitude	-	.525**
Self-Esteem	.525**	-

** $p < 0.01$

The correlation analysis presented in Table 3 indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between gender attitude and self-esteem ($r = 0.525, p < 0.01$). This suggests that individuals who exhibit more egalitarian gender attitudes tend to report higher self-esteem. The strength of this correlation implies that gender-related beliefs may play a substantial role in shaping an individual's self-perception and psychological well-being.

Table 4. Pearson's Correlation Value Between Gender Attitude and Self-Esteem Among Male Participants (n=10)

Variable	GenderAttitude	Self-Esteem
GenderAttitude	-	.53
Self-Esteem	.53	-

$p > 0.05$

A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted to examine the relationship between gender attitude and self-esteem among male participants. The analysis revealed no significant correlation between gender attitude and self-esteem, $r(8) = .53, p > 0.05$.

A Pearson product-moment correlation was conducted for female participants to assess the relationship between gender attitude and self-esteem. The results

indicated a significant, positive correlation between gender attitude and self-esteem, $r(18) = .49, p < 0.05$.

Table 5. Pearson's Correlation Value Between Gender Attitude and Self-Esteem Among Female Participants (n=20)

Variable	GenderAttitude	Self-Esteem
GenderAttitude	-	.49*
Self-Esteem	.49*	-

$P < 0.05$

Discussion

The present study explores the relationship between gender attitude (stereotypical & egalitarian) and self-esteem among young female and male participants tapping into how attitudes toward gender roles correlate with self-worth and self-evaluation of an individual. The study identifies some key findings that contribute to understanding these relationships.

The study found that female participants exhibited significantly more egalitarian gender attitudes than their male counterparts. This result is consistent with previous studies suggesting that young female generally exhibit more egalitarian views on gender roles than young male and are more inclined to challenge traditional norms, thereby advocating for gender equality (Shukla, 2015; Patel, Santhya, & Haberland, 2021). The observed difference may be attributed to sociocultural influences, including greater exposure to gender equality narratives, education, and socialization processes that promote more progressive gender attitudes among women (Bolzendahl, & Daniel, 2004; Boehnke, 2011). Over time, shifts in societal structures, policy interventions, and increased educational opportunities for women may have contributed to this development. Higher education provides individuals with exposure to egalitarian viewpoints, encouraging them

to critically analyze and question gender stereotypes (Boehnke, 2011; Debnath & Bano, 2023). Moreover, previous studies suggest that women are more likely to support egalitarian beliefs, as they directly experience gender-based inequalities and societal expectations (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). Girls frequently encounter greater obstacles to independence, which heightens their awareness of gender disparities and increases their likelihood of advocating for change.

In contrast, male participants demonstrated comparatively lower gender attitudes, indicating a stronger adherence to conservative gender roles. One possible explanation for the comparatively lower gender attitude scores can be attributed to the early socialization process that reinforces stereotypical masculine ideals and gender roles. From a young age, boys grow up in households where gender-biased practices are often ingrained, such as prioritizing sons' education, granting them greater mobility, and assigning them fewer domestic duties (Ram et al., 2014). As these privileges directly favor them, young males may be less inclined to challenge or question these norms, ultimately reinforcing stereotypical gender attitudes. Interestingly, a previous study highlights that female youth are less aware of the gender discrimination they face, while male youth are more likely to recognize such disparities (Ram et al., 2014). However, recognizing gender discrimination does not necessarily translate into endorsing gender equality. For male youth, the recognition of gender discriminatory practices may not always prompt efforts to challenge these norms, particularly when such systems provide them with advantages. As a result, they may internalize these norms as societal expectations rather than injustices. This internalization is further compounded by parental reinforcement, peer validation, and cultural narratives that often position men as

dominant figures in the household and society. A lack of critical engagement with gender equality discourses may prevent young men from actively adopting more egalitarian gender attitudes (Dhar et al., 2022).

It is suggested that men's employment status has little impact on their gender attitudes, as male participation in the workforce has traditionally been viewed as the standard (Bolzendahl, 2004). Unlike women, whose gender attitudes are often shaped by their increased participation in education and the workforce (Boehnke, 2011), men may not experience the same transformative exposure to gender role shifts. This lack of direct impact further explains why men may be relatively less likely to endorse egalitarian gender attitudes.

The study also examined differences in self-esteem between male and female participants. Although female participants reported slightly higher self-esteem scores compared to males, the difference was not statistically significant. This suggests that both young male and young female participants exhibit relatively similar levels of self-esteem, contradicting older psychological theories that suggested males tend to have higher self-esteem compared to females (Gosling, 2016).

The findings of the current study are consistent with the previous literature (Hensley, 1977), which found no significant differences in self-esteem scores between male and female college students using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Hensley's study (1977) emphasized that the structure of self-esteem is unidimensional across genders, meaning that both males and females tend to perceive and evaluate their self-worth in similar ways. The current study supports this assertion, suggesting that among males and young females, self-esteem may not be inherently gendered but

rather influenced by individual, social, and cultural factors.

Interestingly, these results contrast with the previous findings (Bleidorn et al. 2016), which found that males consistently reported higher self-esteem than females. Their study demonstrated that the gender gap in self-esteem is more pronounced in individualistic and gender-equal societies, whereas in collectivist cultures, the gap tends to narrow. Given that the present study was conducted among Indian adolescents and young adults, the findings align more closely with the patterns observed in collectivist societies, where gender differences in self-esteem are often less distinct.

The relatively balanced self-esteem levels in this study may also reflect changing social norms that promote gender equality in various aspects of life, including education, career aspirations, and personal development. As more women gain access to opportunities that were traditionally male-dominated, their confidence and self-perception may improve, narrowing the historical gap in self-esteem between genders. However, it's important to consider that self-esteem is influenced by multiple factors, including social support, personal achievements, and cultural context, which may have contributed to the current results of our study.

The correlational analysis found a significant positive relationship between gender attitude and self-esteem. The positive correlation between egalitarian gender attitudes and self-esteem supports previous research suggesting that gender role flexibility is positively associated with self-esteem (Kling et al., 1999). Individuals with egalitarian beliefs may experience greater personal agency, reduced internalized gender constraints, and increased confidence in their abilities, all of which contribute to higher self-esteem. Stake and Orlofsky (1981) highlighted that self-esteem

is influenced by how well individuals align with socially valued traits (e.g., assertiveness for men, nurturing qualities for women). Those who challenge traditional roles and embrace a more egalitarian stance may experience higher self-esteem because they feel more autonomous and self-determined in their choices. Given that this study was conducted in India, a collectivist society, the correlation between gender attitudes and self-esteem may reflect shifting societal norms.

Conclusion

The present study provides valuable insights into the relationship between gender attitudes and self-esteem among males and females, particularly in the Indian socio-cultural context. The findings suggest that females exhibit significantly more egalitarian gender attitudes than males, reinforcing the idea that women are more likely to challenge traditional gender norms and advocate for equality. However, while female participants reported slightly higher self-esteem scores than their male counterparts, the difference was not statistically significant, suggesting that self-esteem may not be inherently gendered but rather shaped by individual experiences, socialization processes, and cultural factors.

Moreover, the positive correlation between gender attitude and self-esteem underscores the psychological benefits of egalitarian beliefs, as individuals with more progressive gender views tend to report higher self-esteem. These findings align with previous literature indicating that gender role flexibility fosters personal agency and confidence, leading to a more positive self-evaluation. Expanding research in this area will help further unravel the complex interplay between gender norms, societal expectations, and self-perception, ultimately contributing to the promotion of gender equality and psychological well-being among young individuals.

Despite its valuable contributions to understanding the relationship between gender attitudes and self-esteem among males and females, the present study has certain limitations that should be acknowledged.

First, the study was conducted on a small sample size of 30 participants, which limits the generalizability of the findings to a broader population. The relatively small number of participants reduces the statistical power of the study, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions or apply the results to different demographic groups. Future research should aim for a larger and more diverse sample to enhance the external validity of the findings. Second, the sample was highly homogenous, comprising students primarily from Tripura who were enrolled in secondary and higher education institutions. This educated sample may not fully represent the diversity of experiences and perspectives related to gender attitudes and self-esteem, particularly among individuals from different socioeconomic, cultural, and educational backgrounds. Since exposure to higher education has been found to foster egalitarian beliefs, potentially influencing self-esteem, future studies should incorporate participants from varied educational levels and professional settings to better understand these dynamics across different segments of society.

Third, the study employed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES), which measures self-esteem as a global, unidimensional construct. However, research suggests that self-esteem is a multidimensional phenomenon that consists of agentic self-esteem (independence, assertiveness, achievement-driven behaviors) and communal self-esteem (warmth, interpersonal relationships, social connectedness) (Stake & Orlofsky, 1981). Prior studies indicate that global self-esteem scales tend to measure agentic self-esteem more accurately in

males, while communal aspects of self-esteem, which are equally relevant to both genders, may not be adequately captured. Consequently, the lack of significant gender differences in self-esteem observed in this study may be influenced by the measurement approach rather than actual gender-based disparities. Future research should incorporate both agentic and communal self-esteem measures to gain a deeper understanding of self-worth across genders. Additionally, cultural factors may have moderated the relationship between gender attitudes and self-esteem in this study. Given that the present study was conducted in a collectivist setting, self-esteem may be more relational and less tied to individual achievement, minimizing observable gender-based differences. Future studies should explore cross-cultural variations in self-esteem development to account for sociocultural influences on gender-related self-evaluations.

In light of these limitations, future research should focus on expanding sample diversity, employing multidimensional self-esteem measures, and examining cultural factors that shape the relationship between gender attitudes and self-esteem. Such efforts will provide a more comprehensive understanding of how sociocultural contexts and evolving gender norms influence self-worth among males and females.

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