The influence of gender role adherence on alcohol use and problems

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Introduction
- College students abuse alcohol at higher rates than their non-college cohort (Johnston et al., 2002).
- Alcohol abuse is associated with increased risk for fatalities, assaults, serious injuries, and arrests (Turrissi et al., 2006).
- Approximately 75% of college men and 55% of college women drink heavily, and 20-25% of heavy drinking students experience a wide range of drinking-related problems at some point during their college years (Yu, Evans, & Perfetti, 2003).
- Heavy episodic drinking by college women is correlated with an increased risk for sexual assault (Abby et al., 2001, Ullman et al., 1999), a variety of psychological problems including depression (Beckman & Askenase, 2000), and an impaired assessment of associated risks (Spigner, Hawkins & Loren, 1993).
- Compared to female counterparts, college men report consuming higher quantities of alcohol per episode and experiencing more negative consequences including hangovers, property damage, disputes between friends, and engaging in unplanned sexual activity (Perkins, 2002).
- The association between gender and alcohol use has been well documented in previous research. However, the mechanisms underlying this association have not been studied systematically.

Research Question
Which aspects of conformity to masculine and feminine gender norms are associated with problematic drinking behaviors and negative consequences in mandated college students?

Method
Participants
Participants consisted of 322 students at a large Midwestern public university who were sanctioned to participate in an alcohol intervention program for violations of college alcohol policy or legal infractions.

The majority of the participants was male, Caucasian, under 23 years of age, non-Greek affiliated independent, and lived in the residence halls. Please refer to table 1 for participant demographic information.

Materials
Alcohol problems were measured using the Rutgers Alcohol Problem Index (RAPI). Alcohol quantity and frequency of use were taken from the first 2 questions on the Alcohol Use Disorders Identification Test (AUDIT). For this study, α levels for the RAPI and the AUDIT were .87 and .71 respectively.

The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) was used to assess adherence to masculine ideology. For this study, α levels for the 11 CMNI subscales ranged from .60 to .91. The Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory (CFNI) was used to assess adherence to feminine ideology. For this study, α levels for the 8 feminine norms subscales ranged from .77 to .95.

Procedure
Participants completed the alcohol survey information as a component of their alcohol intervention requirement during the first meeting. There was no penalty for declining to participate or for withdrawing from the survey portion. Participants received a $10 gift certificate in exchange for completion of the gender-related survey.

Participants who completed the study were not significantly different from non-completers in gender, age, race, year in school, Greek status, housing, alcohol use frequency or quantity, or alcohol problems.

Data Analysis
Bivariate two-tailed Pearson correlations were calculated to determine the relation between participants’ alcohol-related behaviors and problems to the CMNI and CFNI full scale and subscales and total scores. Correlation results are reported in Table 2 with significance indicated at p < .05 or p < .01.

Path analyses were used to test the unique association of each gender inventory full scale and subscales with alcohol problems, drinking frequency, and drinking quantity using Mplus.

Results

Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory
- Nice in Relationships, Sexual Fidelity, and Domestic subscales were all significantly related to at least one drinking variable, suggesting that adherence to these femininity norms is a protective factor against increased alcohol use and alcohol-related problems.
- In contrast, the Thinness and Invest in Appearance subscales were significantly positively associated with at least one drinking variable, suggesting that adherence to these femininity norms is a risk factor for increased alcohol use and alcohol-related problems.

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory
- Emotional Control, Risk-Taking, Violence, Power Over Women, Playboy, and Disdain for Homosexuality subscales were all significantly positively related to at least one drinking variable, suggesting that adherence to these masculinity norms is a risk factor for increased alcohol use and alcohol-related problems.
- The remaining subscales were not significantly related to any drinking variables and were excluded from further analyses.

Path Analyses
Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory
All CFNI subscales that were correlated with drinking were entered in a model predicting frequency and quantity of alcohol use and alcohol-related problems.

Seventeen percent of the variance in frequency of alcohol use could be accounted for by these Femininity norms subscales ($R^2 = .17$, $p < .05$). Nice Relationships and Invest in Appearance were no longer significant predictors of alcohol use frequency. Sexual Fidelity and Domestic remained significant ($β = .24$, $p < .05$; $β = .21$, $p < .05$, respectively).

Eight percent of the variance in quantity of alcohol use could be accounted for by these subscales ($R^2 = .08$, $p < .01$). Nice relationships and Sexual Fidelity were no longer significant predictors of alcohol use quantity. Thinness and Domestic remained significant ($β = .22$, $p < .05$; $β = .23$, $p < .05$, respectively).

Finally, entered simultaneously, the subscales did not account for a significant proportion of variance in alcohol-related problems ($R^2 = .09$, $p < .09$).

Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory
All CMNI subscales, that were correlated with drinking, were entered in a model predicting frequency and quantity of alcohol use and alcohol-related problems.

Eight percent of the variance in frequency of alcohol use could be accounted for by these Masculinity norms subscales ($R^2 = .08$, $p < .05$). Playboy was the only masculinity subscale to uniquely predict drinking frequency ($β = .20$, $p < .05$).

Eight percent of the variance in quantity of alcohol use could be accounted for by these subscales ($R^2 = .08$, $p < .05$). As with frequency, Playboy was the only masculinity subscale to uniquely predict drinking quantity ($β = .20$, $p < .05$).

Ten percent of the variance in alcohol-related problems could be accounted for by these Masculinity norms subscales ($R^2 = .10$, $p < .05$). Power Over Women and Playboy were the only subscales to uniquely predict alcohol-related problems ($β = .14$, $p < .05$; $β = .16$, $p < .05$, respectively).

Discussion
This exploratory study examined how conformity to gender norms might be associated with alcohol-related behaviors and problems. Our findings suggest that adherence to masculinity presented with heightened risk for alcohol use problems while adherence to femininity presented with a mix of risk and protective effects. Specific subscales on each gender measure clarified the nature and direction of the association between gender and alcohol use problems. We found that these associations were significant.

For men, pursuing a thin body ideal and consuming alcohol to improve the appearance of their own body image appear to increase alcohol use. For women, a focus on developing helpful and protective relationships with others, maintaining the home, and keeping sexual intimacy contained within one committed relationship appeared to result in decreased risk. These findings suggest that women’s body image concerns appear to increase risk while a focus on relationships and “relational” sexuality may provide a protective effect against alcohol use and associated problems.

It is worth noting that female college students with increased levels of alcohol use appear less likely to value sexual fidelity which may place them at increased risk for sexual assault and rape.

For men, preference for emotional control and an orientation towards risk taking and violence resulted in increased risk for alcohol use and problems. These findings suggest that this area of exploration is warranted and that further research on alcohol use and gender preference in alcohol-related problems appears indicated.

For women, pursuing a thin body ideal and consuming alcohol to improve the appearance of their own body image appear to increase risk while a focus on relationships and “relational” sexuality may provide a protective effect against alcohol use and associated problems.