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Hyperfemininity and Body-Related Constructs

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The purpose of the present study was to examine the relationships between hyperfemininity and body esteem, body shame, and surveillance. Participants were 130 female undergraduate students taking an introductory psychology course. They were administered the Hyperfemininity Scale, the Body Esteem Scale and two subscales of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (Surveillance and Body Shame). As expected, hyperfemininity was positively associated with surveillance and body shame. Unexpectedly, hyperfemininity was not associated with body esteem. These findings suggest that hyperfeminine women may be at greater risk than non-hyperfeminine women to objectify themselves and feel shameful when they compare their bodies to internalized cultural standards.

Hyperfemininity is defined as an exaggerated adherence to the stereotypic feminine gender role, involving the use of sexuality to gain or maintain romantic relationships with men, the belief that these romantic relationships define their success, and the preference for traditional male behaviors in their partners (Murnen & Byrne, 1991). Given the importance of their ability to be sexually appealing to men, a hyperfeminine woman should have an exaggerated focus on her body appearance and sexual attractiveness. The purpose of the current study was to examine relationships between hyperfemininity and body-related constructs, including surveillance, body shame and body esteem.

Surveillance is to engage in self-objectification, which is to objectify oneself from a third-person perspective regarding body appearance (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997; McKinley & Hyde, 1996), and may lead to a variety of negative consequences for women's physical and mental well-being, including lower sexual self-

esteem, body shame, depression, and disordered eating (Calogero & Thompson, 2008; Noll & Fredrickson, 1998; Tolman, Impett, Tracy, & Michael, 2006). The Objectification Theory proposes that self-objectification may be the result of the constant sexual objectification of women in our culture leading them to internalize body standards (Fredrickson & Roberts, 1997). However, cultural objectification will not impact all women in the same way. Hyperfeminine women may be at greater risk than non-hyperfeminine women to view themselves from an outsider's perspective (Nowatzki & Morry, 2009).

Although Nowatzki and Morry (2009) found a positive association between hyperfemininity and self-objectification, the direct relationship between hyperfemininity and body-related self-evaluations (how they feel about their self-view) has not been investigated until the present study. Two such constructs will be examined; body esteem and body shame. Body esteem refers to the degree to which an

individual feels positive or negative about one's own body (Franzoi & Shields, 1984).

Body shame refers to how an individual feels about oneself based on how well one's body measures up to culturally idealized standards. Associations among surveillance, body shame, and body esteem have been reported (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). The current study will extend the literature by examining how hyperfemininity may relate to these measures.

Although past researchers have investigated the association between body image and the feminine gender role (Borchert & Heinberg, 1996; Jackson, Sullivan & Rostker, 1988; Snyder & Hasbrouck, 1996), hyperfemininity has never been directly linked to body-related self-evaluative constructs. Rather, previous research has largely focused on the association of hyperfemininity with other sex, or relationship-related measures. For example, Murnen and Byrne (1991) found that hyperfeminine women were more accepting of adversarial sexual attitudes, sexually coercive behavior, and traditional marriage and family attitudes, than non-hyperfeminine women. Hyperfeminine women also reported relatively more negative attitudes toward women, attraction to men with hypergender ideologies, permissive sexual attitudes, and sexual experiences (Maybach & Gold, 1994; Murnen & Byrne, 1991; McKelvie & Gold, 1994; Smith, Byrne, & Fielding, 1995). Furthermore, Nowatzki and Morry (2009) found that hyperfeminine women were likely to engage in and be more accepting of sexualizing behaviors (i.e., catwalks and wet t-shirt contests).

These correlates are consistent with hyperfeminine beliefs. However, given that hyperfeminine women view their sexuality as key to lure and manipulate men for relationships, it follows that these women should also be extremely focused on how their bodies appear to others. In addition, given the perceived importance of their ability to use their sexual attractiveness to succeed in relationships with men, hyperfeminine women may be more critical of

themselves, and thus, more vulnerable to negative body-related self-evaluations. Therefore, consistent with Nowatzki and Morry's (2009) finding, but using a different measure of self-objectification in the current study, it is predicted that those scoring higher on hyperfemininity will be more likely to objectify their body appearance from a third-person perspective than those scoring lower. Furthermore, hyperfemininity is expected to be positively associated with body shame and negatively associated with body esteem.

Method

Participants

Participants were 130 female undergraduates who were selected from a psychology department volunteer pool. Mean age was 18.5 years ($SD = .86$), ranging from 18 to 23 years. Most participants (80.8%) classified themselves as holding a freshmen class status, and the large majority of participants identified as White/European/European American (82.3%). Nearly all participants indicated either not currently being in a relationship with any partner (51.5%), or being in a relationship with a single partner (47.7%). As described in the results, some participants were dropped from each analysis due to missing data.

Measures

Hyperfemininity Scale. Participants were administered the Hyperfemininity Scale (HFS) to measure individual adherence to the extreme feminine gender role (Murnen & Byrne, 1991). The scale consists of 26 forced-choice, paired statements. For example, participants chose to agree with one or the other statement, "I like to flirt with men," or "I don't like to play games in a relationship." The Cronbach alpha for this scale in the current study was .67.

Body Esteem Scale. The Body Esteem Scale (BES) was administered to measure evaluation of one's own body parts on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*have strong negative feelings*) to 5 (*have strong positive feelings*) (Franzoi & Shields, 1984). The scale consists of 35 body parts (i.e., lips,

, buttocks, chin) or functions (i.e., sex drive, muscular strength, physical coordination), and includes three female subscales: Sexual Attractiveness, Weight Concern, and Physical Condition. However, consistent with previous research (McKinley & Hyde, 1996), the 35 items on the BES were summed for a total score given that the Cronbach alpha in the current sample was high, .93.

Objectified Body Consciousness Scale. Preoccupation with body appearance from an external perspective was measured by the Surveillance Scale (SS), which is a subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS) (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Participants rated their agreement with 8 items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include, "I rarely worry about how I look to other people," and "During the day, I think about how I look many times." The Cronbach alpha for this scale in the current study was .84.

Body shame was measured by the Body Shame Scale (BSS), which is another subscale of the Objectified Body Consciousness Scale (OBCS) (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Participants rated their agreement with 8 items on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 7 (*strongly agree*). Sample items include, "I feel ashamed of myself when I haven't made the effort to look my best," and "I would be ashamed for people to know what I really weigh." The Cronbach alpha for this scale in the current study was .84.

Procedure

This study was approved by the Human Subjects Committee for research at Salisbury University. Participants signed an informed consent form prior to administration of the questionnaire packet. The packet contained questions about basic demographic information, the HFS, the BES, and the SS and BSS subscales of the OBC. All responses were completely anonymous.

Results

Pearson product-moment correlations were used to test the hypotheses. As expected, there was a significant positive relationship between hyperfemininity and surveillance, $r(110) = .386, p < .0001$, and between hyperfemininity and body shame, $r(110) = .186, p < .05$. Due to missing data, 18 participants were dropped from these analyses. Unexpectedly, there was no significant correlation between hyperfemininity and body esteem.

Exploratory analyses also revealed a significant negative relationship between body esteem and body surveillance, $r(118) = -.400, p < .0001$, and between body esteem and body shame, $r(118) = -.519, p < .0001$. Due to missing data, 10 participants were dropped from these analyses. In addition, results indicated a significant positive relationship between body surveillance and body shame, $r(126) = .321, p < .0001$. Two participants were missing data and dropped from this correlation.

Discussion

The primary purpose of the present study was to examine relationships between hyperfemininity and body-related constructs, including body surveillance, body shame, and body esteem. As predicted, and consistent with previous research, stronger adherence to the extreme stereotypic feminine gender role was associated with greater body surveillance (Nowatzki & Morry, 2009). Given that hyperfeminine women use their sexuality to attract and maintain relationships with men, they may engage in self-surveillance to keep perspective on how they physically appear to men.

It was predicted that hyperfemininity would be negatively related to body esteem and positively related to body shame. If their core identity is defined by how successful they are with men, hyperfeminine women may feel excessive pressure to measure up to idealized cultural standards of attractiveness and, thus,

judge themselves harshly. Since those standards can never be fully realized, these women may be at increased risk for feeling negatively about their bodies and shameful about themselves. As expected, hyperfemininity was associated with greater body shame. However, unexpectedly, it was not related to body esteem.

This lack of relationship was surprising given that higher body surveillance was associated with higher body shame and lower body esteem, and greater body shame was associated with lower body esteem, both in the present sample and in previous research (McKinley & Hyde, 1996). Perhaps this is because hyperfeminine women view their sexuality as their prime asset in achieving success. Although the body is often used in sexual expression, sexuality can involve more than just the physical body. The BES lists individual body parts and functions, and asks respondents to indicate how they feel about each one. It may be that the sum of items on this scale does not tap into a holistic view of one's body, which may be more relevant to sexuality. It is also possible that respondents indicated how they felt about the functioning or health of these 35 body components, rather than physical attractiveness. For example, when asked to indicate their feelings about their ears, participants may have considered how well they can hear, rather than how they look.

Although hyperfemininity was not associated with body esteem, results suggest that women who adhere to an extreme stereotypic feminine gender role may be at higher risk for objectifying themselves from an external perspective and feeling ashamed of themselves if they believe their bodies do not measure up to cultural standards. However, it should be noted that the current data was correlational and, therefore, no causal inferences can be made. The generalizability of these findings is also limited by the college student sample. In future research, gathering larger and more diverse (i.e., ethnicity, age) samples may help further our understanding of these relationships. Future

researchers could also examine direct associations between hyperfemininity and other constructs that have been related to body shame, body esteem and surveillance in the literature (i.e. disordered eating, depression).

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