

Gender Identity and Gender Discrimination Among Female Employees in India

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ABSTRACT

Gender discrimination is an unspoken reality for Indian women and it extends to the workplace. It limits the true potential of the female workforce and the growth of the nation, besides adversely affecting women's health and engagement at the workplace. The study emphasizes the need to understand and dismantle gender discrimination as there is a strong economic and welfare rationale for doing so. Gender is viewed from a social identity perspective and thus, the role of gender identity in the perception of gender discrimination at work is examined for 65 female employees at work. Significant correlations were observed between three out of four dimensions of gender identity and gender discrimination. Multiple regression results indicated that the four dimensions of gender identity together explain 41% variance in the perception of gender discrimination. The model reflected a good fit and can be expected to generalize the findings well on the population. The study highlights the importance of gender identity in the perception of gender discrimination at work and shows that various dimensions of gender identity can impact gender discrimination differently. Managerial implications of the same are also discussed and development of gender and identity related interventions is advised to tackle gender discrimination in a positive way at the workplace.

Keywords: *Gender, Gender Identity, Gender Discrimination, Social Identity, Organizational Behaviour*

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INTRODUCTION

According to ILO statistics, the female labor force participation rate in India is among the lowest in the world, with India ranking at 121 out of 131 nations (Prabhu, 2017). Gender discrimination and occupational segregation are examples of social and cultural norms that have been identified as one of the reasons for the sharp decline of the female labor force participation rate in India (Kapsos et al., 2014). It has been reported that if India could match its female workforce participation rate with the best performing nation in the Asia Pacific region, it could add 770 billion US dollars (18%) more to its annual GDP by 2025 (McKinsey Global Institute, 2018). These statistics highlight a strong economic rationale behind addressing gender issues at the workplace.

For ages, Indian women have lived in a primarily patriarchal environment, susceptible to discrimination with regards to social, political, educational and economic opportunities as a result of their perceived inferior status (Batra & Reio Jr., 2016). Discrimination against women is inherent in the Indian social structure and it is a mix of such social, organizational and personal biases that have curtailed the potential of women in organizations (Sandhu & Mehta, 2008).

A review on gender inequality in South Asia reveals that gender based behavioral norms are expected to be carried into the workplace in India (Ali, 2010 as cited in Stratchan et al., 2015). It has been found that gender inequalities at work have curtailed Indian women's workforce participation by limiting their bargaining power, representation, control over work-life balance, familial support, access to training opportunities and health, financial and educational resources (Madhav & Sankaran, 2011).

Perceptions of gender discrimination have known to be harmful for women's psychological well-being (Schmitt & Branscombe, 2002) and stress has been reported as an outcome of gender discrimination (Shaffer et al., 2000). Gender discrimination also has adverse effects on female employees' cognitive and emotional engagement at the workplace (Sia et al., 2015). Thus, there is a strong welfare rationale behind addressing gender discrimination as it has implications for female employees as well as the organizations. This makes it imperative to examine and dismantle gender discrimination at a societal as well as at an organizational level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Gender Discrimination – The Concept

In the workplace, gender discrimination is said to take place when personnel decisions are based on gender instead of qualifications and performance of an individual (Gutek et al., 1996). It may be felt by an individual who experiences unfair and unjust treatment owing to his or her gender (Ngo & Loi, 2014). Thus, when female employees feel that they have been overlooked for a promotion or training opportunity or a challenging assignment or have not been rewarded and compensated as well as their male counterparts because of their gender, that is a perception of gender discrimination.

Gender discrimination has been evaluated mostly through three types of evidence: analyzing decisions regarding candidates or employees possessing similar qualifications in all respects, except differing in terms of gender; comparing organizational outcomes and the presence of gender bias for male and female employees; comparing perceptions of work experiences of one gender as against the work experiences of the other gender (Cleveland, Vescio & Barnes-Farrel, 2005).

Research suggests significant differences in the beliefs on gender discrimination among Indian executives; significant differences in their demographics and psychographics have been observed, equality of opportunities being the most important discriminatory factor (Sandhu and Mehta, 2008).

Gender Discrimination: Linkages with Gender, Social Identity, Gender Identity

To understand the phenomenon of gender discrimination, it is important to reflect over the psychology and impact of ‘gender’. Gender has been identified as a critical determinant of mental health and distress (Joshi, 2015) with women perceiving greater gender discrimination than men at the workplace (Gutek et al., 1996). Gender has also been examined from a ‘social identity’ perspective, a psychological meta-theory that incorporates the principles and assumptions of social identity theory, developed by Tajfel and Turner in the 1970s, and the self-categorization theory, developed by Turner and colleagues in the 1980s (Haslam, 2004).

Social identity theory assumes that a social group is a collection of individuals who identify as members of the same social category and social identity pertains to their evaluation of their social groups (Luhtanen & Crocker, 1992). Thus, the theory states that social groups influence an individual's psychology as they can be internalized into an individual's sense of self (Greenway et al., 2015).

Social (group) identification has been positively associated with perceived discrimination (Cameron, 2001) and it is found to specifically predict perceived discrimination for low status members of the group (Major, Quinton & Schmader, 2001 as cited in Major et. al, 2002). Gender can be one of the many groups from which individuals derive a social identity and individuals may categorize themselves into one of the gender groups that they identify with.

Gender identity can be defined as "people's understanding of themselves in terms of cultural definitions of female and male" and is a self-concept of prime importance in human psychology as it places individuals within social structures (Wood & Eagly, 2015). It can be conceptualized as the categorical knowledge of one's gender as well as its importance and evaluation for oneself (Sharma & Sharma, 2010).

Usually, gender identity has been studied in two forms – by way of gender stereotypical traits or interests and from a social identity perspective (Wood & Eagly, 2015). Most research with respect to gender identity in the Indian context has been restricted to a stereotypical traits perspective or focuses on sex role stereotypes or gender role identity (e.g. Sethi and Allen, 1988; Basu, 2010; Basu et al., 2012) but relevant literature on gender identity from a social identity perspective was not found for the Indian context.

Given that it was only in the 1980s that Indian psychological research on stereotypes, prejudice and discrimination began to include a gendered perspective (Vindhya, 2007), it is understandable that there is limited literature examining gender from a social identity perspective in an Indian context as compared to the existing literature in the western context. This is a key research gap that has been identified and this study attempts to pave the way in this regard.

Past research supports the argument that gender identity plays a significant role in the perception of gender discrimination at work. Typically, women who identify highly with their gender group are sensitive to and threatened by gender discrimination due to the significance they

attach to their gender in their self-evaluations (Leslie & Gefland, 2008). Gender identification has been found to be positively related to perceived gender discrimination (Foley et al., 2015) and also moderates individual responses to perceived gender discrimination (Eliezer et al., 2010).

As discussed earlier, women have been considered the disadvantaged or low status group in the Indian society. The traditional outlook towards women in India had, in a way, stripped women of their individual identities and they were merely seen as a part of families or groups (Alavi, 2013). The low status implies that, gender group identification will predict perceived gender discrimination for women and the same can be examined at the workplace. Despite the massive strides by women in the professional arena, the shackles of gender discrimination still weigh upon the female workforce in organizations and it is high time that we pursue solutions to this age old problem. Based on the existing evidence of gender discrimination and its linkages with gender identity, following study objectives and corresponding hypotheses are formulated:

1. To examine the relationship between gender identity and gender discrimination among female employees.

H1: There will be significant correlation between gender identity and gender discrimination among female employees.

2. To examine whether gender identity predicts gender discrimination among female employees.

H2: Gender identity will predict gender discrimination among female employees.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Participants and Sampling

The sample consisted of female employees of varied age groups in India, engaged in private firms of the corporate sector, employed in different industries. Snowball sampling was used to identify potential respondents.

Measurement Tools

A *Demographic information sheet* with information such as name, age, education details, gender, occupation, current designation, current employer, industry of employment, etc. was used to obtain key

demographics. Some of these fields were kept voluntary to maintain confidentiality, such as name and income level.

Gender version of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES) (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992), adapted by Leslie and Gefland (2008) was used to measure gender identity (GI). This tool has 16 statements to be answered on a seven point Likert type scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. Scale reliability reported by Leslie and Gefland (2008) was $\alpha=.81$ for the Gender version of CSES as against $\alpha=.85$ to $.89$ reported in other samples (Luhtanen and Crocker, 1992). The scale reliability for the present study was found to be $\alpha=.62$.

CSES consists of four sub-scales with four items each - Membership Self-Esteem (MSE), Private Self-Esteem (PRI), Public Self-Esteem (PUB) and importance to identity (IID). Reliability for the MSE, PRI, PUB and IID sub-scale were $\alpha=.57$, $\alpha=.56$, $\alpha=.60$ and $\alpha=.64$ respectively. As per the authors’ recommendations, each sub-scale or dimension of GI is analyzed separately, without calculating a mean or overall score for GI.

Perceived Gender Discrimination Scale (Foley, Hang-Yue and Wong, 2005) adapted from Sanchez and Brock (1996) was used to measure perceived gender discrimination (GD). The tool has four statements to be answered on a six point Likert type scale, ranging from “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”. The reported scale reliability was $\alpha=.86$ (Foley, Hang-Yue and Wong, 2005). The scale reliability for the present study was found to be $\alpha=.78$.

Procedure

The research scales were replicated in an online format through Google Forms and shared on social media platforms (primarily Facebook and Twitter) to reach potential respondents. A brief outline of the study, contact information of the researcher and instructions were present in the form. Privacy and confidentiality of data was maintained at all times. The responses so received were collated through a spreadsheet software and the data analysis was conducted using SPSS.

Data Analysis Techniques

Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to analyze the data. Scale reliabilities for each of the scales were calculated. Reliabilities for the sub-scales of the gender version of CSES were also calculated as is recommended when a questionnaire has sub-scales (Field, 2013).

Means and standard deviations were calculated. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to assess the relationship between the dimensions of gender identity and gender discrimination. Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis was used to ascertain prediction of gender discrimination.

Findings

The average age of the sample of female employees ($n=65$) was 28 years ($SD=2.59$) and they possessed an average work experience of two years. The sample displayed a highly educated set of women with most (86%) holding a Master's degree or a PG Diploma. 57% of the sample was unmarried. Demographic details are given in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographics of Total Sample ($n=65$)

Age (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
21-25	11	16.9
26-30	47	72.3
31-35	5	7.7
36-40	2	3.1
Work Experience (Years)	Frequency	Percentage
1	10	15.4
1-2	6	9.2
2-3	8	12.3
3-4	15	23.1
4-5	14	21.5
Greater than 5	12	18.5
Highest Education	Frequency	Percentage
Bachelors Degree	8	12.3
Masters Degree	35	53.9
Other	1	1.5
PG Diploma	21	32.3
Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Married	22	33.8
Unmarried	37	56.9
Engaged	2	3.1
Divorced	2	3.1
Separated	2	3.1

Table 2 displays the mean scores, standard deviations and correlation coefficients for the different dimensions of GI and for GD. The respondents reported mean scores of $\bar{x} = 6.26$ on MSE, $\bar{x} = 6.03$ on PRI, $\bar{x} = 4.20$ on PUB, $\bar{x} = 4.84$ on IID and $\bar{x} = 12.38$ on GD. The maximum score possible for each dimension of GI was seven as per the instructions for using the CSES. It is seen that female employees, on an average, score on the higher spectrum on MSE and PRI and relatively moderately on PUB and IID. The maximum score possible for GD was 24. The perception of gender discrimination at work among female employees seems to be at moderate levels.

Table 2: Mean, S.D and Correlation Matrix for Total Sample (n=65)

Variable	M	S.D	MSE	PRI	PUB	IID	GD
Membership Self-Esteem (MSE)	6.26	.70	1				
Private Self-Esteem (PRI)	6.03	1.01	.50**	1			
Public Self-Esteem (PUB)	4.20	1.65	.17	.33**	1		
Importance to Identity (IID)	4.84	1.77	.20	-.57	-.17	1	
Gender discrimination (GD)	12.38	5.24	.03	-.43**	-.45**	.34**	1

** p< .01 significance level

Three out of four dimensions of GI were significantly correlated with GD. MSE had no significant correlation with GD ($r = .03$, n.s). PRI had a negative, moderate and significant correlation with GD ($r = -.43$). PUB had a negative, moderate and significant correlation with GD ($r = -.45$). IID had a positive, somewhat moderate and significant correlation to GD ($r = .34$). Significant sub-scale correlations were also observed. PRI was moderately, positively correlated with MSE ($r = .50$) and the correlation was significant. PRI was somewhat moderately, positively correlated with PUB ($r = .33$) and the correlation was significant. These results exhibit support for H1.

Table 3 displays the regression results on GD through step-wise multiple regression analysis. All dimensions of GI had a significant effect on GD as hypothesized. The regression model was observed to be a good fit of the data as seen through the F-ratio. Together, the four dimensions of GI significantly predicted GD as seen in Model 4, $R^2 = .41$,

$F(4, 60) = 10.34, p < .00$. A comparison of R^2 and adjusted R^2 shows a very small difference for the final model, i.e., 0.04 or 4% (computed as $0.41 - 0.37 = 0.04$). This shows that the model generalizes well for the population as the value of adjusted R^2 is very close to the value of R^2 (Field, 2013). The shrinkage from 0.41 to 0.37 reflects that if the model was derived from the population rather than a sample, it would explain 0.4% less variance in the outcome.

Together, PUB, PRI, MSE and IID explained 41% variance in GD. We can assess in Model 4, other predictors remaining constant, when PUB rises by one standard deviation, GD falls by .32 standard deviations; when PRI rises by one standard deviation, GD falls by .44 standard deviations; when MSE rises by one standard deviation, GD rises by .26 standard deviations and when IID rises by one standard deviation, GD rises by .21 standard deviations. Thus, we find support for H2.

Table 3: Regression on Gender Discrimination for Total Sample (n=65)

Model	Predictor Variable	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	F	Sig	B	Standardized β	t	p-value
1	PUB	.45	.20	.19	16.10	0.00	-1.84	-.45	-4.01	.000
2	PUB PRI	.54	.29	.27	12.71	0.00	-1.43 -1.61	-.35 .31	-3.09 -2.76	.003 .008
3	PUB PRI MSE	.61	.37	.34	11.85	0.00	-1.43 -2.43 2.40	-.35 -.47 .32	-3.26 -3.86 2.73	.002 .000 .008
4	PUB PRI MSE IID	.64	.41	.37	10.34	0.00	-1.29 -2.27 1.92 .82	-.32 -.44 .26 .21	-2.97 -3.64 2.16 2.01	.004 .001 .035 .049

DISCUSSION

Luhtanen and Crocker (1992) had outlined the following meanings of the dimensions of their Collective Self-Esteem Scale (CSES): Membership Self-Esteem (MSE) reflects the most individualistic aspect of collective self-esteem arising out of one's gender group membership; Private Self-Esteem (PRI) reflects one's judgements of how good or valuable one's gender group is; Public Self-Esteem (PUB) reflects one's evaluations of others' opinions about one's social group; Importance to Identity (IID)

reflects the importance of one's gender group membership to one's self-concept.

The present study found that different aspects of gender identity held different value to the self-concept of female employees and they exhibited moderate levels of perceived gender discrimination. What can be understood is that female employees had a healthy view of themselves as members of their gender (MSE) and they held a favorable opinion of their gender (PRI). However, their gender was not as important to their self-defined identity (IID) and they had moderate belief that others think positively about their gender group (PUB).

It was seen that gender identity is significantly related to the perception of gender discrimination at work among female employees. Further, it was observed that different dimensions of gender identity impact the perception of gender discrimination by varying proportions as observed by Major & Dover, 2016.

The study found that female employees perceived greater gender discrimination at work when they attached greater value to their gender as part of their self-concept (pertaining to IID). They perceived lesser gender discrimination at work the more they believed that others thought favorably of their gender (PUB) and the more they valued their own gender (PRI).

It was also seen that the different aspects of gender identity together predict the perception of gender discrimination at work significantly. Thus, the importance of gender identity in the attribution to gender discrimination in organizations has also been highlighted (Foley, Ngo, Loi and Zheng, 2015; Major and Dover, 2016, pp 221).

CONCLUSION

The study highlights the role of gender identity in the perception of gender discrimination among female employees. It suggests that gender identity is significantly related to the perception of gender discrimination at work and different dimensions of gender identity impact gender discrimination by different proportions. Gender identity is found to be useful in predicting the levels of gender discrimination at work among female employees.

This study reiterates the importance of evaluating the role that society plays in shaping our thoughts and behaviours, even at work. Gender identity is a social construct and hence incorporates the sense of self (based on gender) from the existing social norms. Gender discrimination is still a dreadful reality of women's lives, victims tend to grow accustomed to it

and fail to recognize such discriminatory incidents sometimes. Thus, the study has attempted to create awareness of gender discrimination at the workplace and exhibited how gender identity can be used to dismantle the barrier of gender discrimination at work in a positive way.

Few studies examining gender identity from a social identity perspective have been conducted in an Indian context and this study is a small step towards filling this research gap. Moreover, the study provides an understanding of the dimensions of gender identity and how they impact perceptions of gender discrimination among women. The study was conducted on female employees which helps in furthering the agenda for research on gender in India, focusing on women's issues at work so as to aid well-being of women and the economic development of the nation.

Overall, the study adds to the existing body of knowledge by providing strong evidence of the relationship between gender identity and perceived gender discrimination among Indian women employees and examination of the linkages at a multi-dimensional levels. The prediction model was found to be generalizable on the population which adds to the value of this study. Thus, it plugs the dearth of empirical research on gender identity in relation to gender discrimination in the Indian context. The findings also bring to the fore certain managerial implications that HR practitioners and organizations must consider while tackling gender discrimination at the workplace.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The study provides evidence that female employees who tend to identify highly with their gender group (corresponding to IID) also tend to experience greater gender discrimination at work. The question is not whether the gender discrimination is legitimate or not, it is felt and once it is felt, it exposes these female employees to the many adverse effects of gender discrimination such as distress, poor health and lowered engagement from the workplace. It is interesting to note that female employees experienced lesser gender discrimination the more they felt that others view their gender group of women more favorably (corresponding to PUB) and also when they themselves considered their own gender worthwhile (corresponding to PRI).

These findings have serious implications for managing the female workforce. HR practitioners and organizations can take cues from these findings to conduct gender sensitization programmes that help in building a positive gender image in the minds of all stakeholders. Further, self-

esteem interventions may help female employees enhance their self-worth, which is likely to lower their perception of gender discrimination. Moreover, sub-scale correlation results suggest that the evaluation of one's own gender (PRI) and others' evaluations of one's gender are significantly related (PUB). Hence, programmes that build a positive identity on either of the two dimensions may be helpful in generating positive results. Overall, the findings of this study may help managers understand how gender discrimination is perceived by female employees at work and provides critical clues on how to tackle gender discrimination at work.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE OF FUTURE RESEARCH

Some limitations of the study must be acknowledged. Though the overall reliability of the Gender version of the Collective Self-Esteem Scale as well as its sub-scales was found to be relatively low, we proceeded because it has been observed that relatively short scales may not have very high reliability coefficients and that a reliability coefficient of about 0.6 is acceptable upon meeting the three conditions: the scale has strong evidence of validity; there are sufficient theoretical or practical reasons for the scale; the scale has less than 10 items (Loewenthal, 2004). Application of western scales and its aptness for an Indian sample was also a challenge. However, in the absence of an indigenous scale for measuring gender identity from a social identity perspective, it was considered practical to utilize an already existing scale. The research instruments were self-report measures that have their own limitations. Incorporating qualitative research via interviews or focused group discussions would have provided a richer understanding of gender discrimination as experienced by female employees.

Given the above limitations and learnings from the study, it would be fruitful for researchers to also examine legitimacy of perceived gender discrimination. A comparison between the felt (perceived) gender discrimination and systemic gender discrimination in light of gender identity (such as blatant discrimination in policies, programmes and procedures at a company), their impact on employee and organizational outcomes would be insightful for organizations. Further, the use of experiments in understanding the prevalence of gender discrimination may be interesting as little or no evidence of the same was found in the Indian context.

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