

4-2016

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Recommended Citation

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Does Materialism Predict Body Hair Removal Among Undergraduate Males and Females?

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499 Honors Senior Project

April, 2016

Abstract

Previous research indicates that materialistic women are more likely to want to alter their bodies (Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009). This study focuses specifically on the relationship between materialism and body hair removal. We collected information about the frequency of body hair removal, reasons for hair removal, and materialism (Richins & Dawson, 1992). Findings indicate that males and females do not significantly differ on materialist values. Correlational analyses reveal that for women, materialism is related to frequency of hair removal for several body sites; for men, however, materialism was related to body hair removal for only a single site. Qualitative analyses reveal that men who are more materialistic also report fewer health-related (intrinsic) reasons for hair removal. For women who are more materialistic, analyses reveal that they provide more normative (extrinsic) reasons for hair removal.

Does Materialism Predict Body Hair Removal Among Undergraduate Males and Females?

Why is it that people spend hours upon hours altering their physical appearance? Freud (1962) observed, “Beauty has no obvious use; nor is there any clear cultural necessity for it. Yet civilization could not do without it.” Certainly, Western society places a considerable amount of emphasis on physical attractiveness. In order to meet idealized cultural standards, people tend to modify their appearance in ways that will gain social approval. One type of appearance alteration, body hair removal, has recently received the attention of researchers. The current research aims to address whether body hair removal behaviors and attitudes are related to materialist values. Specifically, correlational analyses will examine the extent to which materialist values predict the frequency of body hair removal and attitudes regarding such behavior. Similar to materialist individuals’ temporary satisfaction with their consumption (Kasser, 2002), the gratification that comes from appearance alteration may also be short-lived. That is, those who value materialism may report the removal of body hair more frequently, as well as describe extrinsic (materialistic) reasons for doing so.

Gender Differences in Hair-Related Attitudes and Practices

Historically, head and body hair, and hair-related practices have helped to differentiate men and women (Synnott, 1993). More often than not, we see more head hair on women, and more body hair on men. Synnott asserts that hair serves as a symbol for both genders. Compared to men, women have a closer identification with, and seem to place more value on, their head hair. In Western cultures, although long head hair may be a symbol of femininity, body hair on women is seen as decidedly unfeminine. However, prior to the early 1900’s, body hair removal was a less routine practice due to the uncommon exposure of female body parts (Hope, 1982, as cited in Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003). As female beauty standards began to change, more

widespread hair removal occurred. Media images and clothing styles began to shift, and youthful appearances were encouraged, thus promoting the hairlessness norm (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003; Fahs, 2012). In a study conducted by Tiggemann and Hodgson (2008), about 96% of the 235 females in the sample reported regularly removing leg and underarm hair. Those who do not adhere to this hairlessness norm have received direct social criticism. In the past, they have been labeled insane, practicing witchcraft, or associating with the devil (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003). Moreover, women were shaven and tortured in France during the witch-hunts, which was thought to strip them of any strength or protection.

Contrary to women, men seem to identify less with their head hair, but may be more reliant on facial and body hair to follow the socially acceptable standards of masculinity (Synnott, 1993). The association of male hair with power and strength began quite early, symbolizing sexual dominance and competitor intimidation (Toerien & Wilkinson, 2003). It is normative for men to have short head hair, in relatively uniform styles. Women, on the other hand, are socially referred to as “dykes”, or “manly” when seen with shorter hair, and seem more likely to search for the “newest” and most popular hairstyles. Synnott further describes men’s head hair and body hair as opposite, keeping head hair short and groomed, while dismissing leg and underarm hair. Although we recently see more men shaving parts of their bodies, Synnott asserts that chest hair on a man is seen as sexually appealing, signifying strength and masculinity. Of course, there are differences among men in terms of their appearance-related attitudes and behaviors. Heterosexual men seem to be more concerned with other elements of their body such as penis size, weight and muscularity (Fahs, 2012). However, gay men place more importance on body hair discomfort, and tend to have more of an inclination to remove it.

In contemporary society, women are socialized from an early age to view their bodies as unacceptable. To achieve socially constructed beauty ideals, among many other practices, girls and women are expected to remove hair from nearly all parts of their body. Tiggemann and Hodgson (2008) found that the vast majority of the women in their Australian sample were removing leg and underarm hair, about 75% were removing bikini line hair, and 61% were removing pubic hair (Tiggemann & Hodgson, 2008). However, studies show that the prevalence of hair removal varies with age and race. Acknowledging that the hairlessness norm has become much more prevalent in recent years, Toerien, Wilkinson and Choi (2005) found that individuals 51 years and older were significantly less likely to have ever removed leg or pubic hair, as compared to younger individuals. Moreover, DeMaria & Berenson (2013) found that White and Black women were more likely to practice hair removal, and had begun these practices at a younger age, compared to Hispanic women.

For those who do remove hair, socially constructed attitudes about female body hair can provide further explanation. Basow and Braman (1998) presented a video to participants that displayed a woman either with or without visible body hair. When presented with visible body hair, she was seen as less attractive, socially talented, intellectual, and happy (Basow & Braman, 1998); moreover, among both men and women respondents, the woman was perceived as more violent, active and strong, features that are associated with masculinity. In the study conducted by Tiggemann and Hodgson (2008), among the majority of female participants who reported removing hair on various parts of the body, explanations such as femininity and sexual attractiveness were found to be most prevalent. Other reasons, such as “It makes me feel cleaner”, “It makes me feel confident”, and “I like the soft silky feeling” were also reasons

commonly endorsed by women. Thus, it is no surprise that women feel the need, and even obligation, to remove their body hair.

Since a correlation between body hair existence and the self-identification as feminist is shown to exist (Basow & Willis, 2001), research has been conducted to test whether the negative attitudes stem from perception of the connection between body hair and feminism, or whether it is simply the body hair itself that leads to negative attitudes. The experiment included two conditions: one in which the target woman chose to not shave due to feminist reasons, and the other in which she had more body hair due to a medical condition in which shaving created various problems. Negative attitudes arose for both conditions, showing that body hair itself is perceived as negative, not simply its association with feminism (Basow & Willis, 2001).

Similarly, to challenge the social norms of hair among both men and women, Fahs (2012) conducted a study in which her female students were to refrain from removing their body hair (leg, underarm and pubic hair), and her male students were to shave these parts for a period of 10 weeks, while keeping a written log of their experiences. The women reported experiencing accusations of homosexuality, concerns and apprehension from family members and male partners, and increased levels of social punishments such as gagging noises or eye rolls (Fahs, 2012).

There is also a small but growing literature that provides evidence of body hair being an important factor for overall body-esteem in men. When asked to shave parts of their body, Fahs (2012) found that men experienced homophobic views and labeling from other men. They reported how difficult and time consuming it was to shave, and some even found ways to make their hair removal practices more masculine, using “manly” knives or box cutters to remove hair (Fahs, 2012). However, gay men enjoyed the experience more, and had a heightened sense of

self-esteem. Currently, though, the prevalence of hair removal is increasing for males. Boroughs and colleagues (2005) found that among the men in their study, 63.6% engaged in body depilation of some form. They reported removing hair primarily from the groin, chest and abdomen based on attractiveness, cleanliness, sex appeal and muscularity concerns (Boroughs, Cafri, & Thompson, 2005). However, unlike women who engage in body hair removal partly because of the social stigma related to not doing it, men reported that there was no external influence that made them decide to remove parts of their body hair. In a more recent study done by Boroughs and Thompson (2014), 84.1% of men reported some depilation. However, the degree differs from that of women, where men focused more on decreasing body hair, rather than removing it completely, in order to keep a somewhat masculine and hairy appearance (Boroughs & Thompson, 2014).

Objectification Theory

Body hair removal and the rationale for doing so, can be understood through self-objectification theory. Bartky (1990) argues that a “woman’s body language speaks eloquently, though silently, of her subordinate status in a hierarchy of gender” (Bartky, 1990). She compares society itself to the Panopticon, in which females are the inmates, continually holding themselves to high cultural standards. Based partly on Bartky’s work, Frederickson and Roberts (1997) assert that the female body is socially and culturally constructed as a sexual object, viewed this way both through social encounters and media depictions. Women tend to internalize these virtually unattainable standards and identify them with a sense of self-worth, possibly leading to body-image dissatisfaction and incompetence. Women who view themselves as physically unattractive may have a greater chance of developing lower self-esteem, deeming themselves as less important or successful. In order to meet cultural ideals, women modify themselves in ways

that society considers necessary (i.e. taking up a small amount of space, moving gracefully and modest, and altering various parts of the body such as skin and hair), thus internalizing the view of the feminine body as deficient or lacking (Bartky, 1990). Frederickson and Roberts (1997) assert that these internalizations even have the power to affect later life experiences, and potentially lead to negative mental health outcomes such as shame, anxiety, and depression.

Although previous research has found that women are more affected by self-objectification, there is also evidence to indicate it can be problematic for men (Moradi & Huang, 2008). For instance, Hebl, King and Lin (2004) found higher reports of self-objectification in Asian American men as compared with women of the same race, and similar levels of body shame in African American males and females. Moreover, self-objectification, body surveillance, and body shame were shown to have a significant negative correlation to both body and self-esteem, along with health-promoting behaviors, in men as well as women (see Moradi & Huang, 2008, for a review). In a study conducted by Strelan and Hargreaves (2005), among exercising men and women, self-objectification and reasons related to self-image were found to be negatively correlated with body-esteem, and both genders reported exercising regularly for appearance reasons. In another study, men displayed more appearance-related concerns during intimate sexual encounters than did women, and in association with body shame, were less able to experience sexual pleasure and arousal (Sanchez & Kiefer, 2007, as cited in Moradi & Huang, 2008). Previous research has also focused on differences between gay and straight men. For example, gay men reported higher levels of self-objectification, body shame, body dissatisfaction, and drive for thinness compared to heterosexual men (Martins, Tiggemann & Kirkbride, 2007). Moreover, when experimentally induced into a state of self-

objectification, gay men reported greater feelings of shame, decreased body satisfaction, and more eating restraint.

Terror Management Theory

Terror management theory (TMT) also provides a theoretical background that can explain body hair removal. According to Goldenberg and colleagues (2000b), TMT was established as a way to understand areas of human behavior that may be driven by the unavoidable awareness of our own mortality (Goldenberg et al., 2000b). Inspired by the work of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski (1997) developed the theory of terror management to explain why humans behave in ways that provide cultural conformity and self-esteem improvement. Like non-human animals, we all someday will die, but unique to humans, we face the direct fear of actually being aware of this inherent mortality. Without the terror management behaviors that are used on a day-to-day basis, we would all be living in a constant state of terror and panic due to this awareness (Greenberg, Solomon, and Pyszczynski, 1997; Goldenberg et al., 2000b).

When individuals adhere to cultural worldviews and try to maintain high self-esteem, they feel more valued as members of society, gaining a sense of what Goldenberg and colleagues (2000b) call “symbolic immortality”. Because our bodies will undeniably deteriorate when we die, we are aware of our human limitations. These limitations remind us that we are evolutionarily similar to animals, causing a sense of danger and helplessness when it comes to thoughts of death. To cope with this, humans distance themselves from these thoughts by elevating themselves to feel domination above other animals. We strive to perfect ourselves in every way possible, one of which is the attempt to make our bodies beautiful based on social

constructions of what attractiveness means. Being seen as a symbolic object instead of a human being can help us to escape from our existential fears.

To test these ideas, Goldenberg and colleagues (2000a) hypothesized that when individuals are reminded of their mortality, they will have a greater need to meet cultural standards and heighten their self-esteem. Indeed, it has been found that individuals who already had high body-esteem were likely to identify even more with their bodies, whereas those with low body-esteem were not. Moreover, those who had high body-esteem were also more willing, and more likely to engage in body-related activities, such as sex (Goldenberg et al., 2000a). However, those who felt as though body appearance was important, but also felt as though they did not meet the cultural standards, monitored their appearance less when in a state of mortality salience. Another study conducted by Goldenberg and colleagues (2001) supports the hypothesis that, as a defense mechanism against thoughts of death, humans strive to distinguish themselves from other animals. When assigned to a mortality salience condition, participants showed a heightened level of disgust toward particular objects, events or behaviors. Moreover, humans were more likely to positively assess an essay that distinguished humans from animals when in the mortality salience condition (Goldenberg et al, 2001). Furthermore, Tiggemann and Lewis (2004) assert that disgust sensitivity arises with the negative social constructions that humans associate with female body hair. Women will continue to remove hair from various parts of their bodies when confronted with overall societal disgust pertaining to body hair on women (Tiggemann & Lewis, 2004).

In addition to providing a lens through which we can understand body hair removal, TMT offers a way to explain materialism and the behaviors underlying consumerism (Arndt, Solomon, Kasser & Sheldon, 2004). Thoughts of death may be reduced through the acquisition

of material wealth and possessions by creating a higher sense of self-worth and feelings of cultural achievement. Mortality salience is shown to cause people to purchase and consume in order to maintain and support their cultural worldviews. In a study conducted by Kasser and Sheldon (2000), individuals placed in a mortality salience condition were shown to assume higher financial expectations when looking 15 years into the future. These expectations included overall worth as human beings when it comes to salary, housing, investments and travel, and spending money on pleasurable objects and activities such as clothing and entertainment. Moreover, the researchers found that when thoughts of death were primed, a higher amount of greedy and consumptive behavior was prevalent during a game dealing with forest management. Thus, both materialism and body alterations such as hair removal may be partly motivated by the need to ward off mortality-related anxieties.

Materialism and Hair-Related Attitudes and Practices

Aside from the material goods that are essential to existence, Kasser (2002) explains that focusing too much on materialist values can have negative effects on feelings of happiness and general well-being. For example, evidence shows that when materialist aspirations such as financial success are central to one's life, people report lower adjustment and social productivity, as well as more depression and anxiety (Kasser & Ryan, 1993). As we seek to consume more in order to feel better, these transitory emotions are only working against us in the long-term. We cycle through feelings of fulfillment and greed, never reaching the satisfaction that was initially desired (Kasser, 2002). Similar to the proposal by Henderson-King and Brooks (2009), just as the satisfaction with material purchases is short lived, so is the contentment that we feel about our bodies. We desire to consume more, similar to how we desire to "look" more, whether it is more professional, more normal, or more beautiful. Therefore, those who score higher on

materialist goals may also report removing body hair more frequently in order to keep up with the societal pressures of their current look.

Previous research has provided evidence of a positive correlation between materialism and attitudes about cosmetic surgery procedures (Henderson-King & Brooks, 2009). The researchers concluded that women who reported more extrinsic (materialist) aspirations were more likely to want to alter their bodies, whereas those higher on intrinsic (nonmaterialist) aspirations were less likely to want to cosmetically change their bodies. These findings are consistent with Kasser (2002) who asserts that people are considered materialistic when they base their motivations and goals on extrinsic factors (such as money, fame, and possessions). Moreover, they also do things, and behave in certain ways, because they feel pressure from society or other people in general to do so. On the other hand, people who are not considered materialistic are more intrinsically motivated by factors that promote autonomy, self-acceptance, intimacy, community engagement and helping (Kasser, 2002). Thus, it is possible that individuals who score higher on materialism will report more extrinsic factors for hair removal, whereas those who score lower will report more intrinsic reasons for hair removal.

Regarding gender differences in materialist value scores, results have been somewhat inconsistent. In order to test for materialist value differences, the Richins and Dawson (2002) materialism scale was used, asking people questions regarding how important material goods are for signs of success, happiness, and overall centrality in life. For instance, two studies found men scored higher overall on the material values scale (Browne & Kaldenberg, 1997; Segal & Podoshen, 2013). In contrast, O’Cass (2001; 2004) conducted two studies and found no significant differences between women and men regarding materialism. Lastly, in a more recent

study conducted by Workman and Lee (2011), women were found to have an overall higher score for materialism.

Overview

This research study will specifically address four different questions. The first addresses whether men and women differ in materialist values, in which previous research is inconclusive and somewhat inconsistent. The second examines whether there is a relationship between materialist values and the frequency with which women and men engage in body hair removal. It is hypothesized that there will be a positive relationship between materialist values and the frequency of hair removal for women and men. The third question explores whether there is a relationship between materialist values, and the intrinsic (health/comfortability) reasons for body hair removal among males and females. It is hypothesized that materialism and intrinsic body hair removal reasons will be negatively correlated. Similarly, the fourth question examines whether there is a relationship between materialist values, and the extrinsic (normative/attractiveness) reasons for body hair removal among males and females. It is hypothesized that materialism and extrinsic body hair removal reasons will be positively correlated.

Method

Participants

The sample for this study includes 380 undergraduate college students attending Grand Valley State University. Participants were 96 males and 280 females between the ages of 18 and 39; the mean age was 18.8 for women and 19 for men. Most of the participants (82%) identified as White, 6% identified as African American, 3% as Hispanic and 2% as Asian. Students were

recruited from an Introductory Psychology participant pool, and received credit towards their research participation requirement.

Materials/Procedure

The participants were first given a consent form to read and sign that included a brief overview of the study itself, including confidentiality and contact information. The current study is part of a larger project regarding behavioral practices and attitudes of hair and hair removal. Specifically, the project investigates the extent to which individuals engage in hair-related practices. Participants were also asked about their feelings regarding these practices for themselves, for men in general, and for women in general. The current study focuses on specific questions about the frequency with which individuals engage in hair-related practices, their attitudes about their own practices, and materialist values.

Regarding frequency, participants were asked to indicate the last time in which they participated in the activity. For each activity, responses were: “in past 24 hours”; “in past week”; “in past month”; “in past year”; “have done but not in past year”; “have never done but would like to”; “have never done and not interested”; “don’t know what this is”. Questions were developed specifically for this project. Although there were questions related to hair-related practices in general, the focus of the current study is primarily on hair removal, including items such as “removed eyebrow hair” and “removed facial hair”. Regarding frequency, variables were created by re-coding responses on a scale from 1 (least frequent) to 5 (most frequent).

The participants were then given another list of hair-related activities, including items related to hair maintenance/alteration (i.e. “wash hair”; “style hair”; “dye or color hair”), as well as hair removal on various parts of the body. Participants were asked to circle the behaviors in which they personally believe they should be engaging in, and crossing out the ones they believe

they should not be engaging in. They were then asked to explain why they choose (or choose not) to engage in these behaviors. These open-ended questions were coded based on previous literature and then supplemented by a grounded theory approach. A codebook was devised to systematically organize the responses into various categories based on common response themes. For the present study, I was interested specifically in intrinsic and extrinsic reasons for engaging in the behaviors. For instance, some common extrinsic reasons include removing hair because it is attractive and because it is normative. Common intrinsic reasons include removing hair due to cleanliness, health and sensual experience reasons. In order to assure inter-coder reliability, two research assistants coded the same set of responses, and then met to compare interpretations. Prior to discussion, there was 87% agreement on coding; and, 100% inter-rater agreement was achieved following discussion.

Lastly, to measure materialism, the current study used the Material Values Scale (MVS) developed by Richins and Dawson (1992) to measure materialist values. Items on this scale focus on three different categories of materialism: success, centrality, and happiness. The items for the success subscale pertain to the degree to which material goods designate a successful life; items for the centrality subscale relate to how central materialist values are in an individual's life; and the items for the happiness subscale relate to how much material possessions are needed to achieve happiness in life. Participants were presented with 18 questions based on these three subscales (6 success questions, 7 centrality questions, and 5 related to happiness) and asked to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with each item on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Some items were reverse coded so that a higher score was indicative of a more materialistic person. Cronbach's alphas were .79 for items measuring success, .82 for items measuring happiness, .76 for items measuring centrality, and .85 for overall materialism.

After completing the questionnaire, participants were given the opportunity to read and/or take an information sheet that provided further details about the study.

Results

Quantitative Analyses

The first question of interest was whether or not men and women differ in materialist value scores. Table 1 presents these findings (including means and standard deviations) for overall materialist values and each of the subscales for both men and women. An independent samples t-test was performed to test for gender differences. For materialism overall, there was no significant difference found between women ($M = 2.85$) and men ($M = 2.88$), $t(374) = -.44$, $p = .66$. Likewise, no differences were found for the success or centrality subscales. However, there was a significant difference for the happiness subscale. That is, men reported that material goods were more essential to their happiness ($M = 3.00$) than did women ($M = 2.83$), $t(374) = -2.03$, $p = .04$.

The second question of interest was whether or not there would be a correlation between the frequency with which women and men remove hair and their materialist value scores. For women, a significant, positive correlation was found regarding the materialist subscale of centrality and hair removal for both leg and bikini areas (Table 2). That is, women who reported materialist values as a central aspect to their life also tended to report a higher frequency of leg and bikini hair removal. Also for women, a significant, positive correlation was found between removing pubic hair and the materialist subscales of success and centrality, as well as overall materialism (Table 2). That is, women who believed material possessions to be central to one's life, as well as indicated more success in life, were more likely to remove their pubic hair. Moreover, women who valued materialism overall, were more likely to remove their pubic hair.

For men, a significant negative correlation was found between removing leg hair, and the materialist subscale of success (Table 3). That is, men who placed more value on material possessions as a sign of success in life were less likely to remove their leg hair. No other significant correlations were found for men regarding hair removal frequency and materialism.

Qualitative Analyses

Regarding the qualitative, open-ended response questions, it was hypothesized that individuals who scored higher on materialist values would report more extrinsic reasons for hair removal, such as social norm or attractiveness explanations. Second, it was hypothesized that individuals who scored lower on materialist values would report more intrinsic reasons for hair removal, such as cleanliness, health, or sensual experience explanations. Table 4 presents Pearson correlations between the reasons for hair removal on certain body sites and materialism for women. Table 5 presents this same information for men.

For women, significant, positive correlations were found regarding normative reasons for body hair removal and two of the materialist subscales (success and centrality), as well as with materialism overall. That is, women who believed material goods are indicative of life success were more likely to report removing hair for normative (extrinsic) reasons. Similarly, women who believed material goods are a central part of their life, as well as those who scored high on overall materialism, were more likely to report removing hair for normative (extrinsic) reasons.

For men, a significant, negative correlation was found regarding health reasons for hair removal and the success materialism subscale. That is, men who believed material goods are indicative of a successful life were less likely to report removing body hair for health-related reasons.

In order to provide a sense of how high and low materialist individuals explained their reasons for hair removal, a description and examples of their reasons are provided. Those who were high on materialism were more likely to provide extrinsic reasons pertaining to the need for attractiveness or following social norms for hair removal. For example, pertaining to facial hair, respondents offered reasons such as “Having less facial hair looks more professional in my opinion”, “No one likes a girl with facial hair even if it is blonde”, and “To keep a presentable look”. Reasons for eyebrow hair removal included comments such as “You should get your eyebrows done every once in a while so they don’t get too long”, “Bushy eyebrows are in, but unibrows are not”, “They look better when they’re groomed”, “If you don’t remove the hair, it just looks messy and unshaped”, and “To make sure your eyebrows don’t connect”. Extrinsic reasons for underarm hair removal included responses such as “Hair there is a no go in the states, I was brought up shaving it”, “To not do so as a female I feel is gross”, and “You need to remove underarm hair because it is gross and unattractive if you don’t”. Extrinsic reasons for leg hair removal included “I have dark coarse leg hair it’s got to go, women aren’t supposed to have leg hair”. For bikini line hair removal, some extrinsic reasons were “It’s gross to look at”, “You need to for when you go to the beach otherwise it is embarrassing”, and “Because if you are in a swimsuit no one wants to see the side pubes”. Lastly, pubic hair removal included extrinsic reasons such as “Also depends on the season. Winter I don’t care, but summer it has to go”, and “societal reasons”.

Those who were low in materialism were more likely to provide intrinsic reasons pertaining to cleanliness, sensual experience, and/or health. For example, one reason for facial hair removal was “Facial hair can contain bacteria so removing it can clean the face up”. A reason for eyebrow hair removal was “So it doesn’t itch”. Underarm hair removal was described

as important for intrinsic reasons such as “Removing underarm hair is part of good hygiene”, and “I feel cleaner when I do this. Stubs under my arms can scratch me sometimes too”. For leg hair, two respondents said “Depends on the person, but for me I have sensitive skin and it causes an itching sensation if not removed”, and “Because I like smooth legs”. Intrinsic reasons for pubic hair removal included responses like “Because it makes me feel clean”, “All that growth is irritating”, and “Have sensitive skin and will cause itching sensation if not removed”.

Discussion

Some supporting evidence was found for the hypotheses. To begin, because previous literature was somewhat inconclusive when it comes to gender differences in materialist values, initial predictions were not made. Aside from one small, but significant difference pertaining to the happiness subscale, men and women did not significantly differ in materialist values overall, or in the other two subscales of success and centrality. This result was consistent with O’Cass’ (2001; 2004) studies in which there were no significant materialist value differences between males and females. However, we must not completely disregard the small yet significant difference regarding the happiness subscale. Men reported that material goods were more essential to their happiness in life, as compared to women. This was consistent with the findings of both Segal and Podoshen (2013) and Browne and Kaldenberg (1997). However, unlike these studies in which men were found to be overall more materialistic, the current study did not find a significant difference in overall materialism.

Findings in the current study provide some support for the second hypothesis. For women especially, significant correlations were found regarding materialism and the frequency of hair removal on several body sites. However, for men, only correlations for one body site were found. Regarding women, those who believed that material goods are an indication of overall success in

life also removed pubic hair more frequently. Women who believed that material goods are a central part of their life also reported a higher frequency of leg, bikini and pubic hair. Lastly for women, those who scored higher on overall materialism also reported more frequent removal of bikini and pubic hair. Based on these data, it may be the case that materialistic women, who are more likely to engage in normative hair removal behaviors, feel the need to maintain the “status quo” when it comes to hair removal, compared to women who are less materialistic. These findings are comparable to those found in the study conducted by Henderson-King and Brooks (2009), where women who reported more materialistic values were more likely to want to alter their bodies. Although their study focused specifically on cosmetic surgery procedures, the current study extends these alteration practices to body hair removal as well, and reveals additional relationships between materialism and a woman’s desire to alter her body.

Furthermore, similar to Kasser (2002) who asserts that materialistic individuals have temporary satisfaction from their consumer purchases, materialistic women, in particular, may feel this overall sense of insufficiency, also feeling the need to alter (and maintain) their bodies by way of hair removal, especially on leg, bikini, and pubic regions.

For men, those who scored higher on the success subscale and overall materialism reported removing leg hair less frequently. It is possible that materialistic men may be more concerned about keeping hair on the parts of their body for which hairiness is associated with masculinity (such as leg hair). Since this correlation was derived primarily from the success subscale, this shows that men who believe material goods to be a greater indication of success in life were less likely to report removing leg hair. Thus, materialistic men may believe that maintaining the status quo for leg hair on men is more indicative of a successful life. It is possible that materialistic men may feel as though keeping their leg hair is very important for

males in particular, as it allows them to appear more masculine. This is similar to what Basow and Braman (1998) found for women, in which the woman with visible leg hair was seen as more violent, active, and strong, all characteristics associated with masculinity. Moreover, when Fahs (2012) asked her male students to shave parts of their body (including leg hair), these men experienced very harsh criticism. Thus, males who are high on the success subscale of materialism are possibly less likely to remove leg hair in order to diminish such societal disapproval.

The current study provided evidence for a link between materialism and extrinsic reasons for body hair removal. However, this finding was only true for women. Specifically, materialistic women were more likely to provide normative reasons for hair removal, indicating that they may value the social hairlessness norm pressure more than women who are less materialistic. This finding is very important as it extends previous research, showing that materialistic women have more extrinsic attitudes about body alteration practices, than do women who are low on materialism. It is interesting to note that this significance was not displayed for the happiness subscale. In other words, women who believed that material possessions are a requirement for happiness did not significantly report normative reasons for body hair removal. Future research should see whether this finding replicates for the happiness subscale, and further examine how women who value material goods as a way to be happy are viewing body hair practices. Furthermore, it was surprising that there were no significant correlations between materialism and attractiveness reasons for hair removal for women. Thus, it is possible that although materialistic women may value attractiveness, they may not value it as much as adhering to social norms when it comes to hair removal. Contrary to this, materialistic women may actually value attractiveness reasons as much as those that are normative, but may view normative as

attractive, in light of societal standards. Thus, if this were the case, similarities would be shown between this and the findings from Tiggemann and Hogdson (2008) where women primarily endorsed body hair removal reasons related to both femininity and sexual attractiveness.

For men, there was one significant, negative correlation between the success subscale for materialism and health-related (intrinsic) reasons for hair removal. That is, men who place more value on material possessions as an indication of success in life were less likely to remove hair for reasons related to health. Thus, it is possible that these same men may have responded to more extrinsic reasons for hair removal (such as attractiveness and social normative reasons). Moreover, it is possible that men who value materialism as a sign of success are simply less worried about health reasons (in general) for hair removal, and those lower on materialism are more interested in hair removal as a way to improve their overall health. This makes sense, as we predicted individuals higher on materialism would indicate intrinsic reasons less often.

Research on body hair removal is an important area of study because focusing too much on appearance and materialist concerns can lead to potential negative consequences. For instance, self-objectification, as explained by Frederickson and Roberts (1997), can lead to feelings such as shame, anxiety and overall decreased well-being. Further, Goldenberg and colleagues (2000) assert that behaviors that serve to provide an escape from the realization of death may also unconsciously lead us to lose essential parts of our own human identity. Placing a high value on materialist aspirations, as well as focusing too much on body alteration and maintenance for physical attractiveness are both behaviors which encourage us to adhere to societal norms, in order to decrease our anxieties about death. When we seek to continually modify and change ourselves (thus distancing ourselves from other non-human animals), we may lose part of our identity that is crucial to living a meaningful and fulfilling life. Furthermore, as

studied by Kasser (2002), our happiness and well-being can be affected in a negative way when relying too much on materialist values. When we place such a high value on material goods, we continually seek “more” in order to become “more.” We will constantly be left with an overall feeling of inadequacy, whether it is associated with a deficient body, or a lack of material possessions.

Studying the relationship between materialist values and the reasons for body hair removal can extend what we currently know about how people who value materialism (or not) relate to their bodies. Moreover, this study considered these issues for both males and females. However, this study was not without limitations. To begin, all respondents were undergraduate students, and therefore the responses may be more typical of young adults, and thus may not be generalizable to older age groups. Likewise, the vast majority of respondents were Caucasian, and findings may not be generalizable to individuals who are of a different race/ethnicity.

Previous research shows that older individuals are less likely to have removed leg or pubic hair in the past (Toerien, Wilkinson & Choi, 2005), and that White and Black women differ from Hispanic women in their hair removal practices (DeMaria & Berenson, 2013). Thus, it would be interesting to look at this same relationship of materialism and body hair removal, but extend what we now know to individuals of different age and/or race. Future research should also look at these hair removal behaviors in terms of specific attitudes about other aspects of life. For instance, it would be interesting to see if hair removal behaviors differ according to political perspectives or affiliations. Moreover, future research should consider the relationship between materialism and group identification differences. In other words, it would be interesting to see if materialist values changed based on the social groups that individuals affiliate with.

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Table 1*Materialist Values for Women and Men*

	Women (n=280)		Men (n=96)		<i>p</i> value
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Success	2.72	.61	2.76	.66	.62
Centrality	2.99	.60	2.99	.58	.23
Happiness	2.83	.72	3.00	.75	.04*
Overall Materialism	2.85	.52	2.88	.51	.66

**p* < .05

Table 2*Correlations Between Frequency of Body Hair Removal and Materialism for Women*

	Success	Centrality	Happiness	Overall Materialism
Eyebrow Hair	.03	.04	.08	.06
Facial Hair	-.05	.11	.04	.05
Arm Hair	-.06	.04	-.04	-.02
Chest Hair	-.07	-.01	-.03	-.04
Back Hair	-.08	-.08	-.05	-.09
Leg Hair	-.02	.12*	-.10	.01
Bikini Hair	.09	.14**	.06	.12*
Pubic Hair	.16**	.16**	.11	.18**

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 3*Correlations Between Frequency of Body Hair Removal and Materialism for Men*

	Success	Centrality	Happiness	Overall Materialism
Eyebrow Hair	.02	-.09	.04	-.02
Facial Hair	-.02	.13	-.05	.03
Arm Hair	-.11	.10	.04	.01
Chest Hair	.03	.07	-.00	.04
Back Hair	-.08	-.09	.02	-.07
Leg Hair	-.29**	-.09	-.11	-.21*
Bikini Hair	-.14	-.05	-.00	-.09
Pubic Hair	.05	-.14	.01	-.04

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Table 4*Correlations Between Hair Removal Attitudes and Materialism for Women*

	Success	Centrality	Happiness	Overall Materialism
Normative (E)	.22**	.17*	.03	.17*
Attractiveness (E)	.07	.05	.07	.08
Sensual Experience (E)	-.03	.01	.11	.04
Cleanliness (I)	-.04	-.08	.10	-.02
Gender Normative (I)	.03	.04	.02	-.03
Health (I)	-.01	-.08	-.02	-.05

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; E = Extrinsic, I = Intrinsic.

Table 5*Correlations Between Hair Removal Attitudes and Materialism for Men*

	Success	Centrality	Happiness	Overall Materialism
Normative (E)	-.02	-.07	-.04	-.05
Attractiveness (E)	.12	.03	.04	.08
Gender Normative (E)	.05	-.14	.01	-.03
Cleanliness (I)	-.00	-.08	.12	.01
Sensual Experience (I)	.07	.10	-.16	.00
Health (I)	-.33**	-.01	-.21	-.23

** $p < .01$; E = Extrinsic, I = Intrinsic.