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Gender Stereotypes among University Students towards Masculinity and Femininity

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Abstract

The main aim of this study was to examine gender stereotype and behavior among students towards masculinity and femininity at higher education institutions (HEI) in Malaysia. The study was conducted in two higher education institutions, namely International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and University Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) in Malaysia. A total of 300 students (77 males & 223 females) was selected as the respondents from the selected study areas using purposive sampling method. A survey research design was employed in this study. Questionnaires were completed in a supervised setting by the research protocol. The first objective of this study was to examine the student's masculine and feminine behavior at higher learning institutions using traditional and nontraditional scales. The results revealed that the highest numbers of respondents provided traditional masculine behaviours towards their gender norms in terms of "Dominating family" (92.02 percent) while the lowest percentage was in terms of "Not sharing problem with others" (26.0 percent). Similarly, the study examined female student's attitudes towards femininity from the traditional and non-traditional perspectives. The results revealed that the highest numbers of responses were nontraditional on the aspects of caring and nurturing (96.0 percent), patience (50.05 percent), controlled by others as a natural (52.0 percent) and selfless (57 percent) respectively. By examining both male and female student's attitudes towards masculinity and femininity, it could be summarized that male students were more traditional than female students. Given the importance of student's attitude towards equality as the social and economic prosperity, several suggestions are made.

Keywords: Masculinity, Femininity, Gender Stereotype, Higher Educational Institutions, Traditional, Nontraditional, Cultural Norm.

INTRODUCTION

Construction of gender within the society creates different patterns of expectation for both men and women, which lead to different behaviors (Zahra, 2013, Stibbe, 2004, Van Hoven and Hopkins, 2009). Femininity and masculinity are defined as the degree to which persons see themselves as masculine or feminine what is given to be a man or woman of the society (Burke, Stets and Pirog-Good 1988; Spence 1985). Masculine and feminine roles are not opposite instead of two separate dimensions (Bem, 1977). Femininity and masculinity are usually seen as the quality, nature or state of the female or male sex. From the physiological context, these terms designate a collection of characteristics of each sex, including appearance, gender identity, gender roles, sexual object preference and culturally determined social behavior. Femininity and masculinity are rooted in the social (one's gender) rather than the biological sex (Burke, et al., 1988; Spence, 1985). Masculinity and femininity are seen as the relational concepts, which only have meaning in relation to each other. It is believed that masculine are configurations of practice structured by gender relations that are inherently historical and political process affecting the balance of interests in society and the direction of social change (Connell (1995).

Gender stereotypes of masculinity and femininity play an important role in positive values and norms. As the development of gender identity, there are two psychoanalytic theories could be related which were invented by Freud (1927) and Kohlberg (1966). According to psychoanalytic theory invented by Freud (1927), one's gender identity develops through identification with the same-sex parent. Generally, the child develops a strong sexual attachment to the opposite-sex parent. Boys come to learn masculinity from their fathers and girls learn femininity from their mothers. Cognitive developmental theory is another psychological theory on gender identity development that is invented by Kohlberg (1966). According to the author gender identities take place in stages such as acquiring a fixed gender identity and establishing gender identity consistency. The first stage begins with the child's identification as male or female when hearing the labels 'boy' or 'girl' applied to the self. By about age 3, the child can apply the appropriate gender label to the self. This is when gender identity becomes fixed. After the development of gender identity, male and female child performs differently. Historically, men and women have had different expectations; women's roles were defined as care-givers. Women were expected to perform domestic work while men were defined by their strength and ability to complete physical labor (Ayenibiwo, 2010).

Moreover, men and women's gender roles are classified as traditional and egalitarian or nontraditional. Roles attributed to women in traditional roles consist of non-egalitarian accountabilities such as being responsible for domestic affairs and not being active in professional life. On the other hand, roles attributed to men in traditional roles consist of accountabilities such as being the head of the house and also responsible for bread winning (Simgé, 2011). In other words, from a traditional perspective, masculinity is often associated with characteristics such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, strength, courage and control (Sultana & Lazim., 2011). From the traditional views, men are more assertive, competitive, decisive, confident, ambitious, and instrumentally oriented, whereas women are more nurturing, empathetic, helpful, sympathetic, gentle, affectionate and expressively oriented (Lueptow et al., 2001; Hoffman & Borders, 2001). These characteristics result from a combination of biological, cultural and social influences that would effect on family and society.

Similarly, from the traditional views of feminine roles the woman performs housework and engages in child care, is associated with low levels of prestige and negative values in comparison to the role of men as men's role in the many societies is a person who is a bread winner that provides them to be involved them in a competitive earning (Riley, 2003). These notions of masculinity prevalent in much of the world condone or attach status to men who exhibit dominance over women (Abramsky et al., 2012, Santana et al., 2006, Raj et al., 2006). Furthermore, according to the traditional gender role perceptions, women should behave in ways that are nurturing, and men should be the head of their household and should provide financial support for the family. However, modern gender role suggest an alternative view. According to modern approach individuals' behavior should not be determined only by their sex and that there should be more egalitarian relationships between men and women. Individuals should have the right to choose the roles they want to occupy and to what extent these roles are associated with their sex (Blackstone, 2003).

Thus, traditional masculinity and femininity are characterized by unequal power with classroom; household as well as public domain. Power inequalities between women and men and the negative masculine culture are the major sources of this violence. It could be said that the traditional ideology of masculinity and femininity are the important reason for violence against women (Williams & Best, 1982; Sultana & Lazim., 2011). A number of studies (Asli 2001; Keith &

Jacqueline 2002; Kimberly & Mahaffy 2002; Rosenkrantz 1986;) conducted with the aim of determining their thoughts about gender roles of high school and university students; statements including traditional gender roles such as 'woman's main duty is to take care of home and the family', 'man should be the head of the household', 'breadwinning should be the man's responsibility', 'man should be successful in professional life' etc. were addressed to the students. The findings of these studies showed that female students were found to be embracing the traditional roles less than male students. From these findings, it is appropriate to determine the comparison between male and female student's gender stereotype and norms towards their masculine and feminine behaviours.

In the developing countries like Malaysia, gender related violence, including sexual violence, rape are common phenomena. In line with the present study examines to what extent students tend to have non-traditional stereotype towards masculine and feminine behaviors, traits and norms at universities in Malaysia. Research on educational environments showed that educational institutions foster traditional gender roles by reinforcing submissive roles for girls, who are dominated by boys in the classroom (Hartman 2010; Ayseh & Bruce, 2013). It is important to know the appropriate characteristics of masculinity and femininity among students who are the future leaders of the country. Moreover, there is limited empirical research in Malaysia on student's stereotype and attitudes towards masculinity and femininity. The present study investigates how young people play their gender role about their masculine and feminine behaviours. Although the importance of egalitarian masculinity and femininity in positive values and norms as well as equality has been widely discussed in the literature, little is known among students in higher education institutions in Malaysia. As for the research objectives, the following objectives were determined: (1) to examine student's behaviours and stereotypes towards masculinity and femininity at educational institutions in Malaysia ; (2) to assess the comparison between male and female student's attitudes towards masculinity and femininity.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research was conducted using cross-sectional survey and analyzed using descriptive analysis. The study was conducted in two higher educational institutions such as International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM) and Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) in Malaysia. A total of 300 students (77 males & 223 females) were selected as the respondents from the selected study areas using purposive sampling method. A survey research design was employed in this study. Questionnaires were completed in a supervised setting by the research protocol. For measuring masculine and feminine behaviors, the study used Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) scale invented by Bem (1974) scale. The variables of respondent's attitudes were measured using five points Likert Scales. In response to each of the items, respondents made their ratings on a five point scale, pointing whether they (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) neither agree nor disagree (4) agree and (5) strongly agree.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Male Student's Attitudes towards Masculinity

For measuring respondent's attitude towards traditional and nontraditional masculinity, a total of 9 item attitudes scale have been developed in this section. The questions were related to the traditional characteristics such as aggressiveness, competitiveness, dominance, strength, courage

and control. A total of 77 male students participated in the survey. The results (Table 1) revealed that the traditional masculine attitudes was noted in the statement “I like to see to be followed my guidance by my wife and children”. The majority of respondents (92.20 percent) agreed and believed to follow their guidance of their wives and children, which showed authoritarian parenting style and domination over wife. Men and boys are active agents in constructing and reconstructing dominant norms of masculinity (Will, 2000). According to Pyke (1996) masculine behaviors are configurations of social practices produced not only in relation to feminine, but also in relation to one another such as the domination over lower social and economic group. However, in another attitude such ambitious (“I am very ambitious in the pursuit of a success-oriented career” 87% agree) was found positive association with traditional gender norms. With respect to self-respect (I like to be respected by others, 87% agree), assertiveness (I am assertive to make a decision) and control over family (I like to control my all family members) were positively associated with traditional masculinity as the majority of respondents agreed with these statements respectively. These characteristics are influenced by western culture where are viewed as aggressive and competitiveness that used to define the problems of basic gender identification.

TABLE 1**Male Student’s Gender Stereotype towards Masculinity**

ITEM		1	2	TD	3	4	5	TA	T	M	SD
I like to be respected by others	F	2	0	2	8	32	35	67	77	4.27	0.85
	%	2.6	0.0	2.6	10.4	41.6	45.5	87.0	100		
I like to see to be followed my guidance by my wife and children	F	1	2	3	3	29	42	71	77	4.42	0.80
	%	1.3	2.6	3.9	3.9	37.7	54.5	92.2	100		
I will lose my respect If I discuss my problem with others	F	16	27	43	14	12	8	20	77	2.60	1.27
	%	20.8	35.1	55.9	18.2	15.6	10.4	26.0	100		
I do not like to discuss my feelings and emotions with others	F	7	24	31	12	26	8	34	77	3.05	1.20
	%	9.1	31.2	40.3	15.6	33.8	10.4	44.2	100		
I am very ambitious in the pursuit of a success-oriented career	F	1	0	1	9	42	25	67	77	4.17	0.73
	%	1.3	0.0	1.3	11.7	54.5	32.5	87.0	100		
I should to do household work	F	2	7	9	17	37	14	51	77	3.70	0.96
	%	2.6	9.1	11.7	22.1	48.1	18.2	66.3	100		
I do not like to take any kinds of orders or advice from anybody	F	14	32	46	11	14	6	20	77	2.56	1.21
	%	18.2	41.6	59.8	14.3	18.2	7.8	26.0	100		
I like to control my all family members	F	3	7	10	9	43	15	58	77	3.78	1.00
	%	3.9	9.1	13.0	11.7	55.8	19.5	75.3	100		
I am assertive to make a decision	F	1	4	5	17	38	17	55	77	3.86	0.87
	%	1.3	5.2	6.5	22.1	49.4	22.1	71.5	100		

Indication:

1: Totally Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Undecided; 4: Agree; 5: Totally Agree

T: Overall Total, TD: Total Disagree; TA: Total Agree; MV: Missing Value; M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

*Traditional masculine behaviors answered by male students (77 respondents)

With respect to sharing household responsibility “I should to do household work” a large number of respondents (66.0 %) showed nontraditional attitudes. However, the findings were related to other aspects such as not sharing problem with others (“I will lose my respect if I discuss my problem with others” 26 % agree), control over emotion, (“I do not like to discuss my feelings and emotions with others” 44 % agree) and arrogant (“I do not like to take any kinds of orders or advice from anybody” 26% agree) showed less traditional attitudes towards masculine behaviors respectively.

Female Student’s Attitudes towards Femininity

The study examines female student’s attitudes towards femininity by using seven statements. A total of 223 female students participated in this survey, which is the largest in number. It is important to note that in Malaysia numbers of female students are higher than the male students. The study, therefore, managed to involve the highest number of female as the respondents to be interviewed. The selected variables for measuring female attitudes towards femininity were related to caring, patient, respectful, accept male authority, less ambitious, not sharing feelings to others and affectionate. A mixed mode was followed in selecting the variables, including traditional and nontraditional items. With respect to patient “I should keep quiet and patient” (50.2% agree) about half of the respondents agreed. Similarly, a large number of respondents (48.09 %) provided positive attitudes towards the statement “I should accept the male authority in every aspect of my life”. These results are influenced by cultural norms supported by previous study conducted by Sultana (2010) on the socio-cultural dimension of women’s discrimination in the developing countries. The author argued that due to social-cultural beliefs most families prepared girls for marriage and girls are taught to be obedient and quiet, to respect the leading roles played by males, and to take on the responsibility for bearing and rearing children (Sultana, 2010).

TABLE 2
Gender Stereotype towards Feminine Behaviours

ITEM		1	2	TD	3	4	5	TA	T	M	SD
I should be caring and nurturing	F	3	3	6	3	107	107	214	223	4.40	0.72
	%	1.3	1.3	2.6	1.3	48.0	48.0	96.0	100		
I should keep quiet and patient	F	18	61	79	32	79	33	112	223	3.22	1.23
	%	8.1	27.4	35.5	14.3	35.4	14.8	50.2	100		
I always should be respectful to others	F	42	74	116	36	52	19	71	223	2.70	1.25
	%	18.8	33.2	52.0	16.1	23.3	8.5	31.8	100		
I should accept the male authority in every aspect of my life	F	22	53	75	39	87	22	109	223	3.15	1.18
	%	9.9	23.8	33.7	17.5	39.0	9.9	48.9	100		
I should not be very ambitious in the pursuit of a success-oriented career	F	67	75	142	24	41	16	57	223	2.39	1.28
	%	30.0	33.6	63.6	10.8	18.4	7.2	25.6	100		

I don't often tell others about my feelings of love and affection for them	F %	9 4.0	38 17.0	47 21.0	49 22.0	94 42.2	33 14.8	127 57.0	223 100	3.47	1.06
I should not work hard to ensure myself for a successful career	F %	89 40.0	83 37.2	172 77.2	18 8.1	19 8.5	14 6.3	33 14.8	223 100	2.04	1.18

Indication:

1: Totally Disagree; 2: Disagree; 3: Undecided; 4: Agree; 5: Totally Agree

T: Overall Total, TD: Total Disagree; TA: Total Agree; MV: Missing Value; M: Mean; SD: Standard Deviation

*Traditional feminine gender role answered by female students (223 respondents)

These results also showed that the patriarchal ideology has an influence on student's attitudes towards accepting male power and authority. A similar ideology was observed in terms of "I should accept the male authority in every aspect of my life" where a large number of respondents (48.09%) agree. This result is supported by a previous study conducted by Sultana (2011) on measuring gender role identity and awareness among women towards their right in the family. The author argued that women are viewed as passive, dependent, pure, refined, and delicate; men should be active, independent and strong. It is commonly believed that true women are wives whose concern is with domestic affairs-making a home and having children. The author also stated that in rural society women are often required to put men first. Women are often expected to defer to male authority. In accordance with study findings conducted by Sultana (2011) the similar ideology found when respondents were asked to provide their opinion in terms of "I don't often tell others about my feelings of love and affection for them". A large number of respondents (57.0%) agreed that they don't often share with others about their feelings of love and affection for them. Despite, the results revealed the traditional masculine behaviours and norms in the previous aspects, some respondents showed nontraditional in terms of ambitious of career aspects and hardworking tendency for the success. For these two statements such as "I should not be very ambitious in the pursuit of a successful-oriented career" and "I should not work hard to ensure myself for a successful career" the highest number of respondents was opposite. Overall, the findings contributed to show that on some aspects the respondents tended to have nontraditional ideology.

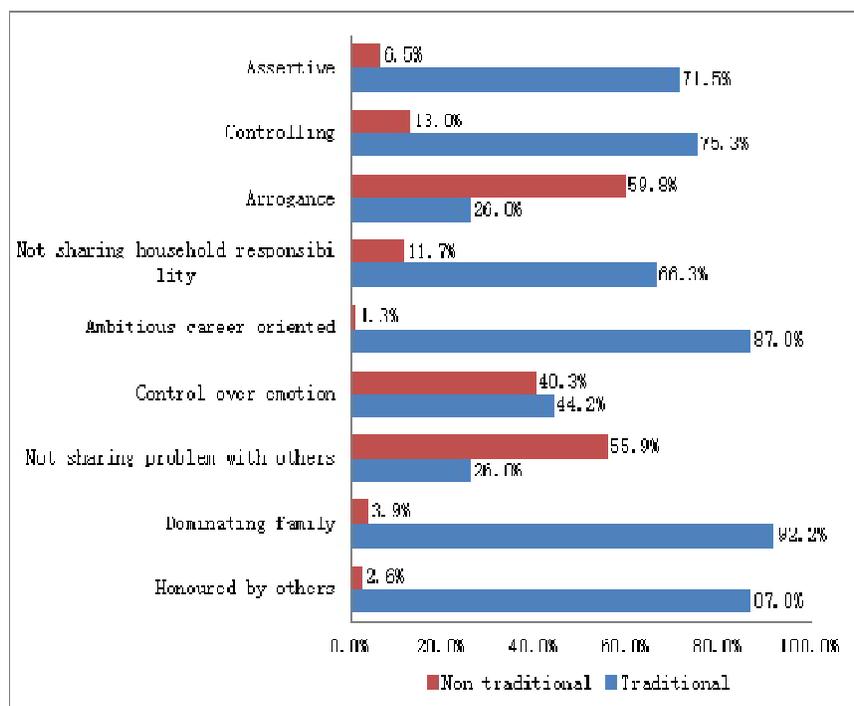
Comparison between Male and Female Attitudes towards Masculine and Feminine

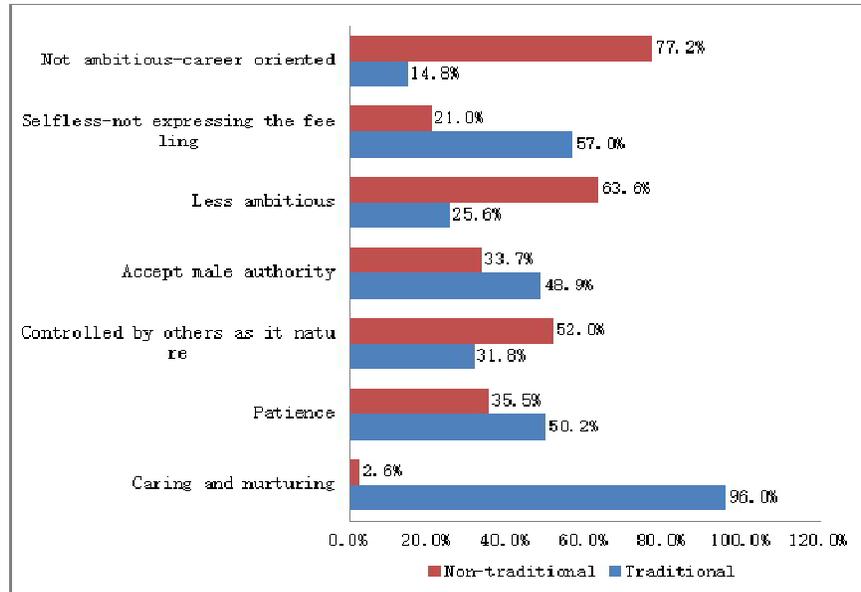
A number of studies have been conducted in comparison between male and female attitudes towards masculinity and femininity. The results revealed that there is a difference between male and female attitudes. A number of studies revealed (Bolzendahi & Myers 2004, Davis & Pearce 2007) showed that male and female gender role attitudes follow a parallel path. However, other studies (Osmond & Martin, 1975, Corder & Stephen, 1984, Kiecolt & Acock, 1988, Fan & Marini, 2000) revealed that males generally hold more traditional gender role attitudes than females. Gender is the most significant factor of gender role attitudes (Wilson and Smith 1995). A study was conducted by Su-Hao & TuYing-Hwa (2000) on women's and men's gender role attitudes in

Coastal China and Taiwan, which showed that women's perception of gender roles is less traditional than men. A number of studies (Asli 2001; Keith & Jacqueline 2002; Kimberly & Mahaffy 2002; Rosenkrantz 1986) revealed that female students were found to be embracing the traditional roles less than male students.

In accordance with literature, the study attempts to examine the comparison between male and female attitudes towards masculinity and femininity from the traditional and nontraditional perspectives. In order to examine whether there is any difference between male and female students towards traditional masculine and feminine behaviours. A total of 77 male students and 223 female student's attitudes were summarized in Figure 1. Although it was difficult to measure the exact difference between male and female attitudes since number of respondents and scale are different. The results were classified as traditional and non-traditional for each section. The items selected for traditional masculine behaviours such as assertiveness, controlling, arrogant (not taking advice from others), not sharing household responsibilities, ambitious, control over emotion, not sharing attitudes to others, dominating family and expecting to be honored by others. For the traditional masculinity (A. Masculinity), the data were counted based on the response of "agree" since the scale was traditional. The results (A. Masculinity) revealed that the highest numbers of responses were traditional for the all statements. However, despite traditional for the all statements were noted, there is a variance one statement to another. The highest number traditional tended to have traditional ideology in terms of "dominating family" (92.02%) while the lowest percentage was in terms of "Not sharing the problem with others" (26.0%). Similarly, the results of feminine behaviours are presented in Figure 1 (Section B). The results were classified as traditional and nontraditional for each section.

Figure: 1: Comparison between Masculine and Feminine Behaviours





The items selected for traditional feminine behaviours such as caring, patient, respectful, accept male authority, less ambitious, not sharing feelings to others and affectionate. The results revealed that the highest numbers of responses were nontraditional on the aspects of caring and nurturing (96.0%), patience (50.05%), controlled by others as a natural (52.0%) and selfless (57%). For the other statements, the results showed the traditional ideology since the respondents provided their responses to “agree”. By examining both male and female student’s attitudes towards masculinity and femininity, it can be concluded that male student’s traditional attitudes slightly higher than the female student’s attitudes.

CONCLUSION

The main aim of this study was to measure student’s attitudes towards masculine and feminine behaviours at higher educational institutions in Malaysia. The results were classified as traditional and nontraditional for each section. The items selected for traditional masculine behaviours such as assertiveness, controlling, arrogant (not taking advice from others), not sharing household responsibilities, ambitious, control over emotion, not sharing attitudes to others, dominating family and expecting to be honoured by others. The results revealed that the highest numbers of respondents provided traditional masculine behaviours towards their norms. The highest number traditional tended to have traditional ideology in terms of “Dominating family while the lowest percentage was in terms of “Not sharing the problem with others”. Similarly, the study examined female student’s attitudes towards femininity. The items selected for traditional feminine behaviours were caring, patient, respectful, accept male authority, less ambitious, not sharing feelings to others and affectionate respectively. The results revealed that the highest numbers of responses were nontraditional on the aspects of caring and nurturing, patience, controlled by others as a natural and selfless. By examining both male and female student’s attitudes towards masculinity and femininity, the study summarized that male students and more traditional than female students. When comparison between male and female student’s attitudes towards traditional masculinity and femininity, male student’s traditional attitudes are slightly higher than the female student’s attitudes.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study provides an insight on how students tend to have attitudes towards masculinity and femininity. Nonetheless, there remain some issues to be addressed in future research. First, with respect to the attitudes towards masculinity and femininity, the highest number of respondents tended to have traditional ideology in terms of “Dominating family”. These attitudes are considered as traditional patriarchal norms that may limit the equality in the society. Due to traditional gender ideology, patriarchal ideology can be viewed on masculine behaviour which may arise many problems in our family as well as society. Hence, it is important to develop nontraditional ideology among students at higher educational institutions. The study suggests that gender and development training course that would provide insight in developing the appropriate traits among the students at higher learning institutions. Secondly, as the present study demonstrated that male students’ tended to have more traditional ideology than the female students, achieving gender equitable norms especially among male students is becoming a great concern. The study, therefore, recommends that it is necessary to arrange gender awareness program that would increase positive masculinity. Thirdly, the study also suggests that generalizations of these findings to other universities have to be made with care as it is a case study approach. This study took a first step in this direction, but needs to be supplemented by further research. Generalizations of these findings to other universities have to be made with care as it is a case study approach. Further research is needed to make an intervention on how non-traditional ideology among Malaysian university students can be increased that would bring the gender equality in the society.

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