

The Association of Genital Appearance Satisfaction, Penis Size Importance, and Penis-Centric Masculinity to Chronically Discriminatory Ideologies Among Heterosexual Men

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The penis is often conflated with masculinity, yet a paucity of literature exists investigating men's experiences of their penis and their masculinity in tandem. The small body of research bridging these topics generally focuses on clinical populations and is unable to speak to men's experiences beyond these populations. This study assessed, in a nonclinical sample, heterosexual men's genital satisfaction, penis size importance, and endorsement of penis-centric masculinity. Participants ($N = 735$; $M_{age} = 34.98$, $SD_{age} = 14.92$) took part in a geographically diverse online survey. Results showed partial support for our theorization, with men's penis size importance and penis-centric masculinity endorsement predicting chronically discriminatory attitudes (i.e., sexism) and sexually narcissistic ideologies. Penis-centric masculinity predicted desired validating reactions to their penis, including excitement, awe, shock, and fear. We theorize that discriminatory and narcissistic attitudes, and the desire for validating responses to the penis, represent compensatory strategies to reaffirm and establish masculinity status. We situate these findings within broader theorizing of masculinity and sexist ideologies and maintain the public significance of this research as a potential intervention point; targeting these beliefs in young men may provide an opportunity to mitigate the future development of compensatory prejudiced ideologies.

Public Significance Statement

Various theoretical frameworks point to the penis as central to perceptions of masculinity and manhood status; men who view the penis as central may endorse chronically prejudiced attitudes toward women as a compensatory strategy. Our results support penis-centric masculinity and penis size importance endorsement as predictors of chronically discriminatory attitudes toward women; findings which inform the understanding of men's experiences of their penis and their masculinity, and highlight a potential intervention point to mitigate the future development of chronically prejudiced ideologies.

Keywords: masculinity, sexism, precarious manhood, masculinity threat

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“penis size = manliness”

—Bordo (1999a, p. 73)

This simple equation, presented and critiqued by philosopher Susan Bordo over two decades ago, continues to plague public

discourse on masculinity. Men's masculinities and their penises remain conflated; recently, Donald Trump's assertion during a Republican primary debate that there was “no problem [with his penis], I guarantee” and the rebuttal by pornography actress/director and Trump's alleged extramarital partner Stormy Daniels that Trump's penis was “smaller than average” and “like the mushroom character in Mario Kart” (Daniels, 2018) gave rise to conversation on Trump's masculinity and character, as well as the politics of penile emasculation (e.g., Freeman, 2018; Kelly, 2018).

That the penis maintains its status as a symbol of masculinity seems undeniable, and the link between cultural representations of the penis, and the cultural conflation of masculinity with large penis size, is well studied (e.g., Addelston, 2008; Bordo, 1999b; Lehman, 2006, 2007). Scientific research into men's *experiences* of their penis and their masculinity in tandem, however, is minimal (e.g., Del Rosso, 2011). The small body of research bridging these topics generally focuses on clinical populations, such as men with erectile dysfunction, penis size shame, or prostate cancer, and typically aims

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to understand men's sense of masculinity following clinical symptomatology related to decreased sexual functioning (e.g., Fergus et al., 2002; Veale et al., 2014). Though informative, this literature is unable to speak to men's experiences of masculinity and the penis outside of the clinical scope. A separate body of literature has examined men's masculinity in relation to body image, but has focused primarily on muscularity (e.g., Cunningham et al., 2020; McCreary et al., 2005; see Murnen & Karazsia, 2017 for a review); scant work has examined men's genital self-image (Davis et al., 2013; Lever et al., 2006), particularly in relation to masculinity. Men's experiences of their penis and their masculinity in tandem thus remain underexplored in the literature.

In the present work, we sought to bridge this gap by assessing heterosexual men's perceptions of their genitals and endorsement of penis-centric masculinity (i.e., the degree to which the penis is central to masculinity) in tandem; additionally, we sought to examine related experiences and ideologies which might inform men's experiences at the intersection of masculinity and the penis. Given our focus on the penis and traditional masculinity, the current work attends exclusively to men with penises. Further, we specifically focus herein on heterosexual men, given differing experiences of masculinity, genital satisfaction, and the penis among heterosexual and sexual minority men (Del Rosso, 2011; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017; Veale et al., 2014). For example, sexual minority men experience greater penile dissatisfaction on average than do heterosexual men (Veale et al., 2014) and gay men are often less able to obtain the social capital attached to hegemonic masculinity, which is inextricably intertwined with heterosexuality (Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017). Additionally, the theoretical frameworks upon which we rely have largely been shaped around cisgender, heterosexual experience; historically, most work on masculinity and/or the penis has drawn from samples of cisgender, heterosexual men to the exclusion of more diverse experiences (see Dowsett, 1993; Green, 2005). We did not impose geographic or cultural constraints on the current sample given the apparently universal nature of both the notion of the penis as central to masculinity and of certain experiences of manhood, such as precarious manhood beliefs (e.g., Gilmore, 1990; Vandello et al., 2008). The apparent universality of these experiences suggests culture and geographic location are unlikely to inform relevant experiences.

Masculinity Is in the Penis: How Did It Get There?

For those who identify with masculinity and have a penis, the penis is likely the central bodily site of masculinity (e.g., Del Rosso, 2011; Wylie & Eardley, 2007). Del Rosso (2011) attributes the allure of the penis as an embodiment of masculinity to the externality of the penis, intimating (though not wholesale accepting) Freudian psychoanalytic notions of "penis envy"—the purported sense of inferiority girls accept upon recognition of the conspicuous, superior penis (Freud, 2002). The penis is an ideal marker of masculinity given this gender differentiation—which accords with the antifemininity mandate of masculinity (e.g., Vandello & Bosson, 2013)—as well as the nature of the penis as a "verifiable" and "hard to fake" (and thus ideal) symbol of masculinity (Vandello & Bosson, 2013, p. 6). However, the penis is also a unique marker of manhood given its appearance is generally innate and biological, in contrast to the general perception of manhood as "more socially than biologically bequeathed" (Vandello & Bosson, 2013, p. 4). In light of the

association of (particularly large) penises and masculinity (e.g., Adelman, 2008; Bordo, 1999b; Lehman, 2006, 2007), the penis may be perceived as the ultimate marker of manhood—a large penis may allow one to assert himself as masculine in the absence of additional confirmatory strategies, while a small or perceived dysfunctional penis may undermine other attempts to win the status of man (see Del Rosso, 2011).

Penis-Centric Masculinity

Parallel to theories of contingencies of self-worth, which argue that people vary in the degree to which their self-worth is contingent on a given domain (e.g., Crocker & Park, 2012; Crocker & Wolfe, 2001), we posit that men vary in the degree to which their masculinity is contingent on the penis (i.e., penis-centric masculinity). Various theoretical frameworks point to the penis as central to perceptions of masculinity and manhood status (e.g., Fergus et al., 2002; Tepper, 1999; Zilbergeld, 1992). In particular, penis size is often conceptualized as central; for example, men express concerns that they cannot be a proper, "sexually powerful man" unless they have a large penis (Khan et al., 2008, p. 41). Further, men with penis appearance concerns experience sexual difficulties including embarrassment and perceived erectile dysfunction; these findings have been interpreted through a lens of masculinity, with authors suggesting that the conflation of penile appearance and masculinity accounts for these difficulties (see Wyatt & de Jong, 2020; Wyatt et al., 2019). That the penis may act as a threat to masculinity is culturally understood, as demonstrated through discourses of penile emasculation, when men's masculinity is threatened by reference to their penis (e.g., small penis jokes; see Del Rosso, 2011; Kelly, 2018). Additionally, men dissatisfied with the appearance of their penis report experiencing anxiety and stress (Del Rosso, 2011), demonstrating the effects of this threat.

When self-worth is contingent on a given domain, failures in this domain threaten self-worth (e.g., Crocker & Wolfe, 2001). In parallel, we suggest that for men high in penis-centric masculinity, failures to encapsulate masculinity in the penis are likely a source of threat. Failures to encapsulate masculinity in the penis may manifest as genital dissatisfaction, which we conceptualize herein as dissatisfaction with the appearance (including size) of one's penis. Existing literature supports the notion that penile appearance dissatisfaction can act as a threat to masculinity; for example, men dissatisfied with the size of their penis report chronic fear and anxiety about others finding out about their small penises, and experience distress specifically pertaining to the notion that others would evaluate their masculinity differently in light of knowledge about their penis size (Del Rosso, 2011).

Genital Appearance Dis/Satisfaction

Several factors may influence men's satisfaction with their penile appearance. For example, some psychological literature demonstrates that pornography viewership decreases genital esteem among men (e.g., Cranney, 2015; Loehle et al., 2017; Morrison et al., 2007; Skoda & Pedersen, 2019). This may occur through processes of social comparison, whereby men compare their genitals to those displayed in pornographic materials (Loehle et al., 2017; Skoda & Pedersen, 2019). Men may also engage in social comparison with other men, particularly in semipublic settings where male nudity is

normalized (e.g., locker rooms; see Del Rosso, 2011). Some research has conceptualized penile appearance broadly, including aspects of penile shape, coloration, and overall appearance in addition to size (e.g., Morrison et al., 2005; Wyatt & de Jong, 2020; Wyatt et al., 2019); to date, however, much literature on men's genital appearance satisfaction is specific to penis size.

Penis Size Importance

Penis size is particularly culturally conflated with masculinity (e.g., Kilmartin, 2000) and is thus particularly important to men; men who perceive their penis as larger than average experience positive psychosocial outcomes such as enhanced general self-image (Lever et al., 2006). Men's perceptions of their penis size relative to others may be more important than men's actual penis size in determining genital satisfaction, and women's responses to men's penises may also inform their sense of genital size and satisfaction (Lever et al., 2006). Men tend to overestimate the value women place on penis size and may imbue women's reactions to the penis with exaggerated meaning (see Lever et al., 2006; Wylie & Eardley, 2007). To understand men's perceptions of their penis (and of their masculinity to the extent it is rooted in the penis), it is thus important to understand the degree to which men value penis size, as well as the degree to which men believe women value penis size. Further, given the importance of men's social comparison and perceptions of *relative* penis size (i.e., the extent to which they believe their penis to be larger or smaller than most) to genital satisfaction (e.g., Lever et al., 2006), it is also important to understand the extent to which men believe other men, generally speaking, place value on penis size. Understanding men's perceptions of the relative importance of penis size to themselves, to women, and to other men can assist in elucidating how threat to penis-centric masculinities may arise, as well as how men might react to such threat.

Compensatory Strategies

For men high in penis-centric masculinity, genital dissatisfaction—and the accompanying threat postulated here—may be related to numerous compensatory outcomes. Individuals experiencing threat on a domain central to the self-concept often engage in harmful behaviors (Crocker & Wolfe, 2001); this is particularly true for masculinity, given that claims to masculinity rely on ongoing validation from others (Vandello & Bosson, 2013; see also Burkley et al., 2016). Indeed, threats to masculinity trigger several compensatory strategies including aggression, hostility, and anger (Berke et al., 2017; Bosson et al., 2009; Caswell et al., 2014; Vandello et al., 2008; see also Vandello & Bosson, 2013). If genital dissatisfaction poses a threat to penis-centric masculinity, we might expect similar compensatory behaviors to emerge.

Sexism

We expected sexism to emerge as one compensatory behavior. Threats to masculinity in general prompt ideological dominance over women in the form of sexism (Dahl et al., 2015); we expected that, similarly, the threat genital dissatisfaction poses to penis-centric masculinity might prompt endorsement of sexism. Further, given that women's responses to the penis likely contribute to men's genital satisfaction (e.g., Wylie & Eardley, 2007), derogation of

women through sexism may represent an avenue through which men can regain penis-centric masculinity. That is, if women's responses to the penis contribute to genital dissatisfaction which threatens penis-centric masculinity, men may derogate women to dismiss or remove the source of the threat.

Sexual Narcissism

Additionally, we theorized that men experiencing threats to penis-centric masculinity resulting from genital dissatisfaction might endorse heightened sexual narcissism. Sexually narcissistic individuals are sexually exploitive, sexually entitled, exhibit low sexual empathy, and present with an inflated sense of sexual prowess (Widman & McNulty, 2020). We theorize that endorsement of sexual narcissism may be another route through which men can compensate for genital dissatisfaction. For example, the low sexual empathy, sexual entitlement, and sexually exploitive components of sexual narcissism may serve to reduce the influence of others on one's sexual and masculine self-concept; endorsement of these ideologies may remove the threat which can be posed by sexual partners' responses to the genitals, or one's own genital satisfaction. Further, the inflation of one's sexual prowess may serve to bolster penis-centric masculinity, which has been threatened, given sexual prowess is conceived of as central to masculinity (e.g., Khan et al., 2008).

Desired Responses to the Penis

Finally, we theorized that women's responses to the penis might represent an additional avenue through which men may compensate; that is, we expected men dissatisfied with their genitals who perceive masculinity as penis-centric to desire certain validating responses from women. Women's responses to the penis inform men's sense of genital satisfaction (e.g., Wylie & Eardley, 2007); validating responses from women may thus be desired to counter dissatisfaction. Men may desire certain responses from women which would affirm the masculinity inherent in their penis; these might include reactions such as sexual desire, awe, and shock at the penis, which would enforce its masculine desirability, power, and physical formidability.

The Present Study

Men dissatisfied with their penises—particularly men who view the penis as central to their masculinity—may endorse chronically prejudiced attitudes toward women (i.e., sexism) as a compensatory strategy. As an additional compensatory strategy, given the centrality of sexuality to definitions of masculinity, these men may endorse more aggrandizing attitudes about their sexual performance (i.e., sexual narcissism). Furthermore, men who view the penis as central to masculinity may perceive women's responses to their penis as another potential route to establish and/or reinforce masculinity.

We hypothesized that genital appearance satisfaction, penis size importance, and penis-centric masculinity together would predict hostile and benevolent sexism (H1), sexual narcissism (H2), and desired reactions to the penis (H3) when controlling for precarious manhood beliefs.¹

¹ Our hypotheses were modified to include precarious manhood belief as a covariate rather than a predictor, in accordance with editorial requests for revision.

Method

Participants

For the purposes of this study, only participants with a penis, who self-identified as men (including trans-men), and who only engaged in sexual interactions with women (i.e., heterosexual) were eligible for participation; consequently, individuals not meeting all the requisite criteria were excluded. The initial sample consisted of 898 heterosexual men with (hetero)sexual experience recruited from several sources, including a research participant pool at a sizable Western Canadian university and through adverts placed in local businesses, coffee shops, and universities. Participants were also recruited via online sampling through various social media sites, including Facebook, Instagram, Reddit, and Twitter. Participating university students were offered course credit to specified psychology classes; participating members of the public were not offered any incentive for their participation. Data were collected from November 2019 to December 2020.

Based on recommendations from Bagheri et al. (2014) and Garson (2019), surveys with insufficient completion rates (<75%) were excluded; given these exclusions, 164 survey responses were omitted. We replaced the remaining missing data on dependent measures using multiple imputation procedures; no more than 3% of data was replaced for any item.² The final sample consisted of 735 heterosexual men ranging in age from 16 to 84 years ($M_{age} = 34.79$, $SD_{age} = 14.87$). Most of our participants were White ($n = 500$; 68.0%), and either married ($n = 276$; 37.6%) or single ($n = 217$; 29.5%). Most had at least some university education ($n = 241$; 32.8%) or had completed their undergraduate postsecondary education ($n = 185$; 25.2%). Participants indicated that their penis had been seen in sexual contexts by 14.60 partners on average ($SD = 21.58$) and of these, 12.80% ($n = 94$) reported a negative reaction to the sight of their penis by a sexual partner. Finally, participants were asked to indicate (either yes or no) whether they currently experienced any sort of chronic penile dysfunction (e.g., penile cancer, diagnosed erectile dysfunction); 39 (5.3%) participants responded affirmatively to chronic penile dysfunction.

Measures

Penis Size

Participants responded to a single item asking, “How large do you estimate your erect penis is (in inches)?” Next, participants responded to a single item asking how they believe their penis size compares to the average penis size; response options ranged from 1 (*much smaller than average*) to 5 (*much larger than average*).

Genital Appearance Satisfaction

Participants responded to one item regarding satisfaction with their genital appearance which asked, “How satisfied are you with the appearance of your genitals overall (think about size, shape, etc.)” Response options ranged from 1 (*extremely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*extremely satisfied*).

Penis Size Importance

Participants responded to three items pertaining to the importance of penis size, which asked, “How important is penis size to you,”

and “How important do you think penis size is to men [women] in general?” Response options ranged from 1 (*not at all important*) to 5 (*extremely important*).

Genital-Appearance Related Experiences

Participants reported the estimated number of women who had seen their penis in consensual sexual contexts. Next, participants were asked if a woman had ever had a negative reaction to seeing their penis in a consensual sexual context. Men who responded “yes” to this question were asked to indicate the type(s) of negative reactions they had received from a list of five potential options drawn from prior literature (e.g., Oswald et al., 2020); four specified options were listed (the woman . . . made fun of or joked about my penis; laughed at my penis; was disgusted by my penis; insulted my penis) while the fifth was open-ended such that participants could report unique responses.

Penis-Centric Masculinity

Drawing from prior literature, including the Beliefs About Penis Size Scale (Veale et al., 2014), we developed a 4-item measure of the degree to which one’s masculinity is penis-centric. Our measure included items such as “Men with bigger penises are more masculine” and “My manhood is strongly tied to my penis.” Participants responded to each item on a scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Responses were averaged such that higher scores indicated a masculinity more strongly tied to the penis. The internal consistency of the measure was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .81$).

Desired Reactions to the Penis

Our measure of desired reactions to the penis in consensual contexts was adapted from Oswald et al. (2020) study examining desired reactions to unsolicited genital images. Items were included from the original measure (Motivations Behind Sending Genital Images) and additional response options were added to capture additional themes as well as measurement limitations noted by Oswald et al. (2020) including a desire for women to respond with insults, awe, compliments, or humor. Given the original items contained nonspecific references to emotional reactions, we simply changed the question stem to reflect desired responses to the penis in consensual contexts rather than in the context of unsolicited images of the penis. Men in the present study were asked “In consensual sexual interactions, how would you like women to respond when they see your genitals?” Participants were asked to select all options that applied from a list of 11 potential emotional reactions (e.g., “I hope women will respond with sexual excitement” or “I hope women will respond with disgust”), including one open-ended option which allowed for the inclusion of unique desired reactions. A detailed list of desired reactions to the penis is provided in the [online Supplemental Material](#).

Of the 11 potential emotional reactions, the endorsement of nine (excluding the “I don’t care” and “specify” options) were coded dichotomously as either being applicable (1) or not applicable (0) for

² MI relies on the assumption that the data are missing at random (MAR) and not missing completely at random (MCAR; Garson, 2019). MCAR was assessed via Little’s test, which was significant, $\chi^2(1321) = 1507.53$, $p < .001$, indicating the data was not MCAR and therefore suitable for MI.

each participant. These nine items were then subjected to a categorical principal component analysis (CATPCA) technique to reduce them to common latent dimensions.³ An oblimin rotation with Kaiser normalization was employed to reveal two components which explained 23.75% and 21.13% of the variance in desired reactions. Overall, the two-component solution explained 44.88% of the total variance. Given the desired reactions to the penis included in each loading, the components were labeled invalidating reactions (Component 1; including laugh, disgust, insult, and anger; $\alpha = .64$) and validating reactions (Component 2; including excitement, awe, compliment, shock, and fear; $\alpha = .56$). Component loadings are available in [Supplemental Materials](#) (see [online Supplemental file Table 1](#)).

Ambivalent Sexism Inventory-Short Form (Rollero et al., 2014)

The short form of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory consists of 12 items answered on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Six items measuring hostile sexism include statements such as, “Women seek to gain power by getting control over men” and “Women exaggerate problems they have at work.” Six items assessing benevolent sexism include statements such as, “Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess” and “Women should be cherished and protected by men.” This inventory results in two subscale scores, one for the total of items that determine hostile sexism and another for the total of items that determine benevolent sexism. Glick and Fiske (2011) demonstrated the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory as a valid measure of chronically discriminatory (i.e., sexist) attitudes towards women. Further, psychometric properties of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory-Short Form (ASI-SF) were demonstrated as consistent with the long-form ASI using a sample ($n = 960$) of Caucasian adults from Italy ($M_{age} = 36.37$, $SD_{age} = 14.92$; see Rollero et al., 2014). In the present study, strong Cronbach’s α values of .90 and .81 were achieved for the hostile and benevolent sexism subscales, respectively.

Precarious Manhood Beliefs Scale (Vandello et al., 2008)

The Precarious Manhood Beliefs Scale (PMB) was developed using an undergraduate sample of self-identified men and women to assess beliefs about the nature of manhood versus womanhood. The scale consists of 7 items assessing the perceived precariousness of manhood; that is, the degree to which manhood is seen as tenuous and elusive. The measure includes items such as “Manhood is something that can be taken away” and “It is fairly easy for a man to lose his status as a man.” Participants respond to each item on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 7 (*very true*). Scores are summed such that higher scores indicate greater endorsement of belief in precarious manhood. Despite limited data on the psychometric properties of the PMB, Bosson et al. (2021) found that the short-form Precarious Manhood Beliefs Scale correlates with ambivalent sexism in a multidimensional model, and it has been shown to be a valid and distinct measure of the tenuous nature of manhood in comparison to womanhood. Internal consistency in the present sample was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .82$).

The Sexual Narcissism Scale (Widman & McNulty, 2010)

The Sexual Narcissism Scale (SNS) consists of 20 items that examine the degree to which an individual’s level of narcissistic personality traits manifest in sexual situations. The measure includes items such as “The feelings of my sexual partners don’t usually concern me.” Participants respond to each item on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Two items are reverse scored and then all are summed to create a total score, with higher scores indicating greater sexual narcissism. In a study that sampled college men and married couples, the SNS demonstrated convergent, divergent, and predictive validity (Widman & McNulty, 2020). The overall internal consistency for the 20 items in the present sample was good (Cronbach’s $\alpha = .86$).

Design and Procedure

After receiving ethics approval from a Western Canadian university Research Ethics Board, we recruited participants to take part in a 20-min, anonymous online survey. Participants were recruited online and directed to complete the survey through the survey platform Qualtrics (www.qualtrics.com). Upon completion of a consent form, basic demographic questions were asked to screen participants for eligibility. Ineligible participants were directed out of the survey. Eligible participants completed basic demographics and then responded to the listed measures in the order presented above.

Results

This study employed several separate regression analyses to examine the predictive influence of genital dissatisfaction and penis-centric masculinity—controlling for the influence of precarious manhood belief—on the outcome variables of hostile and benevolent sexism, sexual narcissism, and desired responses (i.e., validating and invalidating) to the penis. Assumptions of independence of residuals and collinearity were met, as assessed via Durbin-Watson, tolerance, and VIF values. There were no undue influences from extreme cases, confirmed via both Cook’s and Mahalanobis distances.

Zero-order correlations examined how predictive and outcome variables relate to other constructs of interest, including age, pornography viewership, penile dysfunction, penis size (inches), importance of the penis to the self, men, and women, and validating and invalidating desired reactions.

Bivariate Correlations of Measures

Results of the correlational analyses are presented in [Table 1](#). As indicated, several statistically significant relationships were found. Of note, genital appearance satisfaction was significantly positively correlated to both reported penis size (inches) and penis size compared to the average—and significantly negatively related to

³ CATPCA is appropriate for data reduction when variables are categorical and the researcher is concerned with identifying the underlying components of a set of variables while maximizing the amount of variance accounted for by those items (see Starkweather & Herrington, 2018). The primary benefit of CATPCA over traditional PCA is the lack of assumptions; CATPCA does not assume linear relationships among numeric data and does not require assuming multivariate normal data.

Table 1
Bivariate Correlations of Measures

Measures	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
1. Age	—													
2. Self-perceived penile dysfunction	.245**	—												
3. Penis size (inches)	.037	-.083**	—											
4. Penis size (comp/average)	-.101**	-.140**	.628**	—										
5. Genital appearance satisfaction	.033	-.026	.327**	.469**	—									
6. Size importance (self)	.045**	.111**	.166**	.100**	-.075**	—								
7. Size importance (men)	.067**	.057**	.098**	.041**	-.038*	.455**	—							
8. Size importance (women)	-.089**	.062**	.018	-.006	-.110**	.442**	.310**	—						
9. Penis-centric masculinity	.068**	.046**	.036*	-.011	-.197**	.537**	.208**	.319**	—					
10. Sexual narcissism	.055	.159**	.118**	.128**	.081**	.374**	.102**	.298**	.350**	—				
11. Precarious manhood	-.143	-.025	-.062**	-.057	-.216**	.125**	.098**	.172**	.267**	.108**	—			
12. Hostile sexism	-.105**	.071**	.003	-.010	-.064**	.315**	.075**	.344**	.390**	.511**	.355**	—		
13. Benevolent sexism	-.008	.104**	-.093*	-.072**	-.043**	.253**	.073**	.230**	.324**	.355**	.214**	.539**	—	
14. Validating reactions	-.127**	.012	.029	.030	-.004	.054	.032	.026	-.008	.000	-.047	-.047	.001	—
15. Invalidating reactions	.000	-.039	.043	-.020	-.042	-.005	.007	-.028	-.012	.059	-.034	-.047	-.081*	.001

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

the endorsement of precarious manhood belief and penis-centric masculinity. The importance of penis size to oneself was significantly positively related to penile dysfunction, penis size (inches), and penis size (compared to the average). Penis-centric masculinity was significantly positively correlated to penis size importance to the self, other men, and women. Additionally, penis-centric masculinity was significantly negatively correlated with genital appearance satisfaction. Interestingly, sexual narcissism was significantly positively related to every variable in the model, except for validating and invalidating reactions.

Multiple Regression Analyses—Hostile and Benevolent Sexism

Our first hierarchical multiple regression analysis explored the contribution of genital appearance satisfaction, penis-centric masculinity, and the importance of the penis to hostile sexism—while controlling for the influence of precarious manhood belief endorsement. To that end, precarious manhood belief scores were entered into the analysis on the first step, and scores of genital appearance satisfaction, penis-centric masculinity, and importance of the penis to the self, men, and women were entered as a block on the second step. In the first step of the model, precarious manhood endorsement was statistically significant and accounted for 13% of the total variance in hostile sexism, $F(1, 4392) = 632.94, p < .001$. The second step of the analysis was also significant, $F(6, 4387) = 288.00, p < .001$. Analysis of the coefficients revealed that all five predictors were significant (p 's $< .001$), with the largest positive standardized β value (.219) indicating penis-centric masculinity as the strongest predictor; the greater the attribution of masculinity to the penis, the greater the endorsement of hostile sexism.

A second hierarchical multiple regression analysis explored the contribution of genital appearance satisfaction, penis-centric masculinity, and the importance of the penis to benevolent sexism—again controlling for the influence of precarious manhood. Precarious manhood belief scores were entered into the analysis on the first step, and scores of genital appearance satisfaction, penis-centric masculinity, and importance of the penis to the self, men, and women were entered as a block on the second. The first step of this model was statistically significant, with precarious manhood accounting for 5% of the variance in benevolent sexism, $F(1, 4393) = 210.98, p < .001$. At the second step, $F(6, 4388) = 125.84, p < .001$, with all coefficients statistically significant (p 's $< .001$). Once again, penis-centric masculinity had the largest positive standardized β value (.217). Table 2 presents the results of these analyses.

Multiple Regression Analyses—Sexual Narcissism

A third hierarchical multiple regression analysis explored the contribution of genital appearance satisfaction, penis-centric masculinity, and the importance of the penis to sexual narcissism, controlling for the endorsement of precarious manhood belief. The first step of this model was statistically significant, with precarious manhood explaining 1% of the variance in sexual narcissism, $F(1, 4371) = 51.44, p < .001$. The second step—when scores of genital appearance satisfaction, penis-centric masculinity, and importance of the penis to the self, men, and women

Table 2
Summary of Regression Model for the Prediction of Outcome Variables

	Measures	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	95% Confidence interval estimates	
					Lower	Upper
Hostile sexism						
Step 1	Precarious manhood	.355	25.16	.000	.310	.363
Step 2	Precarious manhood	.269	19.87	.000	.230	.281
	Penis-centric masculinity	.219	13.79	.000	.372	.495
	Genital appearance satisfaction	.066	4.98	.000	.204	.469
	Penis size importance (self)	.128	7.40	.000	.708	1.21
	Penis size importance (men)	-.119	-8.18	.000	-1.48	-.904
	Penis size importance (women)	.216	14.78	.000	1.62	2.11
Benevolent sexism						
Step 1	Precarious manhood	.214	14.53	.000	.155	.203
Step 2	Precarious manhood	.140	9.48	.000	.093	.142
	Penis-centric masculinity	.217	12.58	.000	.321	.440
	Genital appearance satisfaction	.049	3.38	.001	.092	.347
	Penis size importance (self)	.102	5.38	.000	.429	.920
	Penis size importance (men)	-.067	-4.25	.000	-.869	-.320
	Penis size importance (women)	.119	7.48	.000	.670	1.15
Sexual narcissism						
Step 1	Precarious manhood	.108	7.17	.000	.115	.202
Step 2	Precarious manhood	.039	2.73	.006	.016	.098
	Penis-centric masculinity	.213	12.80	.000	.552	.751
	Genital appearance satisfaction	.163	11.72	.000	1.07	1.50
	Penis size importance (self)	.241	13.27	.000	2.39	3.22
	Penis size importance (men)	-.097	-6.38	.000	-1.97	-1.04
	Penis size importance (women)	.155	10.14	.000	1.67	2.48
Validating reactions						
Step 1	Precarious manhood	.065	4.31	.000	.005	.013
Step 2	Precarious manhood	.019	1.30	.193	-.001	.007
	Penis-centric masculinity	.154	8.87	.000	.034	.053
	Genital appearance satisfaction	.151	10.40	.000	.089	.130
	Penis size importance (self)	.234	12.36	.000	.211	.291
	Penis size importance (men)	-.014	-.909	.364	-.065	.024
	Penis size importance (women)	.054	3.41	.001	.029	.106
Invalidating reactions						
Step 1	Precarious manhood	.016	1.09	.277	-.001	.002
Step 2	Precarious manhood	.014	.897	.370	-.001	.002
	Penis-centric masculinity	-.001	-.066	.947	-.003	.003
	Genital appearance satisfaction	-.001	-.046	.963	-.007	.006
	Penis size importance (self)	.021	1.02	.307	-.006	.019
	Penis size importance (men)	-.045	-2.64	.008	-.032	-.005
	Penis size importance (women)	.023	1.36	.173	-.004	.020

Note. Standardized coefficients reported. Hostile sexism Step 2: $R^2 = .28$. Benevolent sexism Step 2: $R^2 = .15$. Sexual narcissism Step 2: $R^2 = .22$. Validating reactions Step 2: $R^2 = .14$.

were entered—was also significant, $F(6, 4366) = 201.41, p < .001$. All coefficients were statistically significant (p 's $< .01$), with the largest positive standardized β value (.213) suggesting penis-centric masculinity as the best predictor of sexual narcissism (see Table 2).

Multiple Regression Analyses—Desired Reactions to the Penis

Next, two separate multiple regressions evaluated the predictive ability of genital appearance satisfaction, penis-centric masculinity, and the importance of the penis on both invalidating and validating reactions—controlling for the endorsement of precarious manhood beliefs. In the first analysis predicting validating reactions, precarious manhood beliefs were entered on the first step, and scores of genital appearance satisfaction, penis-centric masculinity, and importance of the penis to the self, men, and women were entered as a block on the second. The first step of this model

was statistically significant, with precarious manhood explaining .4% of the variance in validating reactions to the penis, $F(1, 4395) = 18.58, p < .001$. The second step was also significant, $F(6, 4390) = 120.51, p < .001$, with four of the five coefficients statistically significant (p 's $< .01$; see Table 2). The largest positive standardized β value (.234) suggested importance of the penis to the self as the best predictor of desiring validating reactions to the penis.

Following the same analysis plan, the regression models for invalidating reactions to the penis were not statistically significant at either the first, $F(1, 4395) = 1.18, p = .277$, or second step of the analysis, $F(6, 4390) = 1.61, p = .140$.

Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine whether genital dissatisfaction, penis size importance, and penis-centric masculinity

would predict sexist ideologies and narcissism when controlling for precarious manhood belief in a sample of heterosexual men. Further, we examined whether men who endorsed penis-centric masculinity would seek to reinforce their masculinity through women's reactions to their genitals via validating responses (e.g., awe, compliment, excitement) when controlling for precarious manhood belief.

Bivariate correlations demonstrated some surprising relationships related to perceptions of penis size importance; we detail selected relationships here with caution, given the correlational and exploratory nature of the analyses and thus the inability to draw firm theoretically grounded conclusions from these findings. First, that genital satisfaction was negatively correlated with penis-centric masculinity and precarious manhood belief suggests that there is an important relationship between penile satisfaction and more general ideologies pertaining to manhood. This finding suggests genital satisfaction may contribute to masculinity ideologies—or that endorsement of certain masculinity ideologies may have a negative impact on genital satisfaction. Regardless of the directionality of the relationship, this finding demands further research given the potential for negative outcomes; both masculinity ideologies and genital dissatisfaction are associated with negative implications. Further, self-perceptions of penis size importance (i.e., how important is penis size to you) were positively correlated with penis-centric masculinity, precarious manhood belief, and both hostile and benevolent sexism, suggesting men endorsing these ideologies place greater value on their own penis size. Furthermore, men's perception of how important penis size is to women was positively correlated with precarious manhood beliefs and both hostile and benevolent sexism; it is unclear whether endorsement of these ideologies promotes perceptions of increased value placed on penis size by women or whether the belief that women place a high value on penis size might promote the adoption of these ideologies. Regardless of directionality, these findings suggest that harmful ideologies are linked to the perceived importance that women place on penis size. Taken together, these correlational findings suggest that the perceived importance of penis size may be an important area for further research and potential intervention given its apparent links to ideologies which harm others (i.e., sexism; see Glick & Fiske, 1996) and are likely to harm oneself (i.e., precarious manhood belief; see Vandello & Bosson, 2013).

Masculinity Threat and Compensatory Ideologies

We theorized that men who were dissatisfied with their penis (i.e., lower scores on our measure of genital appearance satisfaction), and particularly those who endorsed penis-centric masculinity, would endorse more sexist attitudes toward women and engage with more sexually narcissistic ideologies as compensatory strategies. Contrary to our theorization, we found men with *higher* genital appearance satisfaction were more likely to endorse hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and sexual narcissism, indicating sexist and sexually narcissistic attitudes are unlikely to represent compensation for genital dissatisfaction. However, we did find men who rated masculinity as more strongly tied to the penis (i.e., penis-centric masculinity) were more likely to endorse hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and sexual narcissism. Penis-centric masculinity was the strongest predictor for all three regression models. These findings partially align with our theorization and suggest that penis-centric masculinity, rather than penile dissatisfaction, uniquely predicts masculinity-reinforcing ideologies. Additionally, penis size importance to the self, men, and

women were all significant predictors of hostile sexism, benevolent sexism, and sexual narcissism. Participants who scored higher on penis size importance to the self and reported higher scores for perceived penis size importance to women were more likely to endorse masculinity-reinforcing ideologies. Conversely, participants who scored lower on perceived penis size importance to men were more likely to endorse masculinity-reinforcing ideologies.

The link between penis-centric masculinity and sexism, as well as the link between *increased* genital satisfaction and hostile sexism, while only partially supporting our theorization, lends support to theoretical frameworks of gender essentialism and gender differentiation as underlying sexist beliefs. Glick and Fiske (1996) proposed that the development of sexist ideologies may be rooted in gender differentiation (including physiological, biological, and social gender differentiation), such as men's greater size and strength (i.e., sexual dimorphism), men's tendency for stronger social dominance orientation due to sexual selection, and restrictive traditional gender roles (i.e., women's restriction to the domestic domain). When the penis is perceived as the source of (positive) masculinity, this may highlight gender differentiation (between the masculine penis and the feminine lack thereof) and thus drive the endorsement of sexism.

Additionally, the connection between penis size and masculinity is often emphasized by the media and pornography websites, fueling men's concerns of sexual inadequacy (Lehman, 2007; Lever et al., 2006). A significant predictor in the sexism and narcissism models was lower perceived importance score for penis size to men (i.e., their peers). This could be indicative of men's hesitation to publicly acknowledge the importance of penis size to their peers for fear of being misidentified as below average in size, and therefore in turn, lower than average in masculinity status. This hesitation may even serve to benefit these men, as portraying oneself as unconcerned with the importance of one's penis size publicly could indirectly link the individual as being well endowed (i.e., lack of importance on penis size publicly displayed is perceived as confidence). This theorizing is also reflected in both our correlational data and three hierarchical regression models, demonstrating a link between the importance our participants placed on their penis size, the perceived importance of penis size to women and men, and their endorsement of hostile and benevolent sexism and sexual narcissism.

Our findings suggest penis-centric masculinity endorsement can predict chronically discriminatory attitudes towards women, likely as compensatory strategies to re-affirm and establish masculinity status. Previous research has shown men's endorsement of sexism predicts intimate partner violence perpetration, legitimization, and acceptance; likelihood to engage in sexual harassment; and rape myth acceptance (Begany & Milburn, 2002; Chapple et al., 2007; Glick et al., 2002; Mthembu et al., 2014; Rollero & Tartaglia, 2019; Sakall, 2001). Further, research has shown a robust relationship between endorsement of sexually narcissistic attitudes and behaviors and sexual assault perpetration (Widman & McNulty, 2010). Given penis-centric masculinity was a strong predictor of both sexism and sexual narcissism, future research should explore the potential contributions of penis-centric masculinity to sexual aggression.

Desired Reactions to the Penis

We theorized that men who endorsed greater penis-centric masculinity would seek to establish and reaffirm their masculinity by seeking validating reactions (e.g., sexual excitement, awe, shock)

from women, when controlling for precarious manhood belief. We did find precarious manhood belief to be a statistically significant predictor of validating reaction-seeking in the first step of the hierarchical regression. Our findings indicate that men who view the penis as strongly tied to masculinity were more likely to desire validating reactions to their penis from women. Further, penis size importance to the self and women were both significant predictors of seeking validating reactions. Validating reactions could enforce and further enhance the masculinity inherent in one's penis. These findings are intriguing and provide an avenue for future researchers to explore how men may seek to validate their masculinity through consensual displays of their penis.

Limitations and Future Direction

It is important to note the present study's limitations due to its correlational nature; though our regression models were statistically significant, we cannot conclude causation. However, these findings provide fodder for future research that could seek to manipulate penis size to evoke perceptions of masculinity threat utilizing an experimental design (e.g., giving men false feedback on how their penis size compares to the average) while utilizing physiological measurements of anxiety and stress (e.g., heart rate, galvanic skin response, and pupil dilation). Additionally, men may have overreported penis size given our use of self-report for this measure due to concerns regarding social desirability (see King et al., 2019). To avoid limitations of self-report measures, future work should seek to measure actual penis size given men's tendency to embellish self-reported penis length (e.g., King et al., 2019). This would also provide future researchers the opportunity to investigate the potential relationship between social desirability—a desire to obtain approval with culturally appropriate responses (Crowne & Marlowe, 1960)—and masculinity ideologies (e.g., precarious manhood).

Despite the preliminary nature of the present research study, future investigations into penis-centric masculinity as a predictor of chronically prejudiced attitudes would be strengthened using validated measures (e.g., the Index of Male Genital Image by Davis et al., 2013) targeting exploratory variables of interest identified through the present study (i.e., penis size importance and genital satisfaction). There are a host of additional factors that could be examined, including (a) sexual orientation (i.e., exploring gay and bisexual men's experiences with conceptualizing masculinity and their penis in tandem), (b) ethnocultural factors (e.g., cultural stereotypes about penis-centric masculinity and penis stereotypes), (c) transgender men's experiences of their penis and their masculinity in tandem, and (d) the link between penis-centric masculinity, facets of narcissism and sexual aggression (see Barnett & Millward, 2021).

Constraints on Generality

Following recommendations to include explicit statements of the boundary conditions and generality constraints of study findings (Simons et al., 2017), we outline here constraints and anticipated boundary conditions of the present results. We expect that our results would generalize to samples of adult heterosexual men with penises, given the apparently universal nature of both the notion of the penis as central to masculinity and of precarious manhood beliefs (e.g., Gilmore, 1990; Vandello et al., 2008), it seems likely that the present results would also generalize to

culturally broader samples. Additionally, given some similarities in experience between heterosexual and sexual minority men, it is plausible that these results may also extend to sexual minority men. For example, research has stated the importance of penis size in gay men's construction of masculinity and the importance of being well endowed (see Drummond & Filiault, 2007; Simpson & Adams, 2019), suggesting gay men may experience similar penis-centric masculinities. This level of generalizability could be further tested in future research. The results of the present study, involving endorsement of attitudes and beliefs around sexism, sexual narcissism, and masculinity ideologies may differ (i.e., increase) in future studies if progress towards gender equality continues to slow (see England et al., 2020). Further, we have no reason to believe that the present results depend on other characteristics of the participants, materials, or context.

Implications and Conclusions

The present study was, to our knowledge, one of the first to examine men's experiences of their penis and their masculinity in tandem by assessing heterosexual men's perceptions of their genitals, perceptions of the importance of penis size, sense of masculinity, and endorsement of penis-centric masculinity. Additionally, the present research sought to examine related experiences and ideologies (e.g., precarious manhood) that inform men's experiences at the intersection of masculinity and the penis. We found that when controlling for precarious manhood, penis-centric masculinity, rather than penile dissatisfaction, uniquely predicted masculinity-reinforcing ideologies. Penis-centric masculinity endorsement and penis size importance to men, women, and the self were significant predictors of chronically discriminatory attitudes toward women, used likely as compensatory strategies to re-affirm and establish masculinity status. Further, we found men who viewed the penis as strongly tied to masculinity were more likely to desire validating reactions (e.g., excitement, awe) to their penis from women. These findings suggest a vast array of underexplored research avenues which would inform understanding of men's experiences of their penis and their masculinity; priorities in this area may include experimental and lab-based examination of masculinity threat in relation to the penis. Our findings also highlight a potential intervention point, whereby targeting penis-centric masculinity endorsement and precarious manhood beliefs in young men may provide an opportunity to mitigate the future development of compensatory (chronically prejudiced) ideologies.

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