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Gender role and anxiety: a meta analysis

Rita Seabrook '09 & Dr. Linda Smolak

Introduction

- Anxiety disorders are more common in women than men, but there is a lack of conclusive evidence about the cause of the gender gap
- Traditional gender roles (femininity, masculinity), rather than biological sex (female, male) may explain the gender gap
- Characteristics of feminine gender role, such as caring, empathy, expressiveness, may lead to feelings of helplessness, powerlessness, and dependence, and subsequent anxiety
- Characteristics of masculine gender role, such as assertiveness and self-confidence, may protect against anxiety disorders
- Age may affect the relationship between gender role and anxiety
 - Prepubescent v. Adolescence v. Adulthood

Purpose

Conduct a meta analysis of gender role orientation and the prevalence of anxiety symptoms and disorders to determine whether a feminine gender identity is linked to more anxiety symptoms than a masculine gender identity and whether this relationship is influenced by age

Hypotheses

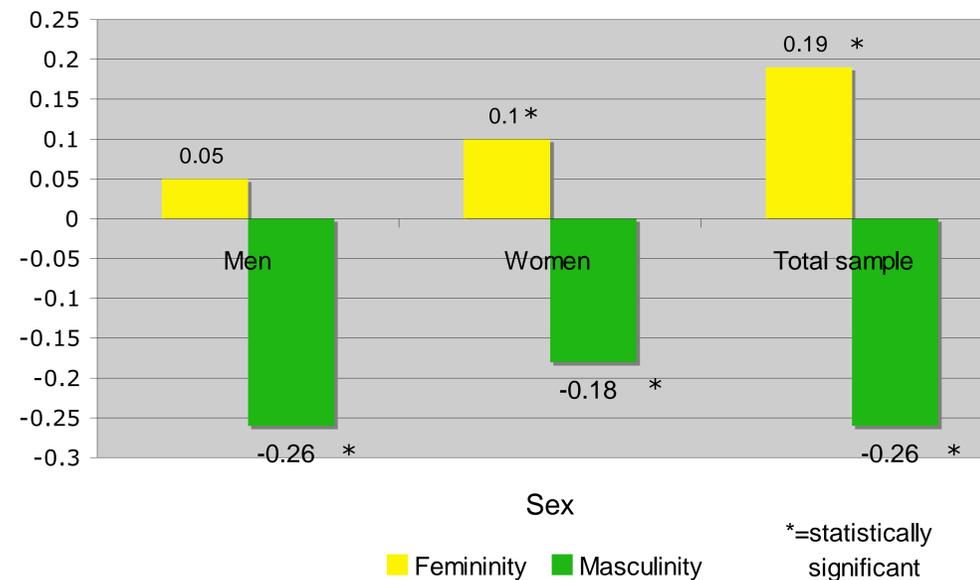
1. There will be a negative relationship (-r) between masculinity and anxiety and a positive relationship (r) between femininity and anxiety
2. There will be a significant heterogeneity in all of these relationships. Age will be a significant moderator of this heterogeneity.

Method

- Studies retrieved using PsycINFO and EJC
- Search terms: gender role, feminine, masculine, sex role, Bem sex role, anxiety, anxiety disorders
- 10 journal articles included in study:
 - Must report correlation between measure of gender role and measure of anxiety
 - Yielded 58 effect sizes, 881 total participants
- Effect sizes calculated as r values, indicating the strength and direction of the relationship between gender role and anxiety symptoms/disorders
- Analysis of heterogeneity to determine whether age affected relationship between gender role and anxiety

Results

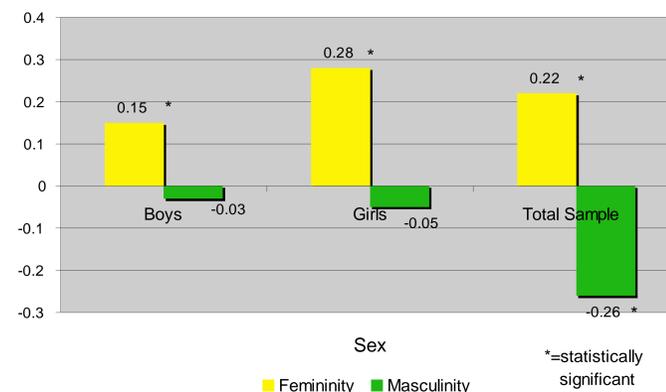
Correlations between gender role and anxiety in males, females, and total sample



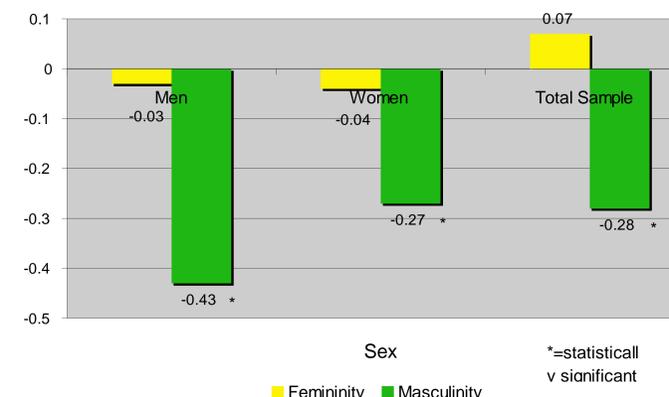
Analysis of heterogeneity of effect sizes

	Men	Women	Total sample
Masculinity	$X^2(9)=57.97$ $p<.001$	$X^2(8)=20.87$ $p<.025$	$X^2(10)=59.49$ $p<.001$
Femininity	$X^2(9)=19.44$ $p<.025$	$X^2(8)=25.32$ $p<.01$	$X^2(8)=56.21$ $p<.001$

Correlations between gender role and anxiety in participants under 18 years of age



Correlations between gender role and anxiety in participants 18 years of age and older



Discussion

Hypothesis 1.

- Results support the notion that sociocultural influences such as gender role may differentially influence anxiety for men and women
- Masculine gender role is protective against anxiety in females, but femininity does not put males at risk for anxiety disorders; maybe there are fewer males who identify with feminine characteristics than females who identify with male characteristics, or males are less likely to report feelings of anxiety

Hypothesis 2.

- Effect sizes were not homogeneous, and age did account for a significant portion of variance in effect sizes
- In children, feminine gender role might be learned earlier than masculine gender role and so the effects of femininity on anxiety are seen earlier than effects of masculinity
- Effect sizes were still heterogeneous after accounting for age, maybe because there were not enough studies to differentiate between prepubescent and adolescent children, or between young, middle-aged, and elderly adults

References

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