## **Changing Gender Identity of Emerging Adults**

## **Neha Tiwari and Rehana Ghadially**

Indian Institute of Technology, Mumbai

The study analyses the gender and generational differences in gender identity amongst emerging adults in contemporary India. The sample consisted of 160 emerging adults and 80 parents living in a semi-metro city. The results revealed that gender identity of girls is changing much more than boys as more girls than boys have moved away from traditional personality traits to non-traditional personality traits. This is attributed to more options available to young women today to develop gender identity of their choice whereas young men also seem to have these options, but pretty much limited in scope as more women have become active in the public domain so the change is more noticeable in them. Generation comparison revealed that younger generation females are more sex-atyped whereas younger generation males do not indicate gender identity change. The results are interpreted in light of socio-historical, political and economic changes occurring in Indian society.

Keywords: Gender Identity, Personality Traits

There has been a profound change in how young people view the meaning and value of becoming an adult. Young people of the previous generation of the 1970s were forced to enter adulthood and "settle down" whereas the present generation sees adulthood as the end of wide-open possibilities. Earlier the young women were under social pressure to get married in their early twenties and have children. The young women of the twenty first century have many more opportunities for education and employment compared to women of the past. Another freedom that emerging adults have wrested from previous generations is the ability to choose a nontraditional career trajectory. Even boys increasingly take up careers in the hospitality or fashion industries whereas girls choose different fields like engineering, medicine, law, finance, defence forces, police, politics etc. With increasing educational and employment opportunities changes have also been observed in personality traits that men and women develop. As a result the gender identity both sexes develop is undergoing a change.

## Gender Identity: Development and its Impact

Gender identity is a part of an individual's personality and a central component of (his/ her) self-concept. Gender identity is referred here as the degree to which an individual identifies himself or herself with masculine and feminine personality traits. Three psychological theories exist about how we acquire gender identity. The first, which is often referred to as biological determinism argues that femininity and masculinity follow inevitably from our physical differences as males and females. The second, known as social learning theory claims that we acquire the relevant masculine and feminine skills by imitating others and adapting our own conduct and attitudes while the third, cognitive developmental theory, maintains that masculinity and femininity develop through a process of interaction between our experience of the world and our emerging but prestructured capacity for conceptual thinking.

From the theory of gender role socialization, traditionally, it has been assumed

that men and women receive different gender role socialization (Bem 1993; Konrad, Ritchie, Lieb & Corrigall 2000). Men undergo a socialization process whereby they develop masculine characteristics such competitiveness and initiative that enable them to be successful in work environment whereas women develop feminine characteristics such as nurturance and expressing feelings as they predominate in caretaking roles. In the patriarchal setting of the Indian family, women's identity is outlined by her relationships to others; as the obedient daughter, the faithful wife (and daughter-inlaw); the (nurturing) mother (more particularly of sons), the all-powerful mother-in-law, and then as the benevolent grandmother. In this way, the practice of the aforementioned roles leads them to specialize in the necessary characteristics and skills to carry out the most significant role for them. Consequently, from this perspective it has been assumed that men are more masculine than women and women are more feminine than men.

In contemporary India, the status of women has been changing because of industrialization, modernization and urbanization along with the principle of democracy, social legislation and influence of transnational media. Women now have greater access to educational, employment opportunities, age of marriage has increased, preference for kind of marriage and traits of marriage partner have undergone a change. Research has also shown that identification with feminist movement or enrollment in a women's studies course has also led to gender role change among women (Smith & Self, 1981; Steiger, 1981).

As a result of expansion in gender roles, changes have been observed in personality traits considered stereotypical of both the sexes. Women have also entered previously male dominated fields such as finance, management fields. Entry of women in paid workforce has led to acquisition of masculine

traits associated with breadwinning roles. Among college aged men and women, endorsement of masculine traits has converged over historical time (Twenge, 1997). Women's BSRI masculine trait scores increased dramatically from 1975-1995 whereas men's endorsement of these traits remained constant. Twenge (1997) attributed convergence in men's and women's identification with masculine traits to sociocultural changes associated with the second wave of the women's movement which influenced women's access to educational and career opportunities. But social expectations regarding women's involvement in communal and expressive roles did not change. Another study done on Turkish students by Ozkan and Lajunens (2005) showed that some instrumental characteristics (i.e., "independent," "assertive," "strong personality") are now desirable for both sexes. This result might reflect the socialization process and change in values. More recently, liberal parents have begun to realize that in order to be successful in an industrialist capitalist economy, even their daughters need to develop certain traits such as becoming assertive and competitive in their behavior. In short, the results of other studies suggest that the desirability of particular traits for men and women may be changing along with other changes in men's and women's roles in society.

Differences in personality traits have been found not only in gender but also across generation. Strough, Leszczynski, Neely, Flinn and Margrett (2007) examined age related differences in self reported masculine, feminine and androgynous personality traits in a cross-sectional sample of American men and women. The sample represented six age groups: adolescents (12-17 years), younger (18-29years), middle aged (40-59 years), young old (60-69 years), old-old (70-79 years) and oldest-old (80 and older) adults. They found that younger adult and middle aged

women were more likely than the oldest old women to endorse masculine personality traits as characteristic of themselves. For younger adult women, the women's movement informed the policies and practices of the social context within which they developed their identities whereas for middle aged women socio-cultural changes of the second wave of women's movement co-occurred with identity development in adolescence and early adulthood. The oldest old women had already established their identities and may not have been able to participate in newly available career and educational opportunities afforded by women's movement. Men's endorsement of masculine personality traits did not vary as a function of age.

Sex differentiated child-rearing practices of parents (Das, 1988) and similar socialization pressures from other agents like teachers (Serbin, O'Leary, Kent, & Tonick, 1973), peers (Hartup, 1983) and media (Kalia, 1979) further strengthen the development of sex appropriate behavior. In early adolescence, boys and girls are increasingly treated differently, with independence encouraged in males and compliance encouraged in females (Crouter, Manke & Mc Hale, 1995). Hanning and Jardim (as cited in Coats & Overman, 1992) suggest that boy games feature experiences in teamwork, competition, winning and losing. Their learning closely resembles the skills manager relies upon in a corporate setting. Girls are encouraged to participate in play activities that emphasize collaborative role-play and are provided more opportunities to practice affiliative skill. As a result of socialization, Indian females find it difficult to take up leadership roles, which boys perform with more ease.

Globalization in India has affected emerging adults both directly and indirectly, even in semi-metros such as Bhopal, has brought about various kinds of shifts. It has resulted not only in increase of jobs but also in the variety of jobs. The age of marriage

has increased, traits desired in a spouse are changing and emerging adults are becoming more body and fashion conscious. There has been increase in viewership of English channels on television and the widespread celebration of events of Western origin such as Valentine's Day and increasing approval of beauty contests. What needs to be explored in the globalizing era is to what extent is gender identity changing. Are there any gender and generation-wise differences with respect to gender identity of emerging adults?

## Hypotheses:

H1 Girls will be less sex-typed in their gender identity than boys

H2 Emerging adults' gender identity will be less sex-typed than their parents' gender identity

H3 The sons will be less sex-typed than their fathers

H4 The daughters will be less sex -typed than their mothers

#### Method

#### Sample:

The sample consisted of one hundred and sixty final year students from two English medium co-educational colleges from the city of Bhopal in Madhya Pradesh. Eighty males (forty from professional and forty from business category) and eighty females (forty from professional and forty from business category) participated in the study. The mean age for the males and females was twenty years. The emerging adults were from three streams i.e. Arts, Commerce and Science.

## Instruments:

1) Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI, 1983) The gender identity of the emerging adults and the parents was measured by Ward and Sethi's Indian adaptation of Bem Sex Role Inventory, 1983 (see Das, 1988). This is a self-descriptive measure consisting of twenty masculine, twenty feminine and eighteen

neutral items. Each item was scored on a Likert scale. One stands for "not at all true of me", two stands for "mildly true", three for "moderately true", four for "almost true" and five for "very much true". The highest possible score for masculine and feminine items is hundred and lowest is twenty. The split-half reliability coefficient of the scale was 0.78. (see Das, 1988).

#### Results

Emerging adults' gender identity by gender and their sex-typed and sex-atyped gender identity have been highlighted in Table 1 and Table 2 respectively. This is followed by generational differences in gender identity of

emerging adults and parents, sons' and fathers' and daughters' and mothers' in Table 3, 4 and 5 respectively.

## Gender Differences in Gender Identity of Emerging Adults

Analysis of results of chi-square for different gender identity indicated significant difference between gender identity of boys and girls on masculinity ( $c^2$ = 11.24, p<.01) and femininity ( $c^2$ = 5.44, p<.05). This shows that significantly more boys described themselves as having masculine traits compared to girls and significantly more girls described themselves as having feminine traits compared to boys.

Table-1: Chi-Square Values, Percentage and Frequencies of EmergingAdults' Gender Identity by Gender

Variables	Boys (N=58)	Girls (N=60)	$\chi^2$	$\chi^2$ (Overall) (df=2)
Masculinity	35 (60.3%)	12 (20%)	11.24*	* 20. 28**
Femininity	9 (15.5%)	22 (36.7%)	5. 44*	
Androgyny	14 (24.2%)	26 (43.3%)	3. 6	

<sup>\*</sup>p <.05, \*\* p<.01

Though the number of girls on androgyny is larger than the boys, significant difference is not found between them. It can be concluded that there is a greater shift among girls from their traditional feminine identity than

boys from the traditional masculine gender identity. Hypothesis-1 (a) is accepted as girls are found to be less sex-typed than the boys. Table 2 highlights the sex-typed and sexatyped gender identity of emerging adults.

Table-2: Chi-Square Values, Percentage and Frequencies of Emerging Adults' Sex-typed and Sex-atyped Gender Identity

Variables	Boys (N=58)	Girls (N=60)	$\chi^2$	χ²(Overall) (df=1)
Sextyped	35 (60.3%)	22 (36.7%)	3.39	6.64**
Sex-atyped	23 (39.7%)	38 (63.3%)	3.25	

<sup>\*\*</sup> p<.01

The overall chi-square results revealed significant difference between boys and girls ( $c^2 = 6.64$ , p < .01) on gender identity. No significant difference is found on sex-typed ( $c^2 = 3.39$ ) and sex-atyped ( $c^2 = 3.25$ ) gender identity between boys and girls. But the trend is in the expected direction as higher percentage of girls than boys are sex-atyped.

# Generational Differences in Gender Identity of Emerging Adults

Significant difference is not found between emerging adults and their parents on the independent t-test computed on masculinity (t= -.057), femininity (t= -.813) and androgyny (t= 1.101).

Table-3: Mean, SD and Independent *t* - test Values of Emerging Adults (N=118) and Parents (N=56)

Gender Identity	Emerging Adults		Parents		
Variables	Mean	SD	Mean	SD	t df=172
Sex-typed	71.83	3.49 (n=47)	71. 92	4.87 (n=12)	057
Masculinity					
Femininity	72.74	4.44 (n=31)	73. 77	5.80 (n=34)	813
Sex-a typed					
Androgyny	73.20	4. 52 (n=40)	73.40	3.72 (n=10)	1.101

Since, t-test did not reveal significant difference between emerging adults and parents the hypothesis that emerging adults' gender identity will be less sex-typed than their parents' is rejected. However, examination of

frequency showed that emerging adults are more sex-atyped than their parents. To test the hypothesis that sons will be less sex-typed than their fathers, chi-square is computed which is depicted in Table 4.

Table-4: Chi-Square Values, Percentage and Frequencies for Sons' and Fathers' Gender Identity

Variables	Sons (N=58)	Fathers (N=24)	$\chi^2$	χ² (Overall) (df=1)
Sex-typed	35 (60.3%)	10 (41.6%)	1.08	2.39
Sex-a typed	23 (39.7%)	14 (58.4%)	1.31	

The overall chi-square did not show significant difference between sons and fathers' ( $c^2$ = 2.39) gender identity. Significant difference is not found between sons and fathers in sex –typed gender identity ( $c^2$  = 1.08), and sex-atyped gender identity ( $c^2$  = 1.31). An examination of the percentage shows that there are more sons (60.3%) than fathers (41.6 %) with masculine gender identity. There are more fathers (58.4%) than sons (39.7%) with feminine gender identity. As no significant difference is found in overall

chi-square and in chi-square computed separately for sex-typed and sex-atyped gender identity of sons and fathers, the hypothesis that emerging adult's gender identity will be less sex-typed than their parents' construction of gender identity is rejected.

To test the hypothesis that daughters will be less sex-atyped than their mothers, chisquare is computed which is depicted in Table 5.

Table-5: Chi-Square Values, Percentage and Frequencies for Daughters' and Mothers'

Gender Identity						
Variables	Daughters(N=60	) Mothers (N=3	36) χ <sup>2</sup>	$\chi^2$ (Overall) (df=2)		
Sex-typed	22 (36.7%)	26 (72.2%)	5.69*	11.36**		
Sex-a typed	38 (63.3%)	10 (27.8%)	5.68*			

<sup>\*</sup>p< .05, \*\* p<.01

The overall chi-square showed significant difference between daughters and mothers ( $c^2$  = 11.36, p<.01) gender identity. Significant generational difference is found between daughters and mothers in sex-typed ( $c^2$  = 5.69,

p< .05) and sex –atyped ( $c^2$  = 5.68, p<.05) gender identity. A higher percentage of daughters (63.3%) than mothers (27.8%) are sex-atyped in their gender identity. There is higher percentage of mothers (72.2%) than

daughters (36.7%) with sex-typed gender identity. The hypothesis is accepted, as the chi-square results showed that daughters are significantly more likely than mothers to be sex-atyped.

#### **Discussion**

More girls display a change in gender identity than boys. Though the trend was in the expected direction, results did not reveal that girls were significantly more likely than boys to be androgynous. The results can be interpreted in the light of economic and societal changes taking place in Indian society with an increasing number of women taking up higher education and employment roles. This calls for adopting masculine traits along with feminine traits within their personality, which results in producing androgynous gender identity. Globalization and liberalization that is taking place in contemporary society demands developing individualist values of personal agency and independence rather than collectivist values of agency interdependence not only in men but also in women which has been highlighted by Markus and Kitayama (1991) and Hernandez and lyengar (2001). Apart from these, studies on tomboys have shown that there were more girls than boys who expand their repertoire of activities to include both gender traditional and non-traditional activities (Martin, 1990, 1995).

More boys than girls showed masculine personality traits whereas more girls than boys described themselves as having feminine traits. This result is in consonance with past research done on gender identity where the respondents described themselves on personality traits and found that men had higher self-ratings on masculinity and women had higher self-ratings on femininity (Ravinder as cited in Ravinder, 1987; Blanchard, Roussel, & Hertzog, 1994; Twenge, 1997). Similar findings on social desirability of personality traits have also been found which showed that the male stereotypical

characteristics were judged more desirable for men and female stereotypical characteristics were judged desirable for women (Ryhal, 1988; Holt & Ellis, 1998). Despite new freedoms and options, more for women than men, domestic arrangements in Indian society and career choices continue to exert influence on inculcation of stereotypical traits for the two sexes.

The result of the present study was found in contradiction with earlier studies which indicated that there is less possibility of boys adopting feminine identity as boys face more negative consequences than girls who adopt masculine behavior (Feinman, 1981). Some of the boys in the present study were also found to have feminine gender identity. This might be the result of exposure to the global media as boys are shown in the nonstereotypical roles for example working as fashion and interior designers or models in the fashion industry. They increasingly are becoming conscious of their looks and are working on becoming more attractive. Studies done in other cross-cultural contexts support this finding. For example, Diekman, Eagly, Mladinic and Ferreira (2005) highlighted in their cross-cultural study that United States participants are more likely than Brazilian and Chilean participants to perceive men as gaining feminine characteristics. Indeed the term metro-sexual has been coined to reflect the subset of men for whom fashion and appearance are a priority (Roeper, 2003). Empirical evidence documents the increasing importance placed on men acquiring feminine traits. A study on Japanese students found that male students had less sex-typed perceptions of themselves than female students (Kasturda & Sugihara, 1999). This has been attributed to changing gender roles in contemporary Japan. This is consistent with other study done in Japan which highlighted the number of men who were involved in domestic activities and number of males taking admission in women studies courses are also increasing, although the change is gradual (Kashima ,1989).

More girls were found to be sex-atyped than boys. This suggests that for girls socio-cultural changes associated with second wave of women's movement are reflected in integration of masculine traits with feminine traits. For boys women's movement did not change their roles whereas on the other hand globalization of Indian economy reemphasized developing masculine traits. Hence, they remain sex-typed to a great extent.

## Generational Differences in Gender Identity

H2(a) is rejected, as no significant difference has been found between emerging adults and their parents in their gender identity. This has been found in contradiction with previous research which has shown that socio-cultural events such as second wave of women's movement will have a different impact on both the cohorts (Strough et al, 2007). To examine the generational differences minutely chi-square was computed for sons and fathers and daughters and mothers.

The H2(b) was rejected, as overall chisquare did not reveal significant difference between sons and fathers on gender identity. When compared in percentage, results showed that higher percentage of sons were sex-typed than their fathers. Sons were found to be more masculine than their fathers as their role models come from non-family sources. Indian economy has shifted from socialist to a more urbanized, industrialized capitalist economy; masculine traits such as competitiveness, independence have been emphasized among emerging adults. This is in consonance with a recent study done by Diekman et al (2005) that found that men were increasingly acquiring stereotypically masculine characteristics such independence, assertiveness, muscular strength in Chile and Brazil from past to future.

Higher percentage of sons than fathers were found to be sex-atyped. This might be because the fathers were socialized in an era when the Indian economy had a socialist bent (encouraged feminine traits such as being sensitive to the needs of others, being generous and family oriented) and the exposure to the foreign media was limited. On the other hand, sons are socialized in an era of globalization and liberalization with large-scale exposure to global media, which emphasizes masculine traits such as being competitive, ambitious, etc. Hence, the fathers were found to be more feminine than their sons.

H2(c) which stated that daughters would be less sex-typed than their mothers was accepted as the overall chi-square was found to be significant. Daughters have moved out from the private domain to the public domain and are opting for not only higher education but are also taking up non-traditional careers such as in police, defense, management, finance, law, engineering which were considered to be male-dominated arenas. In order to be successful in such domains they have acquired masculine traits. Along with this they were also under pressure from their parents to acquire feminine traits so that they are successful in their domestic life especially after marriage and when they become parents. Gender difference on masculinity has also been decreasing over time (Twenge, 1997; Auster & Ohm, 2000). As a result girls were found to be more sex-atyped than their mothers. As expected there was higher percentage of mothers than daughters with sex-typed (feminine) gender identity. Socialization practices in Indian society during late 1970s and early 1980s remained stereotypical as they laid more emphasis on developing feminine traits, which led to sextyped gender identity among mothers. In order to be successful in the public domain younger generation girls acquire masculine traits and define independent identities beyond those of daughters, mother and wife.

## Conclusion

Girls' were found to be more sex-atyped than boys. This is probably the result of economic and societal changes taking place in Indian society as an increasing number of women are going for higher education and taking up employment roles. Boys were significantly more likely than girls to have a masculine gender identity and girls were significantly more likely to have a feminine gender identity. Overall generational analyses did not reveal any significant difference on gender identity. Higher percentage of sons were found to be sex-typed than fathers which might be because the sons are growing up in an era when contemporary Indian society has a capitalist bent emphasizing masculine traits in personality. Fathers were less sex-typed than sons probably because fathers socialized in a socialist era which emphasized feminine traits. Generational change has not occurred amongst males in terms of gender identity. Generational comparison between mothers and daughters showed that daughters were significantly more likely than mothers to have a sex- atyped gender identity. This is probably because daughters are increasingly taking up employment in male dominated fields which require masculine personality traits and on the other hand they remain under pressure from the parents to acquire feminine traits so that they are successful in their marital life. Mothers were more sex-typed than daughters which might be the result of socialization practices that emphasized developing feminine personality traits during their adolescence and young adulthood. Overall, it can be said that daughters have moved away from traditional personality traits towards non-traditional ones more than mothers.

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**Neha Tiwari,** PhD, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Powai, Mumbai- 400 076. Email: tiwari n19@yahoo.com

**Rehana Ghadially**, PhD, Professor, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Powai, Mumbai- 400 076

## Indian Academy of Applied Psychology

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