

## **Gender Role Ideology according to Sex, Acceptance of Women's Rights and Gay Marriage**

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### **Abstract**

*The historical construction of social roles that men and women must fulfil reveals a traditional gender role ideology that favours the maintenance of inequality. This study analyses gender role ideology according to sex, age, acceptance of women's rights and acceptance-rejection of gay marriage. The analysis was carried out with a sample composed of 366 undergraduate students (38,5% men and 61,5% women), between the ages of 18 and 42 ( $M = 24$ ;  $SD = 3,02$ ). Main results indicate that women tend to be more egalitarian than men. In addition, age, acceptance of women's rights and gay marriage are closely related to gender role ideology.*

**Keywords:** gender; gender role ideology; women's rights; gay marriage

### **1. Introduction**

Throughout history, being a man or a woman was based on biological and natural facts (Arnold, 2010). However, this assumption has given way to the concept of gender which considers that cultural influences, socialization processes and psychological features are key factors that influence the fact of being men or women (Fischer, Reuber, & Dike, 1993). Gender is defined as the assembly of practices, beliefs, representations and social prescriptions that arise among the representatives of a human group, based on the interpretation of the anatomical differences between men and women (Rocha-Sánchez & Díaz-Loving, 2005). Furthermore, it becomes important how each culture interweaves their beliefs related to the roles that men and women play in society (Díaz-Guerrero, 1972).

These beliefs have giving rise to a phenomenon called *sexism*, which is defined as "a prejudiced attitude or discriminatory behaviour based on the inferiority of women as a social group" (Cameron, 1977, p. 340). As a consequence, male roles have been generally assessed as more positive than female, encouraging social movements that advocates for gender equality (e.g. claims for women's right to vote) during the nineteenth century. However, from the second half of the twentieth century, this horizon was widened and women's struggle for equal social treatment penetrated into many other areas, reflecting a clear step towards the social recognition of women's rights (Orloff, 1993).

The increasing prevalence of egalitarian values in modern societies and the emergence of significant legislative changes in terms of gender equality, rather than abolishing sexist attitudes changed them, from explicit to implicit manifestations (Swim, Aikin, Hall, & Hunter, 1995; Tougas, Brown, Beaton, & Joly, 1995). These new subtle expressions of prejudice began to be studied by Tougas et al. (1995) and Swim et al. (1995) on the basis of modern symbolic racism (McConahay, 1986; Sears & Kinder, 1985).

Tougas et al. (1995) defined neosexism as the "manifestation of a current conflict between egalitarian values and residual negative feelings toward certain women" (p. 843), as opposed to the traditional concept of sexism that only focused on negative feelings. The authors also found that neosexism was directly related to negative attitudes towards affirmative action programs for women (e.g. political inclusion, rights extension). In addition, Swim et al. (1995) observed that modern sexist attitudes were associated with gender occupational segregation.

From the assumptions of Tougas et al. (1995) and Swim et al. (1995), Glick and Fiske (1996) introduced the concept of ambivalent sexism. In an effort to oppose to traditional forms of sexism based on hostility, the authors suggest the coexistence of negative and positive feelings, highlighting its benevolent side. This ambivalent sexism dimension, is defined as "a set of interrelated attitudes toward women that are sexist in terms of viewing women stereotypically and in restricted roles but that are subjectively positive in feeling tone (for the perceiver) and also tend to elicit behaviors typically categorized as prosocial (e.g., helping) or intimacy-seeking (e.g., self-disclosure) (Glick & Fiske, 1996, p. 491). These theoretical constructs that explain prejudiced attitudes and discriminatory behaviour towards women, have been studied through gender role ideology (Moya, Expósito, & Padilla, 2006). Gender role ideology is defined as a set of attitudes and beliefs about the proper roles of women and men in the family or society, which could be considered in a continuum ranging from egalitarian to traditional values (Korabik, McElwain & Chappell, 2008).

People with a traditional gender role ideology believe that women should give priority to family responsibilities, while men should prioritize work responsibilities (Gutek, Searle & Klepa, 1991). Although a transition from traditional gender ideology to an egalitarian one has been experienced in many societies throughout the world (Friedman & Weissbrod, 2005), most researchers emphasize that women still have the primary responsibility in home and childcare tasks, even though they have paid-employed status (Noor, 1999, 2003).

Gender role ideology is a historical construction whose meaning is derived from each culture or context and is the substrate upon which different meanings are given to the sexes (Pastor, 1998). In this way societies pigeonhole women and men into stereotypes that seem immovable, building belief systems about masculinity-femininity and, in consequence, the type of activities and distribution of occupations that are appropriate for each sex (Pastor, 2000). According to Moya, Navas and Gomez-Berrocal (1991), the fact that roles are hierarchically distributed according to sex, consolidates discrimination because such stereotypes have a prescriptive function, guiding what is right or wrong in terms of women and men's behaviour.

This function differs from the descriptive nature of sexual stereotypes, in which people define men and women's characteristics, particularly in terms of their personality traits and their biological factors. In order to study gender role ideology, Moya, Exposito and Padilla (2006) developed the Gender Ideology Scale (Escala de Ideología de rol de Género, hereinafter EIG), which allows researchers to account for the individual beliefs about the roles and behaviours that men and women should carry out. In this way, the EIG assesses the presence of a traditional gender role ideology in which women are confined to occupy the role of wife, housewife and mother. Also women are seen as weak and in need of protection, while men play the role of suppliers holding a privileged place in decision-making processes. In this regard, it was noted that women tend to obtain higher scores in the EIG, recognizing themselves as more egalitarian than men (Forbes, Adams-Curtis, & White, 2004; Frese, Moya, & Megías, 2000; Lameiras Fernández & Castro-Rodríguez, 2002; Moya, Expósito, & Padilla, 2006).

Increasing age, as an indicator of generational values, should be associated with more traditional conception about gender roles (Helmreich, Spence, & Gibson, 1982; McBroom, 1987). As well, McHugh and Frieze (1997) demonstrate that the older the person is, the more traditional or sexist is their vision of gender roles, while younger people tend to have a more liberal conception. Moreover, Rice and Coates (1995) analyzed different items that accounted for a traditional gender role ideology held over time and concluded that the age is a strong determinant of gender conception, pointing out a gradual generational change from a liberal vision to a conservative one. Gender role ideology is also characterized by its relationship to specific behaviours regarding policy issues (Moya & Expósito, 2000, 2001). On the one hand, a traditional gender role ideology has been negatively associated with the acceptance and expansion of women's rights (Expósito, Moya, & Glick, 1998), and on the other hand with the acceptance of gay marriage (McHuge & Frieze, 1997; Moya, Expósito, & Ruiz, 2000). The aim of this work was to analyze gender role ideology within the Argentinean context in order to assess if there are differences according to sex, age, expansion of women's rights and acceptance-rejection of gay marriage.

## 2. Method

### 2.1. Participants

Participants were 366 undergraduate students from Buenos Aires university (38,5% males and 61,5% female) with a mean age of 24 years ( $SD = 3,02$ ).

### 2.2. Measures

Data was collected through a self-managing questionnaire, ensuring the anonymity of the participants. The following measures were included:

- *Gender Ideology Scale (EIG)*: the short version of the scale was administered, consisting of 12 items (Moya, Expósito, & Padilla, 2006) such as, "If a child is ill and both parents work, it is best that the mother is the one to ask for the day off of work to care for the child", "Extramarital relations are more reprehensible in women than in men" or "Although women work, it should be the man's responsibility to be the breadwinner of the family". The items were rated on a scale ranging from 1 = Strongly agree to 5 = Strongly disagree.
- *Women's rights*: in order to analyze the relationship between gender role ideology and extension-restriction of women's rights, the following item was included: "You think that women's rights should be:" and participants could choose 1 = Expanded, 2 = Maintained as it is, or 3 = Restricted.
- *Gay marriage*: in order to assess the acceptance-rejection of gay marriage, the participants were asked if they believed: 1 = It's fine that it has been legalized or 2 = The law should not have been changed.

### 2.3. Procedure

The subjects were invited to participate in the study voluntarily, requesting their informed consent. Furthermore, they were informed that the data derived from this research would be used only for academic and scientific purposes under the Argentinean National Law 25.326 that protects personal data.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. EIG's Items Analysis

A descriptive analysis of the 12 items of the EIG scale was carried out. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation and item-total correlation for each item as well as Cronbach's alpha if an item was deleted.

**Table 1. EIG items**

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	$r_{ix}$	$\alpha_{-x}$
Item 1	2,48	1,43	.41	.78
Item 2	3,51	1,38	.39	.78
Item 3	3,38	1,36	.39	.77
Item 4	2,69	1,43	.50	.77
Item 5	2,53	1,49	.36	.78
Item 6	2,06	1,32	.53	.77
Item 7	1,72	1,15	.46	.77
Item 8	3,18	1,55	.44	.77
Item 9	2,91	1,68	.41	.78
Item 10	2,41	1,33	.46	.77
Item 11	1,71	1,14	.39	.78
Item 12	1,74	1,13	.40	.78

All items contributed to the overall scale, presenting a relatively high correlation with the total measurement ( $.36 < r < .56$ ;  $p < .01$ ). EIG internal consistency was examined by Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient ( $\alpha = .79$ ), accounting for the fact that the removal of any item would decrease reliability. The total explained variance of the scale was 40,63%.

With the 12 items of the EIG, we proceeded to perform a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) using the maximum Likelihood (ML) as an estimation method, and carrying out the correction of not normal data with Satorra - Bentler (S-B) robust estimation.

The fit indexes of the CFA are reported in Table 2, whose indicators were the ratio between the  $X^2$  distribution and its degrees of freedom (maximum likelihood) as well as the ratio between the S-B  $X^2$  and its degrees of freedom (robust estimation), being acceptable those values that were less than five (Byrne, 1989; Carmines & McIver, 1981). In addition, the Non Normed Fit Index (NNFI), the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), as well as the Bollen's Incremental Fit Index (IFI or  $\Delta_2$ ) were informed, considering values greater than .90 as good fit indicators (MacCallum & Austin, 2000). Finally, the mean-square Root Error of Approximation (RMSEA) was reported, accepting values smaller than .08 as adequate fit indicators (Browne & Cudeck, 1993).

**Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis of EIG**

	$X^2_{(gl)}*$	S-B $X^2_{(gl)}*$	$\Delta$ S-B $X^2_{(gl)}$	NNFI	CFI	$\Delta_2$	RMSEA
EIG	732.24 (66)	89.49 (54)	1,65	.93	.95	.95	.043

\*.  $p < .001$

### 3.2. Differences by sex, women's rights, gay marriage and age

We performed an independent sample  $t$ -tests to examine EIG scores according to sex. The results shows that men have significantly higher scores in their EIG values ( $M = 33,65$ ;  $SD = 9,91$ ) than women ( $M = 29,62$ ;  $SD = 9,10$ ), holding a more traditional gender role ideology and less egalitarian attitude. As for women's rights, 85,1% of the sample considered that they should be expanded, while just 14,9% considered that they should be left as they are. Also, not a single participant thought that women's rights should be restricted. We proceeded to test if there are differences between these two groups and their EIG scores.

The results indicate that there are statistically significant differences ( $t_{(64,26)} = -2,85$ ;  $p < .01$ ) between those who assert that women's rights should be extended ( $M = 29,69$ ;  $SD = 8,90$ ) and those who think they should be left as they are ( $M = 33,98$ ;  $SD = 10,06$ ). Moreover, differences were found ( $t_{(64,42)} = -4.74$ ,  $p < .001$ ) between the EIG scores of those who agree with the gay marriage legalization ( $M = 29,39$ ;  $SD = 9,11$ ), and those who disagree ( $M = 35,37$ ;  $SD = 7,67$ ). Finally, we proceeded to analyze the relationships between EIG and participants age. The results indicate that the correlation between both variables is negative and moderate ( $r = -.23$ ;  $p < .01$ ).

### 4. Discussion

In order to accomplish our objectives, we analyzed EIG scale items (Table 1) and we concluded that they all contribute to the evaluation of the construct. Additionally, the internal consistency of the scale was analyzed showing acceptable levels, similar to those obtained in university student samples from different countries in Latin America such as Brazil, Cuba and Colombia (Lameiras-Fernández et al., 2002), as well as with those obtained in Spain and Portugal (Frese, Moya, & Megías, 2000). Subsequently, the validity of the scale was analyzed using confirmatory factor analysis, suggesting that the one-factor solution of the 12-item model, provides an adequate fit of the data to the theoretical model (Table 2). As indicated by previous studies (Brewster & Padavic, 2000; Katsurada & Sugihara, 1999; Mason & Lu, 1988; Rice & Coates, 1995), the current work showed statistically significant differences in gender role ideology between men and women. Consistently with a general shift toward more egalitarian gender role attitudes among all women, the results find out that women are nearer to the egalitarian pole than men.

These findings differ from those observed by Lameiras-Fernandez et al. (2002) in Latin American countries, who report no statistically significant differences between EIG scores and sex. This study found statistically significant differences between those who believe that women's rights should be increased and those who feel that they should remain as they are.

As noted in previous studies (Moya & Exposito, 2000; Tougas et al., 1995), the results shows that traditional gender role ideology is higher in people who believe that women's rights should be left as they are, than in those who argue that they should be increased. Consistent with previous research (Ficarotto, 1990; Kurdek, 1988; Masser & Abrams, 1997), this study found that people who rejects the legalization of gay marriage, have higher levels of gender role ideology than those who accept it.

Finally, as pointed out by McHugh and Frieze (1997), the present study demonstrates that the higher the age, the greater the defence of a traditional gender role ideology. For future research on the analysis of gender role ideology in the Argentinean context, and attending to the contradictory research findings in the reviewed literature, we recommend a more in-depth analysis of sex differences in the EIG values. We also suggest enlarge the reference sample to achieve greater generalizability and representativeness of the results. To this end, it would be appropriate to increase the sample size and to work with the general population.

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