

BODY IMAGE IN MEN AND WOMEN: GENDER ROLES,  
COMPETITIVENESS, AND APPEARANCE-RELATED EMOTIONS

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## **Abstract**

Body image is understood to be an issue involving multiple genders, social comparison and competition. Therefore, this study aims to learn more about feelings related to healthy body image in men and women by examining the relationships among gender roles, competitiveness, and emotions related to body appearance. I predicted positive correlations between masculinity and competitiveness and between competitiveness and negative body-related emotions. College students (220 female, 60 male, and 2 other) were surveyed using the Bem Sex Role Inventory, Competitive Orientations Measure, and Body and Appearance-related Self-conscious Emotions Scale. Masculinity was positively correlated with the four subscales of competitiveness as well as authentic and hubristic pride in males and females together as well as separately. Each of the four competitiveness subscales was significantly positively correlated with hubristic pride for both genders together and separately, while only two of the four subscales were correlated with authentic pride. Competitiveness was most likely positively correlated with body-related pride because of a self-serving bias. Both maladaptive and adaptive functions may be associated with this finding. Further research is needed exploring positive body image in order to understand how to distinguish and promote healthy and adaptive positive body image.

## Introduction

Examining the relationships between gender roles, competitiveness, and emotions related to body appearance may facilitate promoting healthy body image in men and women. It is well established that there are gendered norms for body image influenced by the media as well as comparison and competition with peers (Ferguson, Munoz, Contreras, & Velasquez, 2011; Griffiths, Murray & Touyz, 2015; Murray & Touyz, 2012). Through the lens of appearance related emotions, this study explores how these factors are related and considers implications for the promotion of healthy body image.

**Body Image.** Body image is a complex construct of self-perceptions that encompasses thoughts, feelings, attitudes, and behaviors related to the body and is not limited to physical appearance (Cash, 2004). Negative body image includes body dissatisfaction and low body esteem, is associated with a number of psychological issues such as depression, low self esteem, eating disorders, social anxiety, attempts to alter appearance through drastic means such as steroid use and cosmetic surgery, and correlates with a variety of health issues such as decreased chance of cancer self-screening, lowered health related quality of life, pro-smoking behaviors, and decreased sexual functions (Campbell & Hausenblas, 2009; Curtis & Loomans, 2014; El Ansari, Dibba, & Stock, 2014; Fiske, Fallon, Blissmer, & Redding, 2014). Recently, body dissatisfaction has also been connected with increased inflammation, showing physiological implications for psychological distress (Černelič-Bizjak & Jenko-Pražnikar, 2014).

Understanding what causes negative body image is only part of promoting healthy body image. Homan and Tylka (2014) point out that positive body image is not just the

lack of body dissatisfaction, but also attitudes and behaviors that show a healthy acceptance and appreciation of the body, including body appreciation, an internal body orientation, and functional body satisfaction. Body appreciation is “unconditional respect and approval of the body.” There is an understanding that one’s body is unique, and work is done to keep it healthy. An internal body orientation puts emphasis on how the body feels more than on how it looks. Functional body satisfaction refers to satisfaction with the body’s physical capabilities. Understanding what promotes and undermines these secure and adaptive self-perceptions is important to future applications of body image research.

**Gender Roles.** The literature on body image disorders has mostly concerned women because disordered eating relating to the ideal of thinness has been the biggest issue related to body image in recent years. However, a growing number of studies are beginning to address the rising prevalence in male body image issues generally related to the ideal of muscularity (Murray & Touyz, 2012). A recent study on heterosexual male body dissatisfaction, gender roles, and disordered eating found that men who conformed more to masculine norms were more likely to have greater drive for muscularity but not thinness, and men who conformed more to feminine norms were more likely to have both a drive for muscularity, thinness and associated disordered eating (Griffiths, et al., 2015).

Since this suggests that feminine-associated disorders may impact men who conform to feminine norms, perhaps masculine body image issues may affect females, particularly as women assume involvement in a variety of occupational fields. Gender norms and their implications need to be examined more closely in relation to body image

with the understanding that this issue is more complex and nuanced than traditional male/female issues.

**Competitiveness.** *Threatened Masculinity Theory* states that in response to the increasing social power and status of women in society, men are attempting to retain their image of dominance, power, and masculinity by increasing their lean muscle mass (Mills & D'Alfonso, 2007; Hunt, Gonsalkorale, & Murray, 2013). Mills and D'Alfonso tested the competitive element of this theory and found that the male participants felt worse about their appearance and less confident in general after failure in a competition, presented as receiving false feedback that they were out-performed in a test of intellect. However, they specifically felt less muscular following failure to a female. Hunt, et al. (2013) found similar results. A threat to masculinity reduced confidence in participant's physical abilities and led them to perceive themselves as less muscular. They paradoxically found that the male participants also reported lower appearance anxiety and drive for muscularity when their masculinity was threatened. The offered explanation was that since appearance concerns are considered feminine, they might be inclined to deny having any. These studies suggest that competitiveness, tying into masculinity, may play a significant role in body image that should be explored further.

Reflecting the larger quantity of body image studies conducted on women, more research is available on female competition and body image than male competition and body image. In women, competitiveness has been linked with body image issues, eating disorders, depression, and acceptance of cosmetic surgery (Peden, Stiles, Vandehey, & Diekhoff, 2008; Sides-Moore & Tochkov, 2011; Thornton, Ryckman, & Gold, 2013). Furthermore, inter-peer competitiveness has a significantly larger negative impact on

body image than comparison to media images (Ferguson et al., 2011; Muñoz & Ferguson, 2012). A study comparing perceptions of White and African American adolescent females found White girls to be more rigid and competitive in their views of body image, associated with their increased dissatisfaction in their body appearance when compared to the more mutually supportive and flexible African American girls (Parker, Nichter, & Vuckovic, 1995). Also, in a likely parallel with men's possible disinclinations to admit appearance issues when their self-image was threatened, women who have a competitive view and endeavor to maintain a perfect appearance in front of others are more likely to "silence," or repress, their own psychological body image needs in order to preserve their image as perceived by others (Schrack, Sharp, Zvonkovic, & Reifman, 2012).

Distinctions have been made between different types of competitiveness. The Competitiveness Orientation Measure (COM) recognizes general competitiveness, dominance, competitive affectivity, and personal enhancement as four unique constructs contributing to competitiveness in the larger sense (Newby & Klein, 2014). General competitiveness, according to this measure, is the non-specific desire to excel in comparison to others and the enjoyment of this competition. Dominance, or dominant competitiveness, has also been known as Hypercompetitiveness, Interpersonal Competitiveness, and Self-aggrandizement according to Newby and Klein. Dominant competitiveness is defined as the need to compete and win, even at great cost, in order to maintain or boost self-esteem. Individuals with this trait may manipulate others for no other reason than to demonstrate superiority. Competitive affectivity is distinct from competing to dominate and is rather the enjoyment of the state of arousal that comes with

competition. Finally, competitiveness in the form of personal enhancement is the internal need to perform well, independent of emotional well-being and competition with others.

The current literature suggests that competition, in perhaps all manifestations, has a complex and problematic effect on body image in both genders. Since competitiveness is generally considered a masculine trait, viewing body image and competitiveness in terms of masculinity and femininity, rather than gender/sex only, could add a new perspective to the issue. Furthermore, as a component of positive body image is internal body orientation, studying perceptions of the self in individuals who are motivated to compare themselves to others can help us understand how to shift focus inward.

**Body Appearance Related Emotions.** Emotions seem to play a central role in regulating and motivating thoughts, feelings, and actions (Fischer & Tangney, 1995). Assessing the emotions one feels about their appearance offers more in depth insight than positive/negative judgments only. Using the Body and Appearance Self-Conscious Emotions Scale (BASES), both negative and positive body appearance related emotions can be assessed (Castonguay, Sabiston, Crocker, & Mack, 2014). The negative emotions examined are shame and guilt. Shame, as assessed by this measure, is a painful emotion experienced when internalized social standards are not met in a general and uncontrollable sense. Guilt, on the other hand, occurs in response to specific failures of controllable events and therefore involves a sense of regret.

The positive side of the scale is pride. Pride results from an individual performing socially valued behaviors or possessing positively regarded qualities. Pride is further divided into Authentic Pride and Hubristic Pride. Authentic pride comes from specific, controllable behaviors or accomplishments, whereas hubristic pride comes from global,



uncontrollable aspects of the self. According to Castonguay, et al., while authentic pride has been associated with increased self-esteem, adaptive personality factors, and increased likelihood of engaging in goal-oriented behaviors, hubristic pride has been associated with both adaptive and maladaptive functions, both increased and decreased self-esteem, narcissistic self-aggrandizement, and poor dyadic adjustment. The value of this distinction between positive emotions is recognizing and differentiating possible adaptive and maladaptive aspects, reflecting the importance of emphasizing the difference between positive body-esteem, consistent with both subcategories of pride, and positive body image, consistent only with authentic pride.

**Hypotheses.** Based only on the current literature on competitiveness and body image, the expected outcome is that competitiveness, in general, will be correlated with negative body related emotions. It is possible, however, that dominant competitiveness, associated with self-aggrandizement, will be linked with hubristic pride. Also, it is predicted the goal-orientated nature of personal enhancement competitiveness will correlate with authentic pride.

Since competitiveness is generally considered a masculine trait and is even an item on the gender role questionnaire being used, masculinity is expected to correlate with all forms of competitiveness.

## **Method**

### **Participants**

A total of 314 male and female college students were surveyed in a junior-level psychology class at a central Texas university. Thirty-two of the surveys were thrown out

due to incomplete or suspicious bubbling (more than 20 in a row of the same answer). Two questions were also included in the survey to prevent random bubbling. Students who did not correctly bubble these two “check” questions were not included in the analyses.

Information was collected on the participants’ identities of gender, age, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, as described above. The final number of participants surveyed was 282, with 78% (n = 220) identifying as female, 21.3% (n = 60) as male, 0.4% (n = 1) identifying as other, and 0.4% (n = 1) with missing gender information. The majority of participants (92.1%) indicated they were between 18 and 23 years old. The majority of students (53.5%, n = 151) identified their ethnicity as Caucasian/White, with 7.4% (n = 21) identifying as African American, 34.4% (n = 97) identifying as Hispanic/Latin American, 2.1% (n = 6) identifying as Asian, and 2.6% (n = 7) did not indicate ethnicity. Regarding socioeconomic status, 2.1% (n = 6) indicated their background was upper class, 24.1% (n = 68) as upper-middle class, 53.5% (n = 151) as middle class, 18.4% (n = 52) as lower-middle class, 1.1% (n = 3) as lower class, and 0.7% (n = 2) had missing information for socioeconomic status.

## **Materials**

**Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI).** The BSRI (Bem, 1974) is a 60-item measure of masculinity, femininity, and androgyny that uses a seven-point Likert scale ranging from “Never or almost never true” to “Always or almost always true.” However, to be consistent with the other measures and to work within the limits of our scantrons, a five-point Likert scale was used ranging from “Never or almost never true” to “Always or almost always true.” The BSRI has 20 items considered “masculine” (e.g., ambitious), 20

items labeled “feminine” (e.g., sympathetic), and 20 items labeled “neutral” (e.g., sincere). The masculinity and femininity scores are independent. While there is a measure of androgyny built in to the scale, it was not used in this study. Using two separate samples, Bem reported that the internal consistency coefficients for masculinity were both .86, for femininity .80 and .82, and for androgyny .85 and .86. Test-retest reliability after a 4-week period was .90 for masculinity and femininity, and .93 for androgyny. The scale was also found reliable for predicting participant sex. That is, the females were more likely to score significantly more feminine and males were more likely to score significantly more masculine.

**Competitiveness Orientation Measure (COM).** The COM (Newby & Klein, 2014) is a 37-item scale that measures, as previously discussed, general competitiveness, dominant competitiveness, competitive affectivity, and personal enhancement competitiveness. It uses a five-point Likert scale that ranged from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” The measure includes 12 items on general competitiveness (e.g., I am a competitive person), 13 items on dominant competitiveness (e.g., I like to be better than others at almost everything), 8 items on competitive affectivity (e.g., I like being the best compared to other people), and 4 items on personal enhancement competitiveness (e.g., I can improve my competence by competing). Some items were reversed in order to avoid response acquiescence.

Newby and Klein (2014) reported that Cronbach’s alpha for general competitiveness was .94, for dominant competitiveness was .95, for competitive affect was .87 and for personal enhancement competitiveness was .84. Cronbach’s alpha was .97 for the whole scale. Significant internal correlations were found between all

categories of competitiveness. General and dominant competitiveness were correlated, with by  $r = .66$ , general and affectivity,  $r = .47$ , general and personal enhancement  $r = .67$ , dominant and affectivity,  $r = .68$ , dominant and personal enhancement,  $r = .50$ , and personal enhancement and affectivity,  $r = .44$ . This suggests that if a factor correlates to one type of competitiveness, it will likely correlate with other types.

**Body and Appearance Self-Conscious Emotions Scale (BASES).** BASES (Castonguay et al., 2014) is a 16-item scale that measures body-related shame, guilt, and authentic and hubristic pride using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “never” to “always.” Each emotion has 4 items, for example, “In general, I have felt guilty that I look the way I do.” Castonguay et al. reported that Cronbach’s alpha was .88 for shame, .89 for guilt, .88 for authentic pride, and .91 for hubristic pride. Internal correlations were reported between shame and guilt ( $r = .78$ ), authentic and hubristic pride ( $r = .73$ ), shame and authentic pride ( $r = -.37$ ) shame and hubristic pride ( $r = -.47$ ), guilt and authentic pride ( $r = -.38$ ), and guilt and hubristic pride ( $r = -.32$ ). These correlations suggest that if a factor is positively correlated with authentic pride, for example, it will likely also be positively correlated with hubristic pride and negatively correlated with guilt or shame.

## **Procedure**

This study was approved by the university’s Institutional Review Board. Participants were given an extra credit option of participating in the survey in a teaching theater class following an exam. Consent forms informing the participants that the survey was voluntary and that they could stop at any time for any reason were provided along with the survey.

## **Results**

**Gender role correlations.** Masculinity in both genders was significantly correlated with all subsections of competitiveness, as hypothesized (Table 1). Masculinity in both genders was significantly correlated with both authentic and hubristic pride. Masculinity in males had a significant negative correlation with shame (Table 3), but not masculinity in females (Table 2).

Femininity in females was significantly correlated with general competitiveness, but not the other forms of competitiveness (Table 2). Interestingly, there was a significant correlation with masculinity and femininity in females, but an insignificant negative correlation in males (Table 2). Femininity was not significantly correlated with any body-related emotions.

**Competitiveness.** When the two genders' data were analyzed together, a significant correlation was found between all four subsections of competitiveness and both authentic and hubristic pride (Table 1). When each gender's data was analyzed separately, however, more nuanced results were found (Tables 2 & 3). All forms of competitiveness in females were more significantly correlated with hubristic pride than authentic pride, and dominant competitiveness was not significantly correlated with authentic pride. Competitiveness in all forms in males was also more significantly correlated with hubristic pride than authentic pride, this time with personal enhancement not being significantly correlated with authentic pride.

## **Discussion**

From the results in this study, there was no support for the hypothesis that competitiveness is linked with negative body-related emotions. Rather, individuals'

competitiveness was significantly positively correlated with both types of body-related pride. A possible explanation of the discrepancy between the results found here and previous literature is the tendency for self-serving bias, as explained in David Myers' *Social Psychology* (2010). Myers explains that most people have a self-serving bias and rate themselves as better than average on subjective, desirable traits and abilities, in this case body appearance. He also explains that the same people tend to have unrealistic optimism, and gives the example that those who deal in the stock market view their business sense as better than that of their competitors. It follows that a person is more likely to compete if they are optimistic that they will win. Therefore, individuals with a self-serving bias are more likely to be competitive because they think it is likely they will perform better than average.

The word *hubris*, as in hubristic pride, also comes up in Myers' (2010) writing as he discusses the pride that was the downfall of the tragic ancient Greek heroes. Having an inflated opinion of one's self or one's abilities may make for a harder fall when one fails, as perhaps represented in the previous literature's findings that competition, when one fails unfavorably, reduces body esteem.

Since all forms of competitiveness correlated more strongly with hubristic pride than authentic pride, maladaptive as well as adaptive functions should be considered as correlates of competitiveness. The implications for promoting positive body image are that creating healthy and secure body-esteem over merely positive body-esteem may be an increasingly important distinction, especially as narcissism is reported to be on the rise in the current generation (Twenge & Campbell, 2008).

Perhaps the positive correlation between masculinity and femininity in females is indicative of increasing levels of androgyny in women since the BRSI was developed in 1974. In our capitalistic society, perhaps women's becoming more masculine is admired while men's becoming more feminine may be less acceptable. This would hold with the Threatened Masculinity Theory in that men feel threatened by women increasingly taking on masculine roles. Implications for promoting positive male body image may include promoting androgyny in men so they don't feel driven to unhealthy extremes to prove their masculinity.

### **Conclusion**

Further research is needed related to promoting positive body image in order to understand how to distinguish and promote healthy and adaptive positive body image. The results of this study suggest that competitiveness is linked with masculinity, regardless of gender, and likely correlated with both adaptive and maladaptive aspects of pride. There were no correlations found between femininity and body-related emotions. More in depth analysis of the data collected in this study is needed to understand the results further.

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Table 1

*Pearson correlations among Sex Roles, Competitiveness Orientation, and Body and Appearance Self-Conscious Emotions for all participants*

Measure	M	F	GC	DC	CA	PE	S	G	AP
Masculinity (M)									
Femininity (F)	.089								
Generally Competitive (GC)	.448**	.117							
Dominantly Competitive (DC)	.433**	-.043	.743**						
Competitive Affect (CA)	.303**	-.010	.654**	.706**					
Personal Enhancement (PE)	.364**	.060	.718**	.696**	.615**				
Shame (S)	-.214**	.057	-.083	-.026	.016	.020			
Guilt (G)	-.111	.003	-.067	.024	-.022	.047	.760**		
Authentic Pride (AP)	.224**	.059	.191**	.182**	.195**	.161**	-.516**	-.493**	
Hubristic Pride (HP)	.246**	-.009	.257**	.337**	.321**	.224**	-.423**	-.341**	.664**

\*\*  $p > .01$

Table 2

*Pearson correlations among Sex Roles, Competitiveness Orientation, and Body and Appearance Self-Conscious Emotions for female participants*

Measure	M	F	GC	DC	CA	PE	S	G	AP
Masculinity (M)									
Femininity (F)	.193**								
Generally Competitive (GC)	.426**	.203**							
Dominantly Competitive (DC)	.389**	.063	.740**						
Competitive Affect (CA)	.292**	.067	.656**	.688**					
Personal Enhancement (PE)	.328**	.119	.713**	.681**	.614**				
Shame (S)	-.135	.008	-.029	.030	.023	.036			
Guilt (G)	-.101	-.052	-.057	.008	-.005	.015	.779**		
Authentic Pride (AP)	.190**	.084	.156*	.132	.170*	.152*	-.557**	-.557**	
Hubristic Pride (HP)	.181**	.055	.202**	.267**	.283**	.205**	-.419**	-.383**	.661**

\*\*  $p > .01$ , \*  $p > .05$

Table 3

*Pearson correlations among Sex Roles, Competitiveness Orientation, and Body and Appearance Self-Conscious Emotions for male participants*

Measure	M	F	GC	DC	CA	PE	S	G	AP
Masculinity (M)									
Femininity (F)	.058								
Generally Competitive (GC)	.482**	.047							
Dominantly Competitive (DC)	.508**	-.161	.725**						
Competitive Affect (CA)	.362**	-.246	.665**	.798**					
Personal Enhancement (PE)	.464**	-.024	.737**	.748**	.618**				
Shame (S)	-.539**	.152	-.278*	-.164	.006	-.014			
Guilt (G)	-.120	.000	.009	.254	.198	.257*	.663**		
Authentic Pride (AP)	.351*	.154	.272*	.294*	.285*	.162	-.299*	-.133	
Hubristic Pride (HP)	.478**	-.142	.439**	.547**	.457**	.273*	-.424**	-.108	.664**

\*\*  $p > .01$ , \*  $p > .05$