

Effect of gender role orientation on marital adjustment

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Abstract

The present study examined the effect of gender role orientation on marital adjustment among married adults in Dhaka city. A total of 240 participants (128 males, 112 females) completed the Bangla version of the Bem Sex-Role Inventory to assess gender role orientation—categorized as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated—and the Bangla version of Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale to measure marital adjustment. One-way ANOVA was used to analyze the data. Results revealed a significant difference in the level of marital adjustment among the four gender role orientation groups, with androgynous individuals exhibiting the highest levels and undifferentiated individuals the lowest. These findings highlighted the importance of gender role orientations in understanding marital dynamics within the sociocultural context of Bangladesh.

Introduction

Men and women are traditionally socialized into different roles⁽¹⁻⁵⁾. Men are socialized to assume the role of provider and to develop agentic traits such as competitiveness and initiative, whereas women are socialized into family-oriented roles that emphasize communal traits like emotional expression and caregiving⁽²⁾. Accordingly, men tend to internalize masculine traits and behaviors, while women internalize feminine traits and behaviors⁽⁶⁾.

Bem⁽⁷⁾ introduced a perspective on gender roles, proposing that individuals can embody both masculine traits, such as assertiveness and independence, and feminine traits, such as sensitivity and nurturance—a combination she termed psychological androgyny. To assess this, she developed the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), which classifies individuals as masculine, feminine, androgynous, or undifferentiated⁽⁷⁾. Masculine individuals endorse traits traditionally associated with men while rejecting feminine qualities, whereas feminine individuals adopt traits valued for women while rejecting masculine ones. In contrast, androgynous individuals score high on both sets of traits,

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giving them a broader behavioral repertoire and greater flexibility to function effectively in both instrumental and expressive domains^(7,8).

Undifferentiated individuals score low on both, showing little identification with gendered traits⁽⁹⁾. Bem further argued that sex-typed individuals rely on gender norms as an organizing principle, while gender-aschematic individuals (androgynous and undifferentiated) are less influenced by stereotypes^(7,10). Bem⁽⁹⁾ showed that androgynous individuals tend to report the highest self-esteem, whereas undifferentiated individuals report the lowest. Subsequent research also suggests that androgynous individuals experience greater psychological well-being than both masculine and feminine individuals⁽¹¹⁻¹⁴⁾. Cheng⁽¹⁵⁾ further found that they demonstrate greater coping flexibility and lower levels of depression. Unlike sex-typed individuals who rely on gender-consistent strategies, androgynous individuals adopt coping strategies suited to the specific demands of the situation.

Gender role orientation significantly influences individuals behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions, shaping important life outcomes such as marital adjustment. Marital adjustment refers to the process by which couples adapt to each other's differences in order to pursue common goals and find happiness⁽¹⁶⁾. Marriage, often considered a lifelong commitment between two individuals, involves navigating diverse personality traits and roles within the relationship⁽¹⁷⁾. Murstein and Williams⁽¹⁸⁾ highlighted that the flexibility of an androgynous role orientation facilitates improved social functioning and role performance, resulting in greater marital adjustment than sex-typed individuals. They found that husbands with androgynous traits reported higher marital adjustment than their masculine or feminine counterparts. Davidson and Sollie⁽¹⁹⁾ found that androgynous and sex-typed individuals demonstrated a higher degree of adjustment in marriage compared to undifferentiated individuals. They also suggested that androgynous individuals often adjust better in marriage because their broader self-concept helps them adapt to different roles and handle the various challenges of a partnership more effectively. Conversely, insufficient proactive socialization, limited role repertoires, and a lack of skills to meet the expectations and obligations of marriage are linked to poorer marital adjustment in undifferentiated individuals. Issac & Shah⁽²⁰⁾ showed that androgyny is associated with enhanced marital adjustment, indicating that couples who are more skilled at navigating gender roles tend to experience better adjustment in their relationships. Purcell, Banikiotes, and Sebastions⁽²¹⁾ reported that individuals identified as androgynous tended to prefer marriages based on egalitarian roles, whereas sex-typed individuals showed no clear preference between traditional and egalitarian arrangements. Studies^(20,22,23) have empirically demonstrated that participants holding egalitarian views reported higher marital satisfaction than those with traditional orientations.

In Bangladesh, traditional gender roles, deeply rooted in patriarchy and Islamic values, have long shaped societal expectations for men and women. However, recent advancements in women's empowerment such as decreased maternal mortality, increased

participation of women in education, the labor force, and national parliament, and improved access to healthcare have begun to challenge these established roles. These shifts have narrowed the gender gap and contributed to changes in societal norms. Despite these positive developments, Bangladesh has also seen a rise in divorce rates, raising concerns about marital adjustment in the face of changing gender dynamics. While global studies have explored the relationship between gender-role orientation and marital adjustment, there is limited research focusing on this topic within the specific cultural context of Bangladesh. This study seeks to address this gap. The objective of the present study was, thus, to see the impact of gender role orientation on marital adjustment. Based on Bem's theory of psychological androgyny and prior research, it was hypothesized that marital adjustment would differ significantly across four gender role orientations, with androgynous individuals showing the highest levels and undifferentiated individuals the lowest.

Materials and Methods

Participants of the Study: The present study sample consisted of 240 adult married individuals, with 128 males (53.3%) and 112 females (46.7%) selected from Dhaka city following convenience sampling technique. The age of the participants ranged from 20 to 42 years, with a mean age of 32.59 years for males ($SD = 5.81$) and 30.12 years for females ($SD = 6.37$). The marriage duration of the participants ranged from 1 to 20 years. Regarding family type, 59.6% (143) of participants lived in nuclear families, while 40.4% (97) lived in extended families.

Participants were provided with a Google form comprising informed consent, demographic information, Bangla version of Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI), and Bangla version of Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS). Clear written instructions were provided within the Google forms. The following instruments were used in this study for collecting data.

Personal Information Form

A form was used to collect socio-demographic details, including age, gender, duration of marriage, number of children, type of family, educational qualification, and employment status.

Bangla Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI)

The original Bem Sex-Role Inventory⁽⁷⁾ was adapted into Bangla by Rahman, Rahman, and Ashraf⁽²⁴⁾. The Bangla version of BSRI was used to classify participants' gender roles. It is a 7-point Likert-type scale with 60 items, representing different personality traits. The items are divided into three groups: 20 masculine traits (e.g., items 1, 4, 7, 10, etc.), 20 feminine traits (e.g., items 2, 5, 8, 11, etc.), and 20 gender-neutral traits, which measure social

desirability (10 desirable and 10 undesirable). Cronbach's alpha values for the masculinity and femininity subscales of Bangla BSRI were 0.77 and 0.74, respectively. Test-retest reliability was 0.82 for masculinity scale and 0.73 for femininity scale. In the present study, only the masculinity and femininity subscales were used to assess gender-role orientation, as done in previous research⁽²⁵⁻²⁷⁾. Participants were classified into four gender-role categories using the median-split method, a widely applied approach in gender-role studies⁽²⁸⁻³⁰⁾. First, the arithmetic mean of each participant's masculinity and femininity scores was calculated. Then, overall median scores were computed: 5.60 for masculinity and 5.85 for femininity. Participants who scored equal to or above the median on masculinity but below the median on femininity were classified as masculine, whereas those who scored equal to or above the median on femininity but below the median on masculinity were classified as feminine. Individuals who obtained scores equal to or higher than the median on both masculinity and femininity were categorized as androgynous, while those who scored below the median on both scales were identified as undifferentiated.

Bangla Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS)

The RDAS⁽³¹⁾ was adapted into Bangla by Nahar, Islam, Syed, and Islam⁽³²⁾. It is a 14-item self-report measure of marital adjustment, consisted of three subscales: Consensus, which evaluates agreement in decision-making, values, and affection; Satisfaction, which measures relationship stability and conflict resolution; and Cohesion, which assesses shared activities and communication. Items were rated on 5- and 6-point Likert scales. Total scores were computed by summing across all items. High scores mean high marital adjustment. A score of 48 or higher indicated a non-distressed relationship, whereas scores of 47 or lower indicated marital/relationship distress⁽³¹⁾. For the Bangla version, Cronbach's alpha was 0.85, Content Validity Index (CVI) was 0.90, and internal consistency was 0.85, indicating high reliability and validity.

Results and Discussion

Participant Characteristics: The distribution of gender-role classifications of the participants and their marital adjustment patterns are presented below.

Table 1. Frequencies and percentages of male and female participants' gender-role classification

Group	Male	Female
Androgynous	34.4% (n = 44)	38.4% (n = 43)
Masculine	32.8% (n = 42)	6.3% (n = 7)
Feminine	6.3% (n = 8)	30% (n = 37)
Undifferentiated	26.6% (n = 34)	22.3% (n = 25)

Table 1 presents the distribution of male and female participants across the four gender-role classifications. Among male participants, 34.4% were classified as androgynous, 32.8% as masculine, 6.3% as feminine, and 26.6% as undifferentiated. Among female participants, the largest group was androgynous (38.4%), followed by feminine (30%), undifferentiated (22.3%), and masculine (6.3%). These results indicate that androgynous classification was the most common among both males and females, while masculine classification was more prevalent in males and feminine classification more prevalent in females.

Table 2. Marital adjustment by gender-role types

Group	Distress Relationship	Non-distress Relationship
Androgynous	0%	100% (n = 87)
Masculine	14.3% (n = 7)	85.7% (n = 42)
Feminine	28.9% (n = 13)	71.1% (n = 32)
Undifferentiated	86.4% (n = 51)	13.6% (n = 8)

Table 2 presents the marital adjustment status or relationship distress (measured by the Bangla Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale) of participants across the four gender-role types. All androgynous participants (100%) reported non-distress relationships, indicating the highest level of marital adjustment; among masculine participants, 14.3% experienced relationship distress; for feminine participants, 28.9% reported distress; while the majority of undifferentiated participants (86.4%) experienced relationship distress, indicating the lowest level of marital adjustment.

A preliminary analysis was conducted using *t*-test to determine if gender influenced marital adjustment. The results indicated no significant impact of gender, so the data were collapsed across genders and the main analysis was done using one way ANOVA in order to see the effect of gender role orientation on marital adjustment.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of marital adjustment across gender role orientations (N = 240)

Group	<i>n</i>	Mean	Std. Deviation
Masculine	49	50.16	3.91
Feminine	45	49.58	4.62
Androgyny	87	52.86	3.75
Undifferentiated	59	43.95	5.49

Table 4. Summary of One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) for marital adjustment across gender role orientations

Source of Variance	SS	<i>df</i>	MS	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>
Between Groups	2823.132	3	941.044		
Within Groups	4624.864	236	19.597	48.020	0.000
Total	7447.996	239			

Note. SS = Sum of Squares, *df* = degrees of freedom, MS = Mean Square

Table 4 indicated a statistically significant difference at the $p < 0.05$ level in marital adjustment scores among the four gender role orientation groups: $F(3, 236) = 48.02, p = 0.000$. Post-hoc comparisons using the Tukey HSD test showed that the androgyny group ($M = 52.86, SD = 3.75$) scored significantly higher than the masculine ($M = 50.16, SD = 3.91$), feminine ($M = 49.58, SD = 4.62$), and undifferentiated ($M = 43.95, SD = 5.49$) groups. Furthermore, the masculine and feminine groups scored significantly higher than the undifferentiated group, while there was no significant difference between the Masculine and Feminine groups.

The study highlighted gender role orientation as a key factor affecting marital adjustment, with androgynous individuals showing the most positive outcome. The findings of this study are consistent with those of previous research^(18,19,33). According to Bem⁽⁷⁾, androgynous individuals draw on both masculine and feminine traits, allowing them to adapt flexibly to diverse situations. Previous research has also shown that androgynous individuals possess a wider range of coping skills⁽³⁴⁾, report higher subjective well-being⁽³⁵⁾, experience better mental health⁽³⁶⁾, demonstrate greater psychological adaptability⁽³⁷⁾, and are more self-actualized⁽³⁸⁾. Moreover, they exhibit higher self-esteem and are more likely to use positive coping strategies⁽³⁹⁾, which are linked to improved marital adjustment⁽⁴⁰⁾. The personality traits and coping skills of androgynous individuals might enable them to navigate marital conflicts more effectively, leading to better adjustment in their relationships compared to individuals with other gender role orientations.

Masculine and feminine individuals were found to have significantly lower marital adjustment than androgynous individuals. Sex-typed individuals are often strongly adherent to traditional gender norms. This rigidity can limit their behavioral and emotional repertoire⁽⁷⁾. Prior research indicates that traditional gender roles, particularly masculine ones, are linked to lower marital satisfaction. For example, high endorsement of traditional masculine roles has been linked to anger, aggression, and negative intentions⁽⁴¹⁾, as well as to a lack of emotional expression, which can undermine marital satisfaction^(42,43). Likewise, exhibiting femininity alone may contribute to interpersonal difficulties⁽²⁰⁾. However, masculine and feminine individuals still reported higher marital adjustment than undifferentiated individuals. This difference can be attributed to the positive contributions of feminine and masculine traits. For example, femininity, characterized by compassion, tenderness, and emotional openness, can contribute positively to marital interactions⁽⁴⁴⁾. Similarly, masculine roles include instrumental traits such as achievement status, self-reliance, and confidence in one's abilities, which have been positively correlated with marital adjustment⁽⁴⁵⁾.

Finally, undifferentiated individuals often lack both masculine and feminine traits, which may contribute to a lower self-concept and difficulty adapting to social expectations. Research has shown that undifferentiated individuals tend to have lower self-concepts than androgynous, masculine, or feminine counterparts⁽⁴⁶⁾. Self-concept plays a crucial role in an

individual's ability to adjust to situational demands, and studies have suggested that undifferentiated individuals often exhibit low self-esteem and a tendency to use more negative coping strategies to deal with challenging situations⁽³⁹⁾. These factors may contribute to their poorer marital adjustment.

This study has some limitations. The convenience sample from Dhaka limits generalizability, and only one partner per marriage participated, overlooking the dyadic nature of marital adjustment. Other factors, such as marriage duration, number of children, socioeconomic status, employment status of both partners and communication patterns were not addressed. Despite these limitations, the findings highlighted the role of gender role orientation in marital adjustment, with androgynous individuals showing the most positive outcomes. This finding is particularly relevant for a society like Bangladesh, where traditional values coexist with growing modernization. Educators and mental health practitioners can use these insights to help individuals understand how gender roles shape relationships and promote adaptive strategies associated with androgyny, to foster healthier marital and family life.

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