

Toxicity and Positivity Across Genders: Feminine, Masculine, and Androgynous Consumer Characteristics

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A research model is designed to assess toxic and positive consumer behavior based on masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. New definitions of androgyny are developed, resulting in two types of consumer androgyny – hypo-androgyny and hyper-androgyny. Also, the hypotheses of the research model are assessed using a snowball sample beginning with young consumers enrolled in upper-division marketing classes at a large U.S. university. Results show important insights on the toxicity of certain consumer characteristics not only in individuals who measure high in masculinity, but also those others included in this study who are more feminine or androgynous. Results also offer findings indicating positive consumer characteristics for all consumer classifications of this research.

Keywords: consumer behavior, consumer toxicity, consumer positivity, androgynous consumers, masculine toxicity

INTRODUCTION

While the world is striving to keep pace with gender issues, recent research in business, marketing, and consumer behavior still normally includes only the male and female genders, if gender is included in the research at all (e.g., Jiang, et al., 2021; Newman, & Trump, 2019; Timming, Baumann, & Gollan, 2020). However, some consideration is beginning to be published that includes a wider view of gender to include both physical and identity gender dynamics (e.g., Meija & Parker, 2021). A better way to understand gender characteristics and their impact on consumer behavior may be to consider masculinity and femininity of individual consumers, rather than physical or identity gender. For example, as early as 1974, recognition of consumers whose dominant characteristics were neither masculine nor feminine, or who show strong

characteristics of both, were recognized as androgynous and measures were developed to identify and assess them (Bem, 1974).

At its most extreme consideration, the concept of toxic masculinity portrays all men as being born fundamentally bad and will engage in sexual harassment with no redeeming qualities at all (d'Abrera, 2019). Also, our patriarchal society produces men who have male privilege and sexist attitudes (Ford, 2019). Other literature suggests men endure unrealistic expectations of masculinity and that society should feel sorry for masculine individuals (Engleman, 2019). Others suggest that fathers who have high expectations and who are strict with their children are toxic (Friedlaender, 2018). It is also suggested that masculinity encourages competitiveness that is toxic in a workplace (Berdahl, Cooper, & Glick, 2018).

The *Google Dictionary* (2021) offers two definitions of toxicity. The first Google definition is “the quality of being toxic or poisonous.” The second definition is “the quality of being very harmful or unpleasant in a pervasive or insidious way.” Neither definition suggests gender exclusivity. In other words, it is possible for an individual to be toxic regardless of their physical or identity gender.

This research offers a unique contribution by eliminating physical and identity gender to examine toxic and positive consumer characteristics in relationship to consumer masculinity, femininity, and androgyny. The research also offers a fresh perspective on consumer androgyny by identifying and assessing two types of androgynous consumers.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Previous relevant research determines the expectations for what this research will find when the data is analyzed and thus helps to form the hypotheses examined. This study identified psychological factors that contribute to gender-related consumer consumption. According to Ye and Robertson (2012), gender personality traits are better predictors than biological sex in explaining consumers' perception. Following is a literature review of independent variables, followed by the research hypotheses.

Independent Variables

Femininity is defined as the degree to which a person indicates having feminine personality characteristics (Bem, 1974). These traits include affection, cheerfulness, being childlike, compassion, not using harsh language, being eager to soothe hurt feelings, being flatterable, gentleness, gullibility, loving toward children, loyal, being sensitive to the needs of others, shyness, being soft-spoken, being sympathetic, tenderness, being understanding, warmth, and being yielding (Tankrikulu, 2017). In addition, the concept of femininity includes being caring (Zelezny, Chua & Aldrich, 2000), having a higher sensitivity toward environmental risk (Brent, 2004), and having greater concern for health and safety issues, especially with children (Davidson & Freudenburg, 1996). Femininity is also a relevant psychological antecedent of ethical intentions (Brough et al., 2016; Pinna, 2019).

Masculinity is defined as the degree to which a person indicates having masculine personality characteristics (Bem, 1974), which include emotional control (Barrett & Bliss-Moreau 2009; Jost & Kay, 2005) and restraint (Hess & Hareli, 2016), independence, competitiveness, assertiveness, ambition, having ability to reason, rationality, and having a need to dominate (Neale, Robbie & Martin, 2015). Additional traits associated with masculinity include being responsible for family, being non-demonstrative, being forceful, being sociable, coming out against injustice, being ambitious, being idealistic, defining personal needs, being self-confident, being prim and proper, acting a leader, being sensible, being authoritarian, being willing to take risks, being aggressive, and being willing to keep promises (Tankrikulu, 2017). Having a masculine identity may also have a negative impact on ethical intentions (Pinna, 2019).

Androgyny is defined as the degree to which a person indicates characteristics for both femininity and masculinity (Barak & Stern, 1986; Bem, 1974), depending on situational appropriateness (Bem, 1974). An individual can adopt a “balance” of both masculine and feminine traits, irrespective of their biological sex (birth gender), and this combination could be viewed as the developmental ideal. Individuals who can integrate and internalize both set of traits within their behavioral repertoire are able to adapt to a wider variety of situational demands (Borna & White, 2003; Woodhill & Samuels, 2004) and are also known to

have higher self-expectations and better performance in a competitive environment, more self-efficacy in career decision making, lower anxiety level, more learning-oriented, and ability to be good listeners (Tankrikulu, 2017).

Positively androgynous people evidence greater confidence and self-efficacy, enabling them to adapt to situational demands (Woodhill & Samuels, 2003; Woodhill & Samuels, 2004). Positive androgyny is defined as the possession of high levels of both positive masculine and positive femininity (Woodhill & Samuels, 2004).

Thus, androgyny is normally defined as the degree to which a person indicates strong characteristics for both femininity and masculinity (Bem, 1974). However, there are people who do not show strong masculine traits nor strong feminine traits. Thus, like people who show both strong masculine and feminine traits, the people showing weakness on both masculine and feminine traits are also androgynous. Thus, this research identifies two types of androgynies. *Hyper-androgyny* is the degree to which a person indicates strong characteristics for both femininity and masculinity (Bem, 1974), while *hypo-androgyny* is defined as the degree to which a person indicates weak characteristics for both femininity and masculinity.

Dependent Variables – Toxic Consumer Characteristics

Arousal-Seeking Tendency is defined as the level of stimulation and arousal a person prefers (Mehrabian & Russell, 1974). Arousal is a physiological response that spans from inactivity and passiveness (i.e., low arousal) to surprise and excitement (i.e., high arousal) (Yoon, 2018). Consumers who primarily seek arousal have relatively stronger preferences for pure vice offerings, as opposed to offerings that include virtuous benefits (Verma, Guha, & Biswas, 2016).

Conformity Motivation is defined as the degree to which a person looks to others to determine how to behave and desires to act in accordance with group norms (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984), even if that opinion may be wrong (Lascu, Bearden, & Rose, 1995). Actions of others can positively affect attitudes toward taking action, thereby affecting their behavioral intention and actual behavior (Chin, Lu, & Wu, 2015).

Those motivated by conformity tend to adhere to social norms when they lack the time, capacity, or inclination to conduct more effortful apparel searching (Wood, 2000). Curtis and Desforges (2013) conclude that consumers are more likely to conform when fewer options are presented. However, when consumers acquire more product knowledge, they are less likely to conform (Winchester, Romaniuk, & Bogomolova, 2008). Consumers with low self-esteem are likely to seek conformity from groups (Hall et al., 2009) and to gain social acceptance, they are likely to choose products that are highly valued by reference groups or society (Clark, Zboja, & Goldsmith, 2007).

Ethnocentrism is defined as a consumer's attitude toward the appropriateness of purchasing home-country-produced products versus those manufactured in other countries, and viewing those products made in other countries as inferior in quality (Shimp & Sharma, 1987), or the fear that opting for foreign-made products threatens domestic industry and causes unemployment (Verlegh, 2007). Ethnocentric consumers want to protect their economy by purchasing domestic products (Quegner-Roth, Zabkar, & Diamantopoulos, 2015). Upper-class consumers (usual purchasers of expensive products) are more affected by consumer ethnocentrism than are lower-class consumers (Aljukhadar, Boeuf, & Senecal, 2021).

Interpersonal Influence Susceptibility is defined as the degree to which a person expresses the need to have friends. Approval of where and what he or she buys (Bearden, Netemeyer, & Teel, 1989). Research demonstrates that individuals who are highly susceptible to interpersonal influence are more likely to conform to social group influence, while those who are less susceptible are more likely to follow their own preferences (Thomas & Vinuales, 2017). In a social network context, susceptibility to interpersonal influence is especially salient for each social network user and is considered the center of a highly visible community (Boyd & Ellison, 2007).

Materialism is defined as the degree to which a person is oriented toward possessing goods and money as a means of personal happiness and social progress (Moschis, 1981). Previous studies have shown that materialism is negatively correlated with life satisfaction and subjective well-being (Dittmar et al., 2014; Gurel-Atay et al., 2021; Sirgy et al., 2012). However, others have indicated there may be occasions, such

as in the pursuit of self-esteem, where materialism may be positively related to well-being (Shrum, et al., 2013).

Possessiveness is defined as the degree to which a person desires to maintain control over one's possessions. (Belk, 1985). Extant research asserts that possessions are a major contributor of our identities, and we regard possessions as part of ourselves (Belk, 1988; Wallendorf & Arnould, 1988). Possessions exert an inordinate influence on subsequent consumption decisions (Sen & Johnson, 1997), and this may be the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behavior (Belk, 1988). Such feelings of ownership can extend beyond tangible objects, and can also include other people, ideas, or physical spaces (Kirk et al., 2018).

Alternatively, contemporary research investigates the "sharing economy," and the transition from an economy based on ownership of goods to an economy based on the shared use of goods and services (Barbu et al., 2018; Belk, 2014; Lee et al., 2008). In this model, consumers pay for temporary use rather than buying and owning items (e.g., Uber and Airbnb). Thus, it is to be expected that for some consumers, access to products and services will become more important than ownership and possession (Barbu et al., 2018).

Dependent Variables – Positive Consumer Characteristics

Acceptance of Authority is defined as the degree to which a person accepts an authority figure's authority, feedback, and/or instructions (Ferrell & Skinner, 1988). There is evidence to support that measures of attitude toward authority predict different kinds of behavior (Milgram, 1965; Rigby, 1984). A series of studies conducted by Milgram (1965) demonstrate how people who have power can control the behavior of others, and that people place an immense amount of trust in authority figures. Milgram states, "A substantial proportion of people do what they are told to do, irrespective of the content of the act and without limitation of conscience, so long as they perceive that the command comes from a legitimate authority" (Milgram, 1965, pg. 74).

Other research suggests that attitudes toward authority more broadly signify how people feel about others. Favorable attitudes toward authority may be part of an overall tendency to support people in general, and positive correlations exist between attitudes towards both actual authority figures and non-authority figures (Burwen & Campbell, 1957; Rigby, 1986).

Individuals who show high levels of accepting authority would likely be more apt to seek the opinions of experts before making a decision. As such, leveraging the power of an authoritative figure is a widely used marketing practice.

Coping with Life is defined as the degree to which a person feels they are able to successfully cope with life's challenges (Lumpkin & Hunt, 1989). In response to life events, individuals tend to cope with, or solve problems derived from the results of such events by changing their attitudes, behavior, or lifestyles (Lee et al., 2000; Ong & Othman, 2007). These major life changes and transitions are often viewed as "stressors" that create a generalized adjustment of one's lifestyle. Purchasing behavior changes in order to cope with stressful changes and satisfy new consumption needs (Lee et al., 2000). Possessions help individuals define who they are and who they aspire to become, and these meanings are especially salient during life transitions (Mehta & Belk, 1991).

Not every life event has the same effect on behavior. Pavia and Mason (2004) make the distinction between consumers who are coping with disruptive events such as job loss, relocation, or natural disaster, versus consumers coping with extraordinary challenges of terminal illness or life-threatening events. They argue that various coping behaviors lead to consumption, but consumption can also lead to functional coping and act as a catalyst for forward thinking to individuals with uncertain futures. For these consumers, purchases reveal the nature of their implicit beliefs about their future (Pavia & Mason, 2004).

Involvement with Education is defined as the degree to which a person feels it important to both get a degree from a university and do well academically (Arora, 1982). Research indicates that education affects buyer behavior and is a suitable criterion for market segmentation (Gronhaug, 1974). Consumers with higher levels of education engage in more information seeking, evaluate more alternatives, take more time to make decisions, and are more venturesome in complex buying situations (Dennis et al., 2009; Gronhaug,

1974). Consumers with a higher level of education (bachelor's degree or higher) evaluate product attributes differently than consumers with lower levels of education (Bock et al., 2014).

To the extent that education affects occupation and/or income, involvement with education can reflect a person's available resources for consumption (Boutsouki, 2019). Income plays a significant role in the purchasing power of consumers and thus affects their behavior.

Self-Confidence is defined as the perception of oneself as a leader and having confidence. (Wells & Tigert, 1971). Consumer self-confidence is important because it provides motivation for individuals to seek assistance when confronted with complex or uncertain decisions (Bearden et al., 2001). In seeking information and decision making, individuals with low self-confidence rely more on external information (such as product attributes, advertisements, or samples), whereas individuals with high self-confidence tend to rely more on memory and prior marketplace experience (Bearden et al., 2001; Xiao, 2016). If consumers with low self-confidence are not confident of their evaluations, they are likely to seek more external information to help evaluate and make choices (Xiao, 2016). Like other measures, general consumer self-confidence should be able to predict tendencies (Bearden et al., 2001).

Self-Esteem is defined as a person's overall subjective sense of personal worth or value. (Lumpkin, 1985). Self-esteem is related to but differs from self-confidence. Self-esteem represents one's own evaluation of worth, value, or importance (Lumpkin, 1985). High self-esteem should enhance consumer self-confidence, and thus have a modest, positive relationship with self-confidence (Bearden et al., 2001).

The use of self-esteem measures in studies of persuasion and influence is based on the notion that individuals high in self-esteem are more difficult to persuade than are low-self-esteem individuals (Bearden et al., 2001; Kropp et al., 2005). Low self-esteem has been associated with general susceptibility to influence (Cox & Bauer, 1964), whereas high self-esteem is generally associated with resistance to influence (Kropp et al., 2005). One explanation for these assumptions is those low in self-esteem comply with the suggestions of others to avoid social disapproval or as an ego-defense mechanism (Cox & Bauer, 1964).

Time Management is defined as the degree to which a person perceives his or her ability to get everything completed in the time available (Lumpkin & Darden, 1982). Much research related to time management emphasizes the concept of busyness. A busy and overworked lifestyle, rather than a leisurely lifestyle, has become an aspirational status symbol (Bellezza et al., 2017). Findings support the notion that appealing to a lack of time is flattering, making consumers feel their time is valuable (Bellezza et al., 2017). The mere perception of self as busy impacts consumers' decision making and an increasing number of marketers position products for busy lifestyles (Kim et al., 2018). New products and services allow consumers to reduce the time it takes to perform certain tasks (e.g., HelloFresh Meal Kit delivery service).

Other related research evaluates time pressure and the impact of a lack of time on choices. Purchasing behavior under time constraints differs from purchasing behavior without time constraints because of the pressure felt by consumers (Godinho et al., 2016; Mitomi, 2017). Evidence has shown that when consumers feel time-pressured to decide, they are unable to gather all relevant information required to evaluate a product (Iyer, 1989), and tend to focus on a restricted set of attributes that can be quickly evaluated (Godinho et al., 2016).

To the extent that a state of being busy is related to a lack of time, Kim et al. (2018) propose that busyness is a subjective perception, and a busy mindset can impact consumer behavior just as actual time pressure would.

Hypotheses

Figure 1 represents the research model and the hypotheses examined in this study. Based on the literature review, the following hypotheses are offered.

H₁: *Feminine consumers are not toxic, neither in overall toxicity nor in each one of the six individual toxic characteristics.*

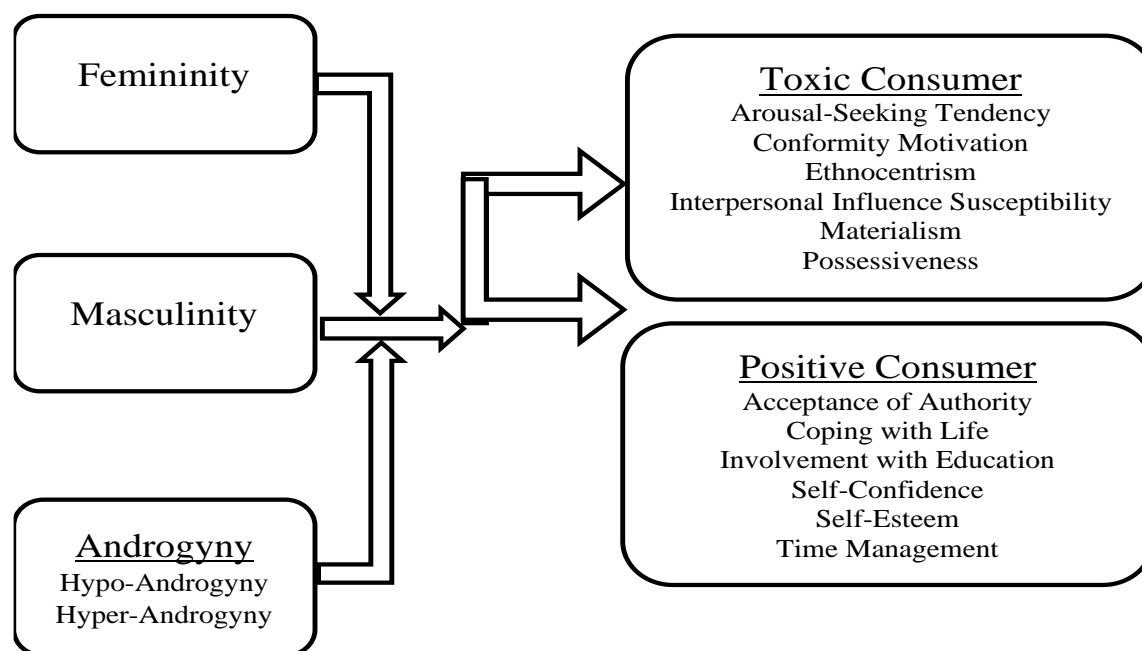
H₂: *Feminine consumers are positive, both in overall positivity and in each one of the six individual positive characteristics.*

H₃: *Masculine consumers are toxic, both in overall toxicity and in each one of the six individual toxic characteristics.*

H₄: *Masculine consumers are not positive, neither in overall positivity nor in each one of the six individual positive characteristics.*

H₅: *Hypo-androgynous consumers are not toxic, neither in overall toxicity nor in each one of the six individual toxic characteristics.*

**FIGURE 1
RESEARCH MODEL**



H₆: *Hypo-androgynous consumers are positive, both in overall positivity and in each one of the six individual positive characteristics.*

H₇: *Hyper-androgynous consumers are toxic, both in overall toxicity and in each one of the six individual toxic characteristics.*

H₈: *Hyper-androgynous consumers are not positive, neither in overall positivity nor in each one of the six individual positive characteristics.*

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected using a snowball sampling technique. Undergraduate students enrolled in upper-division marketing classes at one of the most diverse public universities in the country voluntarily completed a questionnaire and were asked to take two additional questionnaires to friends or family members and return them within a few days. The resulting sample is 193 completed surveys from a

population that is diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity. Respondents ranged in age from 19 to 59 years of age. There were 99 females and 94 males in the study. Finally, 16 Asian consumers, 51 black consumers, 58 Hispanic consumers, and 68 Caucasian consumers participated in this study.

As can be seen in Table 1, most construct measures used in this study were considered reliable with Cronbach's alphas greater than .70 (Nunnally, 1978). One measure (materialism) falls just short of .70, which is suggested as appropriate for exploratory research, as is the case with this study (Barclay, Thompson, & Higgins, 1995). One measure (possessiveness) falls below .60, but has been utilized in previous studies, the variable was retained for this research. Reliability analysis was also used for scale reduction. Table 1 includes information on how many original items there were in each measure and how many items were retained for this research.

TABLE 1
MEASURE DEVELOPMENT AND RELIABILITY

Variable	Original Items	Items Used	Cronbach's Alpha	Measure Source
Independent Variables				
Femininity	20	20	0.792*	Bem (1974)
Masculinity	20	20	0.852*	Bem (1974)
Androgyny	40	40	0.817*	Bem (1974)
Dependent Variables - Toxic Consumer				
Arousal-Seeking Tendency	40	13	0.816*	Mehrabian and Russell (1974)
Conformity Motivation	13	9	0.789*	Lennox and Wolfe (1984)
Ethnocentrism	17	14	0.931*	Shimp and Sharma (1987)
Interpersonal Influence				Bearden, Netemeyer, and Teel (1989)
Susceptibility	8	7	0.909*	(1989)
Materialism	6	6	0.699**	Moschis (1981)
Possessiveness	9	6	0.583***	Belk (1985)
Dependent Variables - Positive Consumer				
Acceptance of Authority	3	3	0.767*	Ferrell and Skinner (1988)
Coping with Life	4	4	0.749*	Lumpkin and Hunt (1989)
Involvement with Education	4	4	0.755*	Arora (1982)
Self-Confidence	6	4	0.795*	Wells and Tigert (1971)
Self-Esteem	5	5	0.798*	Lumpkin (1985)
Time Management	3	3	0.806*	Lumpkin and Darden (1982)

*Reliable

**Reliable for exploratory research

***Validated in other studies

All constructs in this study were measure by seven-point Likert scales. The independent variables were all developed in the same study (Bem, 1974). All original items for both femininity and masculinity were retained to make the measures more comparable, and both were found to be reliable with Cronbach's alphas higher than .70. The measures for the two types of androgynies assessed in this study used all items from the femininity and masculinity scales. Both hypo-androgyny and hyper-androgyny were measured by adding the 20 femininity scores to the 20 masculinity items. An extremely low score on this measure indicated a hypo-androgynous consumer while an extremely high score suggested a hyper-androgynous consumer. This measure for androgyny was also found to be reliable.

The measures for assessing toxic consumer characteristics were all developed and used in previous consumer behavior studies. The measure for arousal-seeking tendency was found reliable and the 40 original items were reduced to thirteen items for use in this study. Such a large reduction of this measure was confirmed through factor analysis as the 13 remaining items loaded on the same factor with an Eigenvalue of 1.787. The measure for conformity motivation was also found to be reliable and its original thirteen items were reduced to nine items for this study. Also, the measure of ethnocentrism was reduced from 17 items to 14 items and the resulting measure was reliable. The measure for interpersonal influence susceptibility was found reliable and one item was eliminated reducing it from eight items to seven items for this study. All items for the measure of materialism were retained for this study and it is reliable considering the exploratory nature of this research. The measure for possessiveness (nine original items reduced to six) was not found reliable in this study; however, it has been shown to be a reliable measure in previous studies, so it was retained for this research.

TABLE 2
RESULTS OF MODEL/HYPOTHESES TESTING

	Femininity	Masculinity	Hypo- Androgyny	Hyper- Androgyny
Overall Toxicity	4.065**	2.628	-7.250*	0.050
Overall Positivity	1.951	13.228*	2.695	12.041*
Toxic Consumer				
Arousal-Seeking Tendency	-1.086	4.368*	-4.056*	2.188**
Conformity Motivation	-1.110	-2.609*	1.114	-2.561**
Ethnocentrism	-1.240	-0.110	-0.807	-0.905
Interpersonal Influence Susceptibility	-2.271**	-1.530	-0.483	-2.607*
Materialism	-1.927***	1.262	-2.357**	-0.405
Possessiveness	2.867*	2.865*	-0.74	3.997*
Positive Consumer				
Acceptance of Authority	-0.692	-0.526	-0.114	-0.824
Coping with Life	-0.006	-0.565	0.409	-0.388
Involvement with Education	4.240*	2.898*	0.821	4.979*
Self-Confidence	1.109	7.479*	-4.289*	5.729*
Self-Esteem	-0.944	-1.886***	0.706	-1.939***
Time Management	-0.032	2.775*	-2.077**	1.872***

*Significant at $p < .01$

**Significant at $p < .05$

***Significant at $p < .10$

The measures for assessing positive consumer characteristics were also developed and used in previous consumer behavior studies. The measure for acceptance of authority was reliable and all three items were retained for this study. All four items for the measure of coping with life were retained and it was reliable. All items for involvement with education were retained and the resulting four-item scale was found to be reliable. The measure for self-confidence was reduced from five items to three and it was found reliable for this study. All items for both measures for both self-esteem and time management were retained and both measures were found to be reliable for use in this research.

RESULTS

Femininity

Using OLS regression to assess our hypotheses, the results are summarized in Table 2. As can be seen in this table, overall, feminine consumers toxic ($t = 4.065, p \leq .05$). Examining the individual toxicity characteristics, femininity also leads to a higher level of possessiveness ($t = 2.867, p \leq .01$). However, further assessment of individual toxicity characteristics reveals that femininity does not lead to higher tendency for arousal seeking, high motivation to conform, or higher level of ethnocentrism. In fact, high levels of femininity results in lower levels of interpersonal influence susceptibility ($t = -2.271, p \leq .05$) and materialism ($t = -1.027, p \leq .10$). Therefore, these results partially support H₁.

Contrary to expectations, feminine consumers were not positive overall. Examining the individual consumer positivity variables also reveals femininity does not lead to higher levels of acceptance of authority, coping with life, self-confidence, self-esteem, or time management. However, femininity results in higher involvement with education ($t = 4.240, p \leq .01$), providing weak and partial support for H₂.

Masculinity

Also contrary to expectations, masculine consumers are not toxic overall. Also, examining the individual toxicity characteristics shows masculinity does not lead to a consumer being ethnocentric, being susceptible to interpersonal influence, nor being materialistic. In addition, rather than leading to stronger motivation to conform, masculinity actually results in a lower conformity motivation ($t = -2.609, p \leq .01$). However, consumer masculinity leads to a stronger arousal-seeking tendency ($t = 4.368, p \leq .01$), and stronger possessiveness ($t = 2.865, p \leq .01$). Thus, H₃ was partially supported.

Masculinity leads to more positivity overall ($t = 13.288, p \leq .01$). Assessment of individual positivity characteristics also reveals that higher levels of masculinity lead to more involvement with education ($t = 2.898, p \leq .01$), more self-confidence ($t = 7.479, p \leq .01$), and higher time management ($t = 2.775, p \leq .01$). Contrary to predictions, masculinity does not lead to more acceptance of authority or coping with life; however, it does result in lower consumer self-esteem ($t = -1.886, p \leq .10$). Therefore, these results suggest partial support for H₄.

Hypo-Androgyny

As predicted, overall, hypo-androgynous consumers do not have toxic characteristics ($t = -7.250, p \leq .01$); in fact, these consumers tend to have a lower level of overall toxicity. Assessing the individual toxicity variables reveals that these hypo-androgyny results in higher levels of none of the toxicity variables. Further, the more hypo-androgynous consumer is, the less likely they are to be both arousal seeking ($t = -4.056, p \leq .01$) and materialistic ($t = 2.357, p \leq .05$). Thus, H₅ is strongly supported by these results.

Overall, hypo-androgynous consumers are not more positive, contrary to predictions. Further examination also shows these consumers are not likely to have higher scores on all but two of the individual positivity variables. Higher levels of hypo-androgyny actually lead to a lower level of self-confidence ($t = -4.289, p \leq .01$) and a lower level of time management ($t = -2.077, p \leq .05$). Thus, H₆ is not supported at all with these results.

Hyper-Androgyny

Contrary to expectations, hyper-androgynous consumers are not more toxic. However, they tend to have higher scores in both arousal-seeking tendency ($t = 2.188, p \leq .05$) and possessiveness ($t = 3.997, p \leq .01$). Surprisingly, having a higher level of hyper-androgyny leads to lower levels of two of the toxicity variables – conformity motivation ($t = -2.561, p \leq .05$) and interpersonal influence susceptibility ($t = -2.607, p \leq .01$). These results show weak support for H₇.

Another result against predictions of this research is that hyper-androgynous consumers are not more positive overall. However, hyper-androgyny leads to higher levels in some of the consumer positivity variables. The variables include involvement, with education ($t = 4.979, p \leq .01$), self-confidence ($t = 5.729, p \leq .01$), and time management ($t = 1.872, p \leq .10$). Contrary to expectations, however, being hyper-

androgynous does not make a consumer have higher levels of the other positivity variable, and in one of the variables – self-esteem – these consumers tend to have lower levels ($t = -1.939, p \leq .10$). These results, therefore, partially support H₈.

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Four types of consumers were examined in this study – feminine consumers, masculine consumers, hypo-androgynous consumers, and hyper-androgynous consumers. These consumers were studied in relationship to toxic vs. positive consumer traits. Based on this study's findings, all four types of consumers possess some toxicity, and all four types of consumers possess some positivity.

Feminine consumers tend to have the toxic characteristics of interpersonal influence susceptibility, materialism, and possessiveness. Masculine consumers tend to have the toxic characteristics of arousal-seeking tendency, conformity motivation, and possessiveness. Hypo-androgynous consumers (those with low scores in both femininity and masculinity) have the toxic characteristics of arousal-seeking tendency and materialism. Finally, hyper-androgynous consumers (those with high scores in both femininity and masculinity) have the toxic characteristics of arousal-seeking tendency, conformity motivation, interpersonal influence susceptibility, and possessiveness. Thus, both feminine and masculine consumers possess the same quantity of three toxic consumer characteristics. The only characteristic that is common to both masculine and feminine consumers is possessiveness. This is important for companies and brands to keep in mind as they position their goods and services to different consumers. When it comes to possessiveness, brands can use this toxic consumer characteristic across all four types of consumers in coming up with their brand name, and their advertising and promotion. Allowing the consumer to feel possessive of the brand can lead to strong loyalty to the brand (Baalbaki & Guzman, 2016).

Hypo-androgynous consumers possess the lowest number of toxic consumer characteristics. The two toxic characteristics they have are evenly split between one shared with masculine consumers (arousal-seeking tendency) and one shared with feminine consumers (materialism). In addition, hypo-androgynous consumers share only one toxic consumer characteristic with hyper-androgynous consumers—arousal-seeking tendency.

Hyper-androgynous consumers possess the largest quantity with four toxic consumer characteristics. They share three of these characteristics (arousal-seeking tendency, conformity motivation, and possessiveness) with masculine consumers. They share two of these characteristics (interpersonal influence susceptibility and possessiveness) with feminine consumers.

Feminine consumers tend to possess only one positive consumer characteristic – involvement with education. Of the four types of consumers examined in this research, masculine consumers tend to possess four positive consumer characteristics – involvement with education, self-confidence, self-esteem, and time management. Hypo-androgynous consumers possess the two positive characteristics of self-confidence and time management. Finally, like masculine consumers, hyper-androgynous consumers tend to possess four positive consumer characteristics – involvement with education, self-confidence, self-esteem, and time management. This indicates how imperative it is that companies and brands understand who their consumer really is. Not just their gender, but delve deeper into their interests, passions, who they really are. Strong segmentation, targeting and positioning play a crucial role in reaching the correct group of consumers for a company or brand.

Unlike toxicity, where feminine and masculine consumers possessed the same number of characteristics, masculine consumers possess the tendency to have more positive consumer characteristics. The one characteristic possessed by feminine consumers – involvement with education – is also possessed by masculine consumers. Schools and higher education can focus on attracting feminine, masculine, and hyper-androgynous consumers with a focus on being involved with education. This may take the form of their personal education, or the education of their children and dependents.

Hypo-androgynous consumers possess two positive consumer characteristics. Both positive characteristics (self-confidence and time management) are also possessed by masculine consumers. These

two positive consumer characteristics are also possessed by hyper-androgynous consumers. Hypo-androgynous consumers share no positive consumer characteristics with feminine consumers.

All four positive consumer characteristics possessed by hyper-androgynous consumers are also found in masculine consumers. Hyper-androgynous consumers also share one positive characteristic (involvement with education) with feminine consumers. They also share two characteristics (self-confidence and time management) with hypo-androgynous consumers.

Interesting to note is that none of the four categories of consumers tend to possess the toxic consumer characteristic of ethnocentrism. This is interesting in that current generations of consumers tend to be more accepting of others without judgment. In addition, none of the types of consumers tend to possess the positive consumer characteristics of acceptance of authority and coping with life. This result may be due to the fact that there have been many current events in the last few years dealing with authority and acceptance of authority, and that is affecting people's perceptions. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic shifted consumers' perception on coping with life to a day by day surviving in life. Perhaps looking at a larger more widespread sample may shed more light onto these two characteristics.

As with any research, this study has limitations which often lead to further research opportunities. Our snowball sample that began with undergraduate students would naturally be more involved with education. Thus, expanding this study to a more general sample would help to further validate these results. Including cross-cultural comparisons may also be interesting in determining gender related consumer characteristics. In addition, hypo-androgyny was introduced to the literature in this study. More research on that variable and the difference between it and other androgynous consumers is valuable. Finally, many other variables could be identified as either toxic or positive and this literature could be expanded by further research on identifying those variables and examining their impact on consumer attitudes and behavior.

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