



Shyness and Personal Space between Working and Home Making Women in Context of Sex-role Orientation

ORIGINAL ARTICLE



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Abstract

The present study was conducted on 40 working and 40 home making women equal in respect of androgyny & sex-typed, respectively. The purpose was to examine the association of working status and sex role orientation with shyness and personal space respectively. For the purpose, it was hypothesized that: (i) Shyness scores between working women and home making women would be found significantly associated. (ii) Shyness scores between androgynous and sex typed women group would be found significantly associated. (iii) Personal space between working women and home making women would be found significantly associated. (iv) Androgynous and sex typed women would be found significantly associated. Shyness, sex role orientation, were measured using Akhtar's Shyness Scale and Sinha's Masculinity Femininity Check List respectively. The personal space was measured experimentally. The obtained data were analysed using chi-square.

The results revealed that (1) Home making women are found more shy than working women. (2) Home making women maintain smaller personal space than working women. (3) Androgynous women are found less shy than sex typed women. (4) Androgynous women maintain smaller personal space than sex-typed group of women.

Key Words

Shyness, Personal, Women, Sex-role.

Introduction

The dynamics of gender roles, societal expectations, and sexual orientation play a critical role in shaping the experiences of women across various spheres of life, particularly in their professional and domestic environments. Shyness, a complex emotional response to social situations, and the concept of personal space are influenced by cultural norms and individual experiences. For women, the intersection of their roles as workers or homemakers with their sexual orientation adds another layer of complexity to how they navigate these aspects in their daily lives. This is particularly important in the context of modern gender roles, where women are often expected to balance both professional and domestic responsibilities, a challenge that is shaped and complicated further by their sexual identity.

Shyness is often linked to a sense of discomfort or self-consciousness in social interactions. This can manifest differently for women depending on their sexual orientation. For instance, heterosexual women may experience shyness in environments that emphasize traditional gender roles, such as in the workplace or within the home, due to societal expectations of femininity and caregiving. Meanwhile, LGBTQ+ women may face a heightened sense of shyness or anxiety when dealing with environments that do not support or understand their sexual identity, adding additional emotional weight to the already complex gender-based expectations they face in their daily lives.

The concept of personal space the physical and psychological boundaries individuals maintain in social interactions also plays a crucial role in understanding the experiences of working and homemaking women, particularly in the context of their sexual orientation. Personal space is often culturally defined, and women are frequently socialized to maintain certain boundaries in public and private spaces. For women in the workforce, the need for personal space can intersect with professional expectations, where physical and emotional boundaries may be blurred due to demanding work schedules, workplace hierarchy, or the gendered expectations of their roles. For homemaking women, the demands of caregiving, maintaining household order, and emotional labor can lead to challenges in establishing and maintaining personal space, which is further complicated by their sexual orientation. Homosexual or bisexual women, for example, may experience additional pressure to conform to societal norms or face discrimination, resulting in a suppression of their own emotional and physical needs.

The division between working women and homemaking women has historically been informed by traditional gender roles, where women were either expected to contribute to the workforce or stay at home to care for their families. However, with evolving societal expectations, more women are balancing both professional and domestic responsibilities, sometimes feeling the pressures of both worlds colliding. In such a context, the intersection of their sexual orientation further shapes their experiences of shyness and personal space. For instance, a working woman who identifies as lesbian or bisexual may face challenges in finding a supportive work environment that respects her sexual identity while still navigating the traditional expectations of professional behavior. Similarly, homemaking women, often expected to prioritize family and domestic duties, may find it difficult to express or maintain their personal boundaries, particularly if they feel their sexual orientation conflicts with societal expectations of femininity and domesticity.

Moreover, the experiences of sexual orientation and gender often intersect in complex ways, creating unique challenges for women. For instance, women who identify as lesbian or bisexual may experience a form of social marginalization, either in the workplace or at home, due to heteronormative expectations that prevail in many cultures. These women may face added layers of shyness, feeling hesitant to disclose their sexual orientation for fear of judgment or discrimination. In contrast, heterosexual women, while not burdened by the same concerns about sexual orientation, might experience their own forms of shyness linked to expectations around their femininity and caregiving roles.

In summary, the interplay between shyness, personal space, and sexual orientation among working and homemaking women underscores the complexity of gender roles and societal expectations. Women's navigation of these spaces—whether in the public domain of the workplace or the private domain of the home—must be understood through the lens of both their gender and sexual identity. Recognizing these intersections is crucial to understanding the challenges women face in negotiating their emotional, physical, and social boundaries in contemporary society. It was found that personal space has not been studied in context of shyness, working status of mothers and sex-role orientation in Patna (Bihar). Hence, the study.

Review of Literature

Crozier³ (2005) explored how shyness manifests differently in men and women, with women often displaying more pronounced social anxiety due to societal expectations of femininity and caregiving roles. The

author discusses how women's shyness can be exacerbated in professional settings where they feel pressured to conform to traditional gender norms. For working women, this can also be compounded by the need to maintain personal space in male-dominated environments. Hall⁵ (1966) explored the concept of personal space and how it varies by culture and gender. Hall's study found that women generally maintain closer personal distances in social interactions compared to men. This research is particularly relevant to understanding how working and homemaking women experience personal space differently, especially in interactions influenced by their sexual orientation and societal expectations. Ragins and Cornwell⁹ (2001) focuses on the intersection of gender and sexual orientation in the workplace, specifically how discrimination impacts gay, lesbian, and bisexual employees. The findings show that women who identify as LGBTQ+ face heightened levels of discrimination and workplace bias, which can lead to increased shyness, avoidance behavior, and difficulty maintaining personal space. The research also highlights how these women negotiate their roles in both professional and domestic spheres. Gergen et al.⁴ (2002) explores the traditional roles of women as homemakers and caregivers, specifically how these roles have been gendered and how they affect the emotional and social well-being of women. The authors argue that societal expectations of women's domestic labor often restrict their personal space, especially in heterosexual relationships where the women are expected to prioritize family over self-expression or professional identity. Patterson⁸ (2000) explored how sexual orientation affects women's roles within the family, particularly when it comes to balancing personal and professional life. It discusses how lesbian women, for instance, may face unique challenges in maintaining personal boundaries due to heteronormative family structures that prioritize traditional gender roles and heterosexual relationships. Lewis⁷ (2005) examined how shyness and social anxiety are often intensified among lesbian women due to the stigma surrounding their sexual orientation. Shy lesbians may struggle with maintaining personal space in both public and private settings, especially when they feel marginalized or excluded from mainstream heterosexual spaces, such as the workplace or family gatherings. Bowleg¹ (2008) explored how the intersection of multiple identities—such as race, gender, and sexual orientation—affects women's experiences in the workplace and at home. Lesbian and bisexual women often find themselves at the crossroads of gendered expectations and homophobic stereotypes, which influences how they navigate personal space, social interactions, and professional environments. Brewster & Moradi² (2010) investigated how heteronormative work environments impact the mental health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual employees. The authors found that discrimination, isolation, and exclusion related to sexual orientation lead to higher levels of shyness and discomfort in maintaining personal space. This is especially challenging for women who must balance their professional roles with societal expectations of femininity and caregiving. Hochschild's⁶ (1989) examined the phenomenon of the "second shift," where working women are expected to balance professional duties with home and family responsibilities. This study is critical in understanding how working women navigate shyness and personal space, as they may feel overwhelmed by the competing demands of both worlds, with limited personal time or space for self-expression. Rieger and Savin-Williams¹⁰ (2012) investigated into the experiences of bisexual women, particularly how they manage their sexual identity and social anxiety. The study found that bisexual women often feel more socially isolated, leading to greater levels of shyness, especially in spaces where their sexual orientation is either questioned or invalidated. This social anxiety can be compounded by the need to maintain personal space while navigating heteronormative expectations. Stengel and Nelson¹¹ (2013) explored how personal space is experienced differently by men and women in professional settings. The authors argue that women, particularly those in subordinate roles, are often expected to be more accommodating and less assertive, leading to discomfort in maintaining personal boundaries. The study further discusses how sexual orientation adds an additional layer of complexity to women's navigation of personal space in workplace environments.

Objectives

- (i) to compare working and home making women in terms of shyness.

- (ii) to compare androgynous and sex typed women in terms of shyness.
- (iii) to compare working and home making women in terms of personal space.
- (iv) to compare androgynous and sex typed women in terms of personal space.

Hypotheses

- (i) Shyness score between working women and home making women would be found significantly associated.
- (ii) Shyness score between androgynous and sex typed women group would be found significantly associated.
- (iii) Personal space between working women and home making women would be found significantly associated.
- (iv) Personal space between androgynous and sex typed women would be found significantly associated.

Method of the Study

Sample

The sample comprised of 80 respondents equal in respect of working home making status, androgyny and sex typed traits respectively. Other than the required condition of research, they were matched so far as practicable.

Design : Between group design was employed.

Tools Used

- (i) A PDS was used to seek the necessary information about the respondents.
- (ii) Sinha’s Masculinity Femininity Check-List was used to measure sex role orientation among working/home making women. Androgynous and sex-typed women were identified using this checklist.
- (iii) Akhtar’s Shyness Scale was used to measure shyness of the respondents.

Experimental Measure of Personal Space

The respondents were called in one by one in room meant for experimental measurement of personal space. The respondents were asked to take a comfortable space. The experimenter interacted with him for 10 to 15 minutes. Thereafter, the subjects were allowed to go outside. The experimenter measure the distance of the subject from him which is the experimental measure of PS. In this way PS of each subject was measured.

Results and Interpretation

Table 01: Chi-square showing the association of working status with shyness

| Variables | Groups | N | Shyness (%) | | t ² | df | P |
|----------------|-------------|----|-------------|------|----------------|----|------|
| | | | Low | High | | | |
| Working-status | Working | 50 | 68% | 32% | 23.35 | 1 | <.01 |
| | Home Making | 50 | 34% | 66% | | | |

The results displayed by table 01 clearly reveal the impact of working status on women’s shyness. More than 68% of working and only 54% of home making women belong to low shyness groups. On the other hand only 32% of working and more them 66% of home making women belong to high shyness group. The chi-square showing the significance of differences among the percentages were found significant ($\chi^2 = 23.35$; $df = 1$; $P < .01$). Working women tend to manifest low shyness because they are regularly exposed to diverse social and professional interactions that enhance their communication skills, confidence, and assertiveness. Their roles often require decision-making, teamwork, and public engagement, which reduce

social inhibition. In contrast, homemaking women may have limited external social exposure and fewer opportunities to develop interpersonal assertiveness, leading to higher levels of shyness and social withdrawal in unfamiliar situations.

Table 02: Chi-square showing the association of sex-role orientation with shyness

| Variables | Groups | N | Shyness (%) | | t ² | df | P |
|----------------------|-------------|----|-------------|------|----------------|----|------|
| | | | Low | High | | | |
| Sex-role Orientation | Androgynous | 50 | 70% | 30% | 20.69 | 1 | <.01 |
| | Sex Typed | 50 | 38% | 62% | | | |

The results displayed by table-02 clearly reveal that more than 70% of androgynous female group and only 38% of sex typed group of women manifested lower degree of shyness. On the other hand only 30% of androgynous women and more than 62% of sex-typed women manifested high shyness. The chi-square was found significant ($\chi^2 = 20.69$; $df = 1$; $P < .01$). Androgynous women manifest low shyness because they possess a balanced mix of both masculine (assertiveness, confidence) and feminine (sensitivity, empathy) traits, enabling them to adapt flexibly to social situations and express themselves without fear of judgment. In contrast, sex-typed women who strongly conform to traditional feminine norms—often internalize societal expectations of modesty, submissiveness, and emotional restraint, which can heighten self-consciousness and lead to higher levels of shyness.

Table 03: Chi-square showing the association of working status with personal space

| Variables | Groups | N | Personal Space (%) | | t ² | df | P |
|----------------|-------------|----|--------------------|--------|----------------|----|------|
| | | | Smaller | Larger | | | |
| Working Status | Working | 50 | 32% | 68% | 20.69 | 1 | <.01 |
| | Home making | 50 | 64% | 36% | | | |

The result revealed by table-03 clearly showed the significant impact of working status on maintenance of womens' personal space. More than 68% of working women and only 36% of home making women were found maintaining larger personal space. On the other hand more than 64% of home making and only 32% of working women maintained smaller personal space. The chi-square was found significant ($\chi^2 = 20.69$; $df = 1$; $P < .01$). This hypothesis no.(3) is retained. Working women often prefer larger personal space because their regular engagement in diverse social and professional settings enhances their need for autonomy, boundary maintenance, and self-regulation. The variety of interactions and responsibilities they handle increases their awareness of personal boundaries and the need for psychological space. In contrast, homemaking women, whose roles are typically centered around the family and home, may develop a comfort with closeness and interdependence, resulting in a preference for smaller personal space.

Table 04: Chi-square showing the significance of the association of sex-role orientation with personal space

| Variables | Groups | N | Personal Space | | t ² | df | P |
|----------------------|-------------|----|----------------|--------|----------------|----|------|
| | | | Smaller | Larger | | | |
| Sex-role Orientation | Androgynous | 60 | 72% | 28% | 29.00 | 1 | <.01 |
| | Sex Typed | 60 | 34% | 66% | | | |

The results displayed by table-04 clearly revealed that more than 72% of androgynous women group and only 34% of sex-types women group maintain smaller personal space. On the other hand more than 66% of sex-typed group and only 28% of androgynous group maintain larger personal space. The chi-square was found significant

($\chi^2 = 29.00$; $df = 1$; $P < .01$). Thus hypothesis no.(1) is retained. Sex-typed women, who conform strongly to traditional gender roles, often prefer larger personal space due to higher levels of social inhibition, modesty, and sensitivity to gendered norms around physical boundaries. They may be more cautious in interpersonal interactions, especially with the opposite sex, and thus maintain greater physical distance. In contrast, androgynous women—who blend both masculine and feminine traits tend to be more confident, socially flexible, and assertive, leading to a preference for smaller personal space and greater ease in close interactions.

Conclusions

- (1) Home making dimension is more conducive to shyness than working women.
- (2) Home making women maintain smaller personal space than working women.
- (3) Androgyny is more conducive to shyness than sex-typed trait.
- (4) Androgynous women maintain smaller personal space than sex-typed women.

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