

Module Response 4: Male vs. Female Beauty Standards

Jaiden R. Hourie

Chemistry 2211: The Chemistry Between Us

Dr. Chris Lovallo

March 17, 2023

Module Response 4: Male vs. Female Beauty Standards

Module 4 has brought about a great deal of discussion regarding personal care products and beauty; from botox to testing beauty products on discarded infant foreskin. Within this wide variety of topics, we took a closer and intrinsic look at beauty standards. We considered if we feel societal and/or peer pressure regarding our appearance, and questioned the degree to which media has an impact. Further, we explored the media's impact on women's self image; this brought to our attention the apparent dichotomy between male and female beauty standards. As a woman—through my own biased perspective—I have always functioned under the assumption that 'women have it worse.' More often than not I feel that the criteria of attractiveness for men and women are very different, with societal expectations frequently conforming to established gender norms. Furthermore, the personal care products that we see marketed to men and women are in stark contrast; men's products are often intended to be efficient and practical, while women's products emphasise luxury and indulgence. The same sentiment can be applied to mens versus women's beauty standards; it is the predominant assumption that men retain fitness for health (practicality), and women retain fitness for attraction or aesthetics (indulgence). Nonetheless, I would also attest that the beauty industry has recently experienced a shift towards greater diversity and gender-neutral marketing. Regardless of whether my assumptions are correct, I feel that they are rooted in a bias that women care more about their appearance than men, and therefore are subject to more scrutiny and targeted products. I would like to believe however, that it is possible—and perhaps common—for men to feel inadequate about their appearance if they do not meet conventional beauty standards, too. That is, although personal care items and beauty standards have traditionally been associated with women, men simply cannot be exempt from the urge to adhere to societal standards. While women may have historically faced more pressure when it comes to beauty standards, I aim to determine how much of this is relevant today, and to see if the belief that self-image is worse for women than men *really* is our social reality.

To begin, let's explore the ways in which many believe that women's self-image and beauty standards are more rigorous than men. To this end, I turn to the idea of malleability, as brought forth by Burkley et al.¹ The contention here is that beauty as being malleable is frequently conveyed across all

¹ [The Ugly Duckling Effect: Examining Fixed versus Malleable Beliefs about Beauty](#)

media, and this belief “puts women (but not men) at risk for harmful appearance concerns, such as basing their self worth on physical attractiveness [and] increased appearance anxiety.”² Burkley et al., then go on to state that compared to women's beauty standards, men's standards are not as severe or impossible to meet.³ Additionally, men are less likely than women to be objectified in the media, which makes it less probable that they will internalize the ideal beauty standards as their own. As a result, many studies have discovered that men are less sensitive to aspects that usually spark women's concerns about looks.⁴ In an effort to validate these claims, Burkley et al., completed a study which aimed to assess the impacts of the notion of malleability in beauty on contingent self-worth for both men and women. They found that compared to women in the control condition, women in the malleable condition reported a self-worth that was more dependent on physical appearance.⁵ Furthermore, they found that this trend did not appear in men. Although men's perceptions of beauty were successfully altered, their anxieties about their appearance were not affected in the same way as women's perceptions of beauty were. They conclude that yes, men have different opinions on what is beautiful, but unlike women, they do not tend to be more preoccupied with appearance.⁶ So, maybe my original hypothesis was correct—keyword, *maybe*.

In a study aimed to determine whether men and women apply different standards for evaluating bodies based on who the body belongs to, it was found that men—just like women—apply double standards for beauty.⁷ Both genders displayed self-deprecating double standards for the overweight body when it came to valence, bodily attractiveness, body fat, and muscle mass. Men also demonstrated self-deprecating double standards for the thin, average-weight, and hypermuscular bodies, but when the athletic body was displayed next to their own faces, they rated it as more appealing and with a higher positive emotion.⁸ However, they found that males appreciate ideal bodies more than non-ideal ones when they are tied to themselves, but women more frequently judge objectively.⁹ Ultimately, the study found that men must contend with an ideal body that is challenging to obtain, similar to women. Likewise,

² [The Ugly Duckling Effect: Examining Fixed versus Malleable Beliefs about Beauty](#)

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ [Gender differences in body evaluation: Do men show more self-serving double standards than women?](#)

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

numerous studies have discovered that when men are exposed to ideal body cues of their own sex, they experience greater dissatisfaction, just as women do.¹⁰ Interestingly however, studies indicate that there are disparities in how the two sexes see their bodies. Compared to boys, girls are more aware of how their body weight impacts their appearance even when they are young (Shriver et al., 2013). Also, women already have lower body esteem when they are overweight, whereas boys only experience this when they are obese. As a result, it appears that women's self-worth is more influenced by their body size than men's self-worth (Owens et al., 2010). Moreover, more so than the male body ideal, which is represented by more varied, though still average-weight, media depictions of men, the norms for the female body ideal appear to be more well defined, and women believe they should be able to attain them (Buote et al., 2011).

Buote et al. (2011) discovered that women believe they should be able to obtain the ideal slender figure, despite the fact that they are aware that this is difficult for women in general. Contrarily, men did not hold themselves to a higher standard than other men did. So, the application of double standards, which are evident when different sets of requirements are applied to different persons while judging them, could possibly contribute to the lower levels of body dissatisfaction in males than in women. It would appear that women have a more internalized view of their body-image, and feel negatively about their body to a greater extent when it is compared to that of another person; this is in contrast to how men view themselves. Yes, men may see a body type as ideal and feel pressure to achieve it, but they do not place the *same* amount of pressure on themselves as women do. In fact, one study¹¹ showed that both genders produce a similar deficit-oriented attention pattern when viewing their own body; women and men did not differ from one another in terms of their state body satisfaction upon observing their own body. However when body types were compared, simple effects analysis showed that for women, state body satisfaction was considerably lower after viewing one's own body than after viewing the body of a peer, while for men, there was no significant difference.¹² And yet, gender-specific body-related attention patterns did not

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ [Gender differences in state body satisfaction, affect, and body-related attention patterns towards one's own and a peer's body: an Eye-Tracking Study with Women and Men.](#)

¹² Ibid.

reflect a gender disparity, as both men and women showed a generic deficit-oriented attentional bias towards their own and their respective peer's body.¹³

Perhaps we are coming to see that there are more equal self-deprecating negative views of self-image for both genders; this renders us more empathetic to seeing individuals on a human basis, not a gendered one.

This is not to argue that males don't worry about how they look (Hebl et al., 2004; Martins, Tiggemann, & Kirkbride, 2007). Simply put, issues that affect concerns about beauty have less of an impact on men's anxiety than they do on women.

Voges, M. M., Giabbiconi, C.-M., Schöne, B., Waldorf, M., Hartmann, A. S., & Vocks, S. (2019). [Gender differences in body evaluation: Do men show more self-serving double standards than women?](#) *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10, 544–544. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00544>

The present study aimed to examine whether men differ from women in the application of double standards in body evaluation depending on the body's identity.

¹³ [Gender differences in state body satisfaction, affect, and body-related attention patterns towards one's own and a peer's body: an Eye-Tracking Study with Women and Men.](#)

Generally speaking, compared to women, men are less dissatisfied with their own body and consider themselves to be better-looking and less overweight. So far, however, it is unclear whether these divergent body ratings arise from the application of double standards. With the present study, we examined whether men apply different standards to their own body than to other men's bodies and whether they differ from women in this regard.

Both women and men showed self-deprecating double standards in valence, body attractiveness, body fat and muscle mass for the overweight body. Men also revealed self-deprecating double standards for the thin, average-weight and hypermuscular bodies, but evaluated the athletic body as more attractive and with a higher positive feeling when it was presented with their own face. Women did not show any self-serving double standards and showed fewer self-deprecating double standards than men. The results indicate that men devalue non-ideal bodies and upvalue ideal bodies when they are self-related, whereas women more rate in a fair-minded manner. Thus, in contrast to women, an advantage for men may be that they are able to self-enhance in the case of desirable bodies. This ability to self-enhance regarding desirable features might be beneficial for men's self-worth and body satisfaction.

The media and society convey a thin ideal for women's bodies, which is internalized by women and men in Western societies (Dittmar et al., 2000; Crossley et al., 2012). Women often experience a discrepancy between their own body and the - often difficult to achieve - ideal female body, leading to the emergence of body dissatisfaction (Grossbard et al., 2011). In the last few decades, however, the ideal male body has also attracted attention. In Western societies, the ideal of a more lean, muscular and V-shaped male body has developed (Ridgeway and Tylka, 2005; Smolak and Murnen, 2008; Crossley et al., 2012), as reflected in photographs in magazines (Law and Labre, 2002) or action toys (Pope et al., 1999). Nowadays, therefore, men are also confronted with an

ideal body that is difficult to achieve. Accordingly, various studies have found that men, like women, feel greater dissatisfaction when they are confronted with ideal body stimuli of their own sex

In contrast to these similar results for women and men, studies also suggest differences between the two sexes in terms of body image. Even in childhood, girls are already more conscious about how their body weight affects their appearance compared to boys (Shriver et al., 2013).

Furthermore, girls' body esteem is already reduced when they are overweight, whereas boys' body esteem is only affected when they are obese (Shriver et al., 2013). A longitudinal study showed that in adolescence, body dissatisfaction increases with time in both sexes, but the highest levels of boys' body dissatisfaction were only as high as the lowest levels of girls' body dissatisfaction

Indeed, in a study in which most men were effectively overweight and most women were effectively average-weight or thin, the men still considered themselves as lighter than they were and the women still saw themselves as heavier than they were (McCreary and Sadava, 2001).

Various factors have been discussed as potentially contributing to the differences in body image between women and men. It has been suggested that the pressure to conform to the body ideal and to look good is higher in women than in men because women are more frequently confronted with ideal bodies in the media and because in Western societies, beauty is more essential to the feminine than to the masculine gender role (Fredrickson and Roberts, 1997; Knauss et al., 2007; Buote et al., 2011). Accordingly, body size seems to be a more relevant factor for the self-worth of women than for the self-worth of men (Owens et al., 2010). Moreover, the standards for the female body ideal depicted in society seem to be clearer, while the male body ideal comprises more

divergent body types, represented by more heterogeneous, also average-weight, media images of men (Buote et al., 2011). Buote et al. (2011) also found that although women know that the ideal thin body is hard to achieve for women in general, they believe that such a body should be attainable for them personally. Men, by contrast, did not show different standards for themselves than for other men. Thus, the lower levels of body dissatisfaction in men than in women might also be evoked by the application of double standards, which are observable when different sets of requirements are applied to different persons when evaluating them

In our sample, men reported less eating pathology and body dissatisfaction than did women, which is consistent with previous studies (Stanford and Lemberg, 2012). As men did not evaluate every body build more positively or as more attractive when the body was presented with their own face, it does not appear to be true that men generally see their bodies “through rose-colored glasses.” Furthermore, it does not seem to be the case that men do not care about how their own body looks; rather, they appear to reject the image of having a non-ideal body and appreciate the image of having an ideal body. In contrast to women, men seem to carry the advantage of being able to rate in a self-serving way if a feature is desirable: If they believe that a body is very desirable, they evaluate it more positively when it belongs to them than when it belongs to someone else.

Arkenau, R., Bauer, A., Schneider, S., & Vocks, S. (2022). [Gender differences in state body satisfaction, affect, and body-related attention patterns towards one’s own and a peer’s body: an Eye-Tracking Study with Women and Men](https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-022-10300-5). *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, 46(4), 735–746. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10608-022-10300-5>

While both women and men showed higher state positive and negative affect after viewing one's own body than after viewing a peer's body, only women displayed worse state body satisfaction after viewing one's own body than after viewing a peer's body. Conversely, both genders showed a similar deficit-oriented attention pattern, irrespective of the presented body type.

The findings provide evidence of gender-specific differences in state body satisfaction after viewing one's own and a peer's body. However, these differences do not seem to be reflected by gender differences in body-related attention allocation. As both women and men showed a deficit-oriented attentional bias, they might benefit from interventions which aim to establish a functional or self-serving way of looking at one's own body.

With respect to the factor Gender, simple effects analyses showed that women and men did not differ from each other regarding their state body satisfaction after viewing one's own ($p = .456$) or the peer's body ($p = .101$), respectively. However, when comparing body types, simple effects analyses indicated that women's state body satisfaction was significantly worse after viewing one's own body than after viewing the peer's body ($p < .001$), while no significant difference emerged for men ($p = .076$).

Little is known about gender differences in attentional biases towards subjectively attractive and unattractive body areas, and how these relate to potential gender differences in state body satisfaction and affect after body exposure. The present study thus aimed to analyze and compare women's and men's state body satisfaction and affect as well as attention patterns towards subjectively attractive and unattractive areas of one's own and a gender-matched peer's body by using an eye-tracking paradigm.

Interestingly, we found that both women and men consistently had higher state positive affect and higher state negative affect after viewing one's own body than after viewing the peer's body. These findings suggest that looking at and evaluating one's own body was associated with both pleasant and unpleasant emotions for both women and men but that men did not experience lower state body satisfaction after viewing their own body than after viewing the peer's body, whereas women did.

Considering that women and men were possibly confronted with subjectively unattractive areas of their own body while viewing the body pictures, the absence of a significant gender difference in state negative affect might be indicative of "normative" body-related discontent in both genders

Specifically, women, but not men, showed worse state body satisfaction after looking at their own body than after looking at the peer's body. However, this gender difference was not reflected by gender-specific body-related attention patterns, as both women and men showed a generalized deficit-oriented attentional bias towards their own and the respective peer's body. As such, this finding might be related to a widespread or even "normative" body-related discontent in women and men

Miyamoto, R., & Kikuchi, Y. (2012). [Gender differences of brain activity in the conflicts based on implicit self-esteem](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0037901). *PloS One*, 7(5), e37901–e37901.
<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0037901>

The brain actually lights up with disdain (

While ventromedial prefrontal cortex (vmPFC) was significantly activated in females, medial and

dorsomedial PFC (dmPFC) were activated in males in the incongruent condition (self = negative) compared with the congruent condition (self = positive).

Additionally, scores on the explicit self-esteem test were negatively correlated with vmPFC activity in females and positively correlated with dmPFC activity in males.

Although we did not find any significant differences between males and females in the IAT scores and the Rosenberg scores, the averaged IAT effect was more remarkable in the female than male groups (females, $p = 0.0009$; males, $p = 0.02$). Moreover, we did not find any significant correlation between the two scores in either group, in partial agreement with a previous study showing no significant gender difference and only weak correlation between two scores

In contrast, we did find remarkable gender differences in brain activity.

In contrast, the male subjects with higher explicit self-esteem showed higher dmPFC activity, possibly because they could process the incongruent situations more cognitively than the female subjects

Burkley, M., Burkley, E., Stermer, S. P., Andrade, A., Bell, A. C., & Curtis, J. (2014). [The Ugly Duckling Effect: Examining Fixed versus Malleable Beliefs about Beauty](https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2014.32.5.466). *Social Cognition*, 32(5), 466–483.
<https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.2014.32.5.466>

while some contend very clearly that

Storybook tales, movies, and beauty magazines often communicate the message that beauty is malleable. Malleable beliefs are generally found to be beneficial, but this is not the case in the beauty domain. Across two studies, we found that the “beauty is malleable” belief puts women (but not men) at risk for harmful appearance concerns, such as basing their selfworth on physical attractiveness, increased appearance anxiety, and increased interest in cosmetic surgery. These results were found when beauty beliefs were measured (Study 1) and manipulated (Study 2).

Thus, the message that beauty is malleable has a potentially harmful effect on women’s lives. This work also suggests that the typical finding that malleable beliefs are beneficial may reverse when the domain in question has unattainable standards.

First, men’s beauty standards are not as extreme or unattainable as women’s beauty standards (Stice, 2003; Wolf, 2002). Second, men are less likely than women to be objectified in the media (APA, 2007; Wolf, 2002) and as a result, are less likely to internalize the ideal beauty standards as their own (Fredrickson, Forbes, Grigorian, & Jarcho, 2007; Fredrickson et al., 1998). As a result, numerous studies have found that men are less sensitive to factors that typically ignite women’s appearance concerns (APA, 2007; Hebl, King, & Lin, 2004). This is not to say that men do not have anxiety about their appearance (Hebl et al., 2004; Martins, Tiggemann, & Kirkbride, 2007). It is just that men’s anxiety appears to be more stable than women’s and is therefore less affected by factors that impact appearance concerns.

By including male participants in this second study, we were able to determine if men also vary in their beliefs about beauty and if so, whether this variability is related to appearance concerns in the same it is for women

Contingent Self-Worth. There was a significant main effect of gender, such that women's self-worth was more contingent on physical attractiveness ($M = 5.57$, $SD = 1.22$) than men's ($M = 4.05$, $SD = 1.04$), $F(1, 144) = 7.73$, $p = .006$, $\eta^2 = .05$. However, this was qualified by a significant Condition $\times$ Gender interaction, $F(2, 144) = 3.18$, $p = .05$, $\eta^2 = .04$ (Figure 2). As expected, women in the malleable condition had self-worth that was more contingent on physical attractiveness ($M = 5.18$, $SD = .95$) than women in the fixed condition ($M = 4.16$, $SD = 1.27$), $t(68) = 3.08$, $p = .003$, $d = 0.75$. Women in the malleable condition also had self-worth that was more contingent on physical attractiveness than women in the control condition ($M = 4.32$, $SD = 1.21$), $t(68) = 2.58$, $p = .01$, $d = .63$. But women in the control condition did not have self-worth that was more contingent than women in the fixed con

Across these varied measures, women who were convinced that beauty is malleable demonstrated greater appearance concerns than women who did not receive this message. Men did not show this pattern. Although men's beliefs about beauty were successfully manipulated, these beliefs did not in turn influence their appearance concerns in the way that they did for women. Thus, the message that "beauty is malleable" led to negative outcomes among women, but not men. Furthermore, the mediational analyses indicated that one negative outcome of this message, interest in cosmetic surgery, is mediated by an increase in women's appearance anxiety

However, our results suggest that men do not appear to show this ugly duckling effect. Although men do vary in their beliefs about beauty, these beliefs are not associated with greater appearance concerns in the way that they are for women.

Foxe, D. (2003). [A changing beauty standard for men](#). *Ft.com*, 1–.

Men are as vain as women, and have had moments in history where they could be masculine and heter-osexual and yet wear lace, high heels and lipstick. Our beauty standard for men is changing, and with it there's a broader market for designer clothes."