The Masculinity of Mr. Right: Feminist Identity and Heterosexual Women's Ideal Romantic Partners

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Abstract

Our study explored the relationship between feminist identity and women's report of an ideal male partner's conformity to masculine gender role norms. Heterosexual, mostly White, college women ($N = 183$) completed measures assessing feminist beliefs and the masculinity characteristics of an ideal male partner. Results indicated that feminist identity significantly predicted participants' preferences for an ideal male partner's conformity to masculine norms. Specifically, women who were more accepting of patriarchal culture, endorsing traditional gender roles and denying sexism, reported wanting an ideal male partner to conform to traditional masculine norms of emotional control, risk-taking, power over women, dominance, self-reliance, and disdain for homosexuals. In contrast, feminist-identified women reported wanting an ideal partner who did not conform to the traditional masculine norms of violence, power over women, playboy, and self-reliance. We discuss implications of these findings for women's heterosexual relationships, including the possibility that feminist identity may serve as a protective factor against involvement in unsatisfying, or even violent, romantic heterosexual relationships.

Keywords

feminism, sex role attitudes, masculinity, human mate selection, relationship satisfaction

Although the term *feminist* is somewhat controversial and many women continue to reject labeling themselves as such (Anderson, Kanner, & Elsayegh, 2009; Zucker, 2004), feminist beliefs and values have become increasingly popular in the United States since the women's movement of the 1960s (Rhodebeck, 1996). Feminism is generally characterized by valuing women and challenging patriarchy and sexism to further gender equality, with a focus on power and its influence on aspects of women's experience such as sexuality and emotional well-being (Downing & Roush, 1985; Henley, Meng, O'Brien, McCarthy, & Sockloskie, 1998). According to research findings, as these feminist beliefs and values have become more pervasive, women's daily experiences at home and work have been reshaped, arguably for the better (Rosen, 2000).

It is important to note that differential access to economic and political resources continues to impact the extent to which women can take advantage of these benefits; however, research finds that when women identify with feminism, they are more likely to have a variety of positive outcomes and more likely to avoid negative ones. For example, women who report a stronger feminist identity tend to report greater subjective well-being (Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006; Yakushko, 2007), self-esteem (Fischer & Good, 1994), self-efficacy (Eisele & Stake, 2008; Foss & Slaney, 1986), self-reliance (Liss, O'Connor, Morosky, & Crawford,

2001), academic achievement (Valenzuela, 1993), and the ability to cope effectively with discrimination (Klonis, Endo, Crosby, & Worell, 1997). Feminist-identified women are also less likely to report body dissatisfaction and bulimic symptoms (Murnen & Smolak, 2009; Ojerholm & Rothblum, 1999), suggesting that feminist identity may protect women from negative societal and cultural influences such as the thinness ideal and other restrictive traditional gender role norms (Hurt et al., 2007; Murnen & Smolak, 2009).

Given feminism's focus on valuing women, challenging patriarchy and sexism, addressing power, and valuing female sexuality and emotional well-being, a woman's feminist identity is likely to be an important contributor to her relationships with men. This may be particularly true for male–female romantic relationships because they may reflect and perpetuate, on an individual and dyadic level, societal gender inequity and traditional role expectations (Chung, 2005; Rudman & Fairchild, 2007). Research supports this

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idea with findings indicating that college women with strong feminist identities enact less traditional dating scripts (Rickard, 1989) and have more egalitarian expectations for romantic relationships and sexual assertiveness (Bay-Cheng & Zucker, 2007; Schick, Zucker, & Bay-Cheng, 2008). Prior research also indicates that nonfeminist women display less sexual assertiveness and less engagement in safe sexual practices than feminist women (Yoder, Perry, & Saal, 2007).

As such, feminist identity may predict the types of men heterosexual women select as romantic partners. We know of no research to date which has examined this question, although findings from some studies have shown that heterosexual women generally value fairly traditional gender-related attributes in romantic partners, including men's earning potential (Eastwick & Finkel, 2008), physical attractiveness (Fletcher, Simpson, Thomas, & Giles, 1999; Regan & Joshi, 2003), dominance, commitment (Cunningham & Russell, 2004), vitality, status, and resources (Fletcher et al., 1999). However, Desrochers (1995) reported that college women in her sample preferred male romantic partners with stereotypically feminine characteristics (such as emotionality and concern for others' feelings) more than stereotypically masculine men. In short, research has highlighted a number of characteristics that women in general seem to prefer, but research on subsets of women that may not express those preferences has been lacking. Given the demonstrated impact of feminism on women's lives in general, and particularly its impact on their relationship preferences, we propose that women's feminist identity may be one meaningful predictor of their preferences for an ideal male partner.

Describing the process of feminist identity development, Downing and Roush (1985) outlined a five-stage model: Passive Acceptance (PA), Revelation (REV), Embeddedness-Emanation (EE), Synthesis (SYN), and Active Commitment (AC). This model of feminist identity development has over 20 years of theoretical development and research support (e.g., Moradi & Subich, 2002; Moradi, Subich, & Phillips, 2002). The stages are viewed as progressive and hierarchical, in that one is thought to move through the stages as a positive feminist identity develops. However, Downing (2002) noted that feminist identity development is a fluid process that may involve returns to earlier stages of development.

The first stage, PA, is characterized by an unawareness or denial of the individual, institutional, and societal sexism that affects women's lives (Downing & Roush, 1985). Women in this stage of development adopt the perspective of the patriarchal culture and enact traditional, stereotypical gender roles, without seeing these beliefs as detrimental to their own sexuality and emotional well-being (Bargad & Hyde, 1991). This stage is distinct from those that follow in that it reflects a nonfeminist stance, whereas the others reflect some degree of feminist thinking (Yoder et al., 2007).

According to Downing and Roush's (1985) model, the stages reflecting greater levels of feminist development begin with REV, which is brought about by experiences that encourage a woman to question traditional gender roles. In this stage, she begins to recognize the existence of sexism. The third stage, EE, is characterized by a desire to build connections to other similarly minded women while withdrawing from men and the male-dominated culture (i.e., embeddedness), then reengaging (i.e., emanation) through realization that such withdrawal can be also harmful. SYN reflects an increased valuing of the positive aspects of being female, while integrating these qualities with one's unique personal attributes to form a positive self-concept. The fifth and final stage, AC, is reached when a woman's integrated identity translates into a sense of personal commitment to creating a future in which all levels of sexism are eliminated.

Because more advanced feminist identity reflects challenging patriarchy and sexism to further gender equality, including challenging power structures and traditional gender roles, women's preferences for how much a romantic partner conforms to traditional masculine gender roles is likely related to their level of feminist identity. Conformity to masculine gender role norms refers to the extent to which a man follows societal prescriptions of what is considered to be normative "masculine" behavior in the mainstream culture of the United States (Mahalik et al., 2003). Mahalik and colleagues (2003) identified 11 distinct masculine norms endorsed by the dominant culture in American society, and they posit that different masculinity norms may be more or less salient for individual men. These norms include Winning, Emotional Control, Risk-Taking, Violence, Power Over Women, Dominance, Playboy (lack of emotional involvement in sexual relationships), Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, Disdain for Homosexuals, and Pursuit of Status. Because this model examines a greater array of masculinity norms than other models, utilizing this model of masculinity has the advantage of being able to identify the fullest expression of how women's feminist identity may intersect with their preferences for a male partner's masculinity.

We believe that examining factors that predict the masculine gender role conformity preferences of women is important given several research findings about the correlates of traditional masculine gender roles. First, research finds that traditional masculinity is associated with greater psychological distress (Mahalik et al., 2003), hostility (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005), and substance abuse (Liu & Iwamoto, 2007; Mahalik, Lagan, & Morrison, 2006). Thus, women who prefer traditionally masculine men may be involved in relationships with men who are more likely to be distressed, hostile, and substance abusing.

Second, women report more relationship problems and psychological distress when their male partners are traditionally masculine. Research finds that the women who are intimately involved with traditionally masculine men report less relationship satisfaction and self-worth (Burn & Ward, 2005; Ferns, 2007), greater levels of depression and anxiety (Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004), and greater duration and intensity of critical comments from their husband

(Breiding, Windle, & Smith, 2008). Traditionally masculine husbands in dual-career couples are also less likely to be role-sharers in childcare and housekeeping responsibilities, despite incomes comparable to those of their wives (Mintz & Mahalik, 1996).

Third, traditionally masculine men are reported to be more violent in general (Courtenay, 2000) and to engage in relational violence including using controlling behaviors in a relationship (Mahalik, Aldarondo, Gilbert-Gokhale, & Shore, 2005) and sexual assault (Locke & Mahalik, 2005). Therefore, understanding factors that predict women's preferences for how male partners enact gender roles has relevance to women's well-being and should be better understood.

Given prior research findings that feminist women challenge patriarchy and traditional gender roles and prefer egalitarian relationships in which they can enact flexible gender roles, we hypothesize that women who more strongly endorse feminist values will describe their ideal partners as less conformant overall to traditional masculine norms than those who identify less strongly with feminism, who should describe their ideal partner as more conformant to masculine norms. Additionally, in order to identify which specific dimensions of masculinity may be rated as favorable or unfavorable by women as a function of feminist identity development, we intend to explore whether the feminist identity stages predict preferences for individual masculine norms (e.g., dominance).

Method

Participants

Participants in our study included 183 women who averaged 18.87 (SD = .86, range 18–22) years of age. Participants were predominantly White American (n = 149, along with 12 Asian Americans, six African American, six Latinas, seven identifying as Biracial, and three Other) and unmarried (n = 179, with one married and three missing). Only participants who self-identified as heterosexual by selecting "heterosexual" from a checklist including "heterosexual," "lesbian," and "bisexual" were included.

Measures

Feminist Identity Composite (FIC). The FIC, compiled by Fischer et al. (2000), assesses endorsement of feminist values, based on Downing and Roush's (1985) five-stage model of feminist identity development. The FIC is a composite of the statistically best-performing items from two earlier measures of feminist identity development, the Feminist Identity Development Scale (FIDS; Bargad & Hyde, 1991) and the Feminist Identity Scale (FIS; Rickard, 1989). The FIC includes 33 items, 13 from the FIDS and 20 from the FIS, with each item answered on a scale from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) and corresponding to a particular stage of feminist identity development. For example, the

item, "One thing I especially like about being a woman is that men will offer me their seat on a crowded bus or open doors for me because I am a woman," indicates endorsement of the PA stage, while "I am willing to make certain sacrifices to effect change in this society in order to create a nonsexist, peaceful place where all people have equal opportunities," indicates endorsement of the AC stage. Higher scores indicate greater endorsement of the values and beliefs associated with each stage. Five subscale scores, representing endorsement of the characteristics of each stage of feminist identity development at a single point in time (Fischer & Good, 1994; Moradi et al., 2002), were calculated using the means across items within each subscale.

Regarding validity and reliability, Fischer et al. (2000) reported evidence of discriminant validity by comparing FIC scores to scores on a social desirability measure and convergent validity by examining the correlations between FIC subscale scores and scores on measures of ego identity development and involvement in women's organizations. In addition, the authors used structural equation modeling to provide evidence of "excellent" structural validity (goodness of fit index = .96). Fischer et al. also reported Cronbach's αs ranging from .68 to .86 in their initial studies using the FIC. Similarly, Moradi and Subich (2002) reported αs ranging from .73 to .84.

Conformity to Masculinity Norms Inventory (CMNI). The CMNI (Mahalik et al., 2003) assesses men's conformity to an array of masculinity norms found in the dominant culture in U.S. society. The inventory consists of 94 items answered on a 4-point scale from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 3 (*strongly agree*), with higher averaged scores indicating greater endorsement of the masculine norms. Using factor analysis, Mahalik et al. (2003) identified 11 distinct factors, labeled as Winning, Emotional Control, Risk-Taking, Violence, Dominance, Playboy, Self-Reliance, Primacy of Work, Power Over Women, Disdain for Homosexuals, and Pursuit of Status. Sample items include: "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" (Winning), "I tend to keep my feelings to myself" (Emotional Control), "I enjoy taking risks" (Risk-Taking), "Sometimes violent action is necessary" (Violence), "In general, I must get my way" (Dominance), "I would feel good if I had many sexual partners" (Playboy), "I hate asking for help" (Self-Reliance), "My work is the most important part of my life" (Primacy of Work), "I love it when men are in charge of women" (Power Over Women), "It is important to me that people think I am heterosexual" (Disdain for Homosexuals), and "I should be in charge" (Pursuit of Status).

Procedure

Participants were undergraduate students at a private university in the Northeast and received extra credit for their participation. In order to survey a representative sample of women

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, α Values, and Intercorrelations of Variables (N = 183)

Variables	M	SD	α	Range	1a	1b	1c	1d	1e
1. FIC									
a. Passive Acceptance	2.64	.68	.75						
b. Revelation	2.51	.62	.79		−.24***				
c. Embeddedness-Emanation	3.23	.83	.87		−.27***	.32***			
d. Synthesis	4.35	.43	.71		−.05	.10	.26***		
e. Active Commitment	3.62	.56	.83		−.37***	.44***	.47***	.39***	
2. CMNI									
a. Winning	13.37	3.63	.81	3–20	.24***	−.08	−.06	−.01	−.12
b. Emotional Control	11.05	4.76	.89	0–26	.23**	−.29***	−.19*	−.23**	−.32***
c. Risk-Taking	16.26	3.01	.76	7–26	−.18*	−.02	.00	.08	−.09
d. Violence	10.46	3.34	.76	0–26	.11	−.20**	−.16*	−.22**	−.28***
e. Power Over Women	5.80	4.23	.90	0–21	.46***	−.24***	−.23**	−.37***	−.49***
f. Dominance	4.78	1.60	.61	1–10	.28***	−.11	−.09	−.11	−.25***
g. Playboy	5.48	4.61	.86	0–17	−.04	−.01	−.08	−.27***	−.19**
h. Self-Reliance	5.42	2.47	.84	0–13	.23**	−.14	−.21**	−.27***	−.36***
i. Primacy of Work	7.18	3.25	.80	0–17	.08	−.03	−.04	−.19**	−.15*
j. Disdain for Homosexuals	14.91	5.16	.90	0–30	.36***	−.19*	−.19*	−.04	−.19*
k. Pursuit of Status	11.91	2.13	.68	5–18	.13	−.01	.09	.19**	.12
i. CMNI total	107.46	23.12	.94	55–181	.31***	−.22**	−.20**	−.25***	−.38***

Note. To save space, CMNI intercorrelations are not reported because they are similar to other studies' findings.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001.

in the university, participants were recruited from a mandatory Introduction to Biology class. Women in the study completed the survey online and were asked to provide demographic information, to complete the FIC describing their own beliefs and attitudes, and then the CMNI for "how they would like to have their ideal romantic partner answer questions assessing 11 dimensions of masculinity."

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure that the feminist identity development represented in this sample was comparable to that represented in other research using the FIC (see Table 1 for means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations of all variables with the FIC). Comparing our means to samples in three studies (i.e., Fischer et al., 2000; Moradi & Subich, 2002; Sabik & Tylka, 2006) indicated that our sample means were within one-half standard deviation of these comparison samples.

Examining participants' preferences for masculinity in an ideal male partner indicated that women in our sample tended to prefer lower masculinity scores in their ideal male partners compared to men in Mahalik et al.'s (2003) normative sample. Specifically, women's preferences were over half of a standard deviation lower for the masculinity norms of Winning, Emotional Control, Violence, Dominance, and Primacy of Work and over a full standard deviation lower for Power Over Women and Playboy. To determine whether the variables met the assumptions of normality for regression analysis, skewness and kurtosis of CMNI and FIC scores were

examined. Results indicated that skewness and kurtosis values were all lower than 1.00, indicating a normal distribution.

Main Analyses

To test the hypothesis that college women's feminist identities would predict their preferences for conformity to masculine norms in their ideal male partner, two sets of analyses were conducted. First, a simultaneous regression analysis was conducted with the FIC subscale scores (PA, REV, EE, SYN, AC) as the predictor variables and the total CMNI score as the criterion variable. Results indicated that FIC scores were significant predictors of Ideal Partners' Masculinity, $F(5, 177) = 8.83$, $p < .001$, with R^2 indicating that FIC scores accounted for 20% of the variance in total CMNI scores. More specifically, PA, SYN, and AC explained unique variance of total CMNI scores when modeled with all five FIC variables. Participants' higher scores for PA ($\beta = .21$, $t = 2.86$, $p < .01$), and lower scores on SYN ($\beta = −.16$, $t = −2.10$, $p < .05$) and AC ($\beta = −.22$, $t = −2.48$, $p < .05$), were associated with lower Ideal Partner's Masculinity. REV and EE were not statistically significant predictors of participants' ideal partners' overall conformity to masculine norms when examined alongside the rest of the FIC variables.

Second, to assess the relationship between participants' feminist identity development and the specific subscales of the CMNI, simultaneous regression analyses were conducted with the FIC subscale scores as the predictor variables and the 11 CMNI subscale scores as the criterion variables. In order to adjust for cumulative error in this second set of analyses, a Bonferroni correction was utilized, yielding a

Table 2. Regression Information for Significant Relations Between FIC and CMNI Subscale Scores ($N = 183$)

Criterion	Predictor	B	SE B	β	t
Emotional Control	Passive Acceptance	.91	.53	.13*	1.74
	Revelation	−1.43	.60	−.19**	−2.13
	Synthesis	−1.77	.83	−.16*	−2.13
Risk-Taking	Passive Acceptance	−1.16	.35	−.26***	−3.33
	Synthesis	1.13	.55	.16*	2.06
	Active Commitment	−1.38	.51	−.26**	−2.71
Violence	Synthesis	−1.06	.60	−.14*	−1.76
	Active Commitment	−1.00	.56	−.17*	−1.80
Power Over Women	Passive Acceptance	2.20	.40	.36***	5.52
	Synthesis	−2.52	.63	−.26***	−3.99
	Active Commitment	−2.15	.59	−.29***	−3.68
Dominance	Passive Acceptance	.54	.18	.23**	2.99
	Active Commitment	−.50	.27	−.16*	−1.89
Playboy	Synthesis	−2.33	.84	−.22**	−2.79
	Active Commitment	−1.39	.78	−.17*	−1.79
Self-Reliance	Passive Acceptance	.47	.27	.13*	1.73
	Synthesis	−.96	.43	−.17*	−2.23
	Active Commitment	−1.04	.40	−.24**	−2.62
Disdain for Homosexuals	Passive Acceptance	2.42	.58	.32***	4.20

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

corrected α level of .008 ($.05_{1-\text{tail}}/11$). Results indicated that Feminist Identity Composite scores significantly predicted Emotional Control, $F(5, 177) = 6.77$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .16$; Risk-Taking, $F(5, 177) = 3.20$, $p = .009$, $R^2 = .08$; Violence, $F(5, 177) = 3.97$, $p = .002$, $R^2 = .10$; Power Over Women, $F(5, 177) = 22.44$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .39$; Dominance, $F(5, 177) = 4.25$, $p = .0011$, $R^2 = .11$; Playboy, $F(5, 177) = 3.67$, $p = .004$, $R^2 = .09$; Self-Reliance, $F(5, 177) = 6.94$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .16$; and Disdain for Homosexuals, $F(5, 177) = 5.96$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .14$. FIC scores did not predict Ideal Partner's Masculinity for the norms of Winning, Primacy of Work, and Pursuit of Status. The variance inflation function (VIF) values were close to 1.0 for all regressions, indicating acceptable levels of multicollinearity (Fox, 1991).

In Table 2, we report the specific βs and significance levels for the FIC scores examined together in relation to the eight CMNI subscales that were significantly predicted. Results suggested a similar profile in analyzing the CMNI subscales as found when analyzing the CMNI total score. That is, women endorsing PA attitudes tended to prefer a romantic partner who is emotionally controlled, does not take risks, has power over women, is dominant and self-reliant, and expresses disapproving attitudes toward homosexuality.

Results also indicated that higher scores on SYN and AC attitudes were associated with greater preference for a male partner who is not violent, does not seek power over women, is emotionally involved in sexual relationships, and is not self-reliant. Additionally, SYN attitudes were associated with women's preferences for a male partner who is emotionally expressive and takes risks, whereas AC attitudes were associated with women's preferences for a male partner who does not take risks and is not dominant.

Discussion

Support was found for the general hypothesis that there is an inverse relationship between women's feminist identities and their ideal male partner's overall conformity to gender role norms. Women who more strongly endorsed feminist values tended to describe their ideal male partner as less conformant to masculine norms than those who identified less strongly with feminist values. Considering previous research suggesting that feminist women enact less traditional dating scripts (Rickard, 1989) and have more egalitarian expectations for romantic relationships (Schick et al., 2008) as well as research suggesting that nonfeminist women have less egalitarian expectations for their romantic relationships (Yoder et al., 2007), our research extends these previous findings by adding research evidence that women with stronger feminist identities express preferences for less traditionally masculine partners.

Analysis of the relationship between feminist identity and each of the 11 masculinity norms provides additional information about which particular masculine characteristics women endorsing values and beliefs consistent with each of the stages of feminist identity development consider desirable in a partner. It also indicates potential protective factors for women adopting a feminist identity. For the most part, these results were consistent with the overall hypothesis. Women with high subscale scores for the PA, who support traditional gender roles and deny sexism, considered Emotional Control, Power Over Women, Dominance, Self-Reliance, and Disdain for Homosexuals to be desirable qualities in a romantic partner. This finding is consistent with Cunningham and Russell's (2004) general finding that heterosexual women value dominance as a quality in a romantic partner.

When women more strongly endorsed the later stages of feminist identity development, however, they saw many of these qualities as undesirable. Those with high subscale scores for the SYN dimension of feminist identity development, who enact flexible gender roles and integrate positive aspects of being female into their individual identities, considered Emotional Control, Violence, Power Over Women, Playboy, and Self-Reliance to be undesirable qualities in a romantic partner. Similarly, women with high subscale scores for AC, who experience a sense of personal commitment to eliminating sexism and encouraging flexible gender roles, considered Risk-Taking, Violence, Power Over Women, Dominance, Playboy, and Self-Reliance to be undesirable qualities in a male partner. These findings extend previous research that has examined the myriad ways feminist identity may impact women's lives.

A somewhat different pattern was found, however, for a few of the masculine norms. For Violence and Playboy, women who strongly endorsed feminist attitudes identified them as undesirable qualities, as expected. However, women who strongly endorsed nonfeminist attitudes, although not rating these qualities as unfavorable, at the same time did not consider them to be desirable qualities. Conversely, for Disdain for Homosexuals, women who endorsed nonfeminist attitudes rated conformity to this norm as a desirable quality, but women who strongly endorsed feminist attitudes did not identify it as undesirable. Speculatively, even feminist women socialized in a homophobic society may internalize some aspects of that homophobia as it relates to the desirable characteristics of a male partner.

Given the number of negative psychological and interpersonal consequences of traditional masculinity for men reported in the literature, there may be important implications regarding risk and resilience to these findings that heterosexual women who score highly on feminist identity development stages reflecting positive feminist identities express preferences for male partners who are less traditionally masculine. Specifically, it is possible that feminist identity may function as a protective factor against involvement in unsatisfying, or even violent, romantic heterosexual relationships. If women with traditionally masculine partners and those who experience gender role conflict are less likely to report high relationship satisfaction than women with less traditionally masculine partners (Burn & Ward, 2005; Ferns, 2007) and more likely to report depression (Breiding et al., 2008; Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004) and heterosexual feminist women are less likely to choose a traditionally masculine partner, the possibility follows that feminist women may be more likely to experience higher relationship satisfaction than nonfeminist women. In this way, feminist identity may function as a protective factor against involvement in unsatisfying romantic relationships. However, it is important to note that feminist identity is only one such factor that may impact partner preferences;

heterosexual women's relationship satisfaction also depends on many other factors.

Beyond relationship satisfaction, the present study's findings have significance because of the link between traditional masculinity and intimate partner violence. Based on prior research findings that associate traditional masculinity with intimate partner violence (Anderson, 1997; Levitt, Swanger, & Butler, 2008; Reidy, Shirk, Sloan, & Zeichner, 2009), as well as research reporting that traditionally masculine men are more likely to be psychologically distressed (Mahalik et al., 2003), hostile (Jakupcak et al., 2005), and violent (Courtenay, 2000) and to abuse substances (Liu & Iwamoto, 2007; Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek, 2007), feminist identity could function as a protective factor against risks such as involvement in potentially violent romantic relationships. As our results suggest, feminist women may find traditionally masculine men who exhibit these qualities to be less desirable intimate partners, which may discourage these women from engaging in romantic relationships with these men. In turn, this selectivity may protect feminist women from experiencing the potential emotional and physical consequences of being in a romantic relationship with a man who is at risk of being psychologically distressed, hostile, and violent and/or of abusing substances. This is not meant to imply that women who espouse nonfeminist beliefs would be responsible for negative experiences with their male partners (e.g., abuse) but that feminist identity may simply be one factor that may influence women's partner preferences.

Caution needs to be exercised in generalizing our findings from our sample of mostly White American women to the preferences of women in other cultural groups, given that it is likely that feminist identity functions differently and has unique implications for women of color and low-income women (e.g., Hoffman, 2006; Settles, Pratt-Hyatt, & Buchanan, 2008). Research has shown that race (e.g., Boisnier, 2003), ethnicity (e.g., Villarruel, Jemmot, & Jemmot, 2005), and cultural heritage (e.g., Lalonde, Hynie, Pannu, & Tatla, 2004) impact the ways in which women develop feminist identities as well as their partner preferences. Furthermore, our study included only heterosexual women. Although that limitation is logical in examining women's romantic relationships with men within a patriarchal society, feminist identity likely has unique implications for bisexual and lesbian women that are not addressed in our study. Additionally, consideration of age is also warranted. For example, it has been suggested that women may perceive and respond to sexist events differently as they grow older (Lott, Asquith, & Doyon, 2001). If heterosexual women's understandings of sexism change over time, the qualities of their ideal partner may change as well.

It is important to consider the distinction between the qualities of women's ideal partners and the qualities of their

actual partners. Although our study investigated qualities of an ideal partner, a number of other studies have examined the qualities of women's actual partners, finding that the masculinity of the actual partners did predict relationship characteristics (e.g., Ferns, 2007; Mintz & Mahalik, 1996; Rochlen & Mahalik, 2004). Thus, male partners' masculinity appears to have relevance to women's experiences in intimate relationships. Future research should examine the relationship between the masculinity of women's ideal partners and the masculinity of their actual partners.

In conclusion, our study's results provide evidence that women's feminist identities help explain their preferences for how their male partners enact masculinity, which has been shown to affect women's experiences in heterosexual relationships. As such, our findings provide an important starting point for future research on the influence of feminist identity on women's romantic relationships. The examination of the relationship between feminist identity and each of the 11 specific masculine gender role norms provides useful information about some of the nuances of women's feminist attitudes and how they influence romantic partner selection. As feminism's social influence continues to develop, further investigation of its impact on male–female dyadic relationships will be critical to a holistic understanding of its effects on women's and men's lives.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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