

Conformity of Female College Students on Feminine Norms

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Date Submitted: February 9, 2024

Date Revised: February 29, 2024

Date Published: March 4, 2024

Originality: 92%

Grammarly Score: 99%

Similarity: 8%

Recommended citation:

Vibal, J. G., Derit, K. A., Bobadilla, K. R., Palco, R., & Tucio, R. (2024). Conformity of Female College Students on Feminine Norms. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 2(3), 164–172.
<https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0044>



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ABSTRACT

Gender norms persist and continue to draw generalized expectations of the sexes. Consequently, women must fulfill these expectations to be regarded and valued. The current research was designed to examine the links between women and conformity to the present feminine norms and determine the magnitude of their conformity when grouped according to college department, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. Female college student respondents (356) completed the CFNI-45 scale, which measures their conformity to the nine sub-facets of feminine norms. As hypothesized, women's conformity is influenced by their accorded groups. Z-scores and ANOVA were used to determine the conformity level of female colleges and the difference in conformity between groups. The study revealed that female college students are average in conformity to sub-facets of thinness, investment in appearance, modesty, relational, involvement with children, sweet and nice, and sexual fidelity. In between average and above average to domestic norms and above-average conformity to romantic relationship norms. Religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status are linked to conformity to feminine norms. Results may contribute significant literature to understand women's conformity and the weight of gender norms.

Keywords: *Feminine norms; Women conformity; College students; Gender schema*

Introduction

Widespread societal norms and cultural expectations continue to impose generalized expectations on women, limiting their opportunities for personal and professional development and perpetuating gender-based stereotypes. Torre (2021) states that Filipino women's norms usually restrict women's status, power, and opportunities by putting men's wants and household responsibilities first. Women continue to experience being downplayed for being women, facing sexist remarks and sexual objectification, harassment, unmet needs, and being forced to follow a path created for women (giving way to men's needs, being dominated by their power, and when married, being at home only and caring for the children), which is heavily guided by the norms.

In addition, the desire to conform to accepted gender norms is one of the most prevalent experiences among Filipino women. The majority of Filipino culture is patriarchal, and women are frequently expected to be obedient, compassionate, and nurturing. As a result, women may feel obligated to compromise their needs in favor of others and fulfill the expectations of their families and communities (Jocson, 2022).

Moreover, female norms in the Philippines are a complicated and changing set of social influences and expectations for how women should act. Respect and modesty are demanded of Filipino women. Their appearance, speech, and social interactions all reflect this. For instance, many Filipino women dress conservatively and refrain from using foul language or speaking harshly or loudly. It is anticipated that Filipino women will be nurturing and kind. Their responsibilities as daughters, wives, and mothers make this clear. Most of the time, Filipino women handle the majority of childcare and housework. They are also expected to support their husbands and families (Hega et al., 2017)

Furthermore, women in the Philippines are supposed to be subservient to men. This occurs in Filipino culture, where men are often seen as household leaders and breadwinners. Also, physical beauty is required of Filipino women. Consequently, women may feel pressured to meet specific beauty standards, such as having a fair complexion and a thin

build. Before getting married, Filipino women must be virgins. This reflects the solid Catholic beliefs that exist in the nation (Philippine Social Science Review, 2023).

However, gender perceptions in society are shifting. The standards governing what is appropriate for women and what is suitable for men are becoming more fluid and less straightforward. There is a need for more studies to understand this transformation, mainly focusing on women's ends, as they are mostly subjected to these fixed ideals from society. Also, there are a few understandings about women's conformity, as most literature offers a broad discussion of conformity only addressed in the entirety of gender.

Besides, Jocson (2022) states that younger Filipino women are more likely than older Filipino women to question traditional gender roles. Regardless of generation, the study also discovered that quite a few Filipino women continue to conform to traditional gender roles. Apart from this, the study by Ng (2020), there is an association between Philippine female conformity and the conventional femininity shown on social media. This pressure to fit in with gender norms and narrow definitions of beauty can have a detrimental effect on mental health, possibly escalating anxiety and despair. The study also found that self-esteem acts as a mediator in the association between gender conformity and mental health.

Above all, cultural expectations for women's looks, behavior, and language shape their experiences and opportunities, limiting their capacity to express themselves and reach their full potential. Although gender norms influence everyone, they have been found to have a disproportionate impact on women.

Considering the above, this study aimed to determine the conformity of female college students toward societal expectations. Specifically, it sought to answer the following:

1. What is the respondent's level of conformity to Feminine Norms?
2. Is there a significant difference in the respondent's level of conformity to Feminine Norms when grouped according to their College Department, Religion, Sexual Orientation, and Socioeconomic Status?

Methodology

The researchers employed a quasi-experimental design for this study, utilising survey collection of data from female college students. CFNI-45 (Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory-45) (Parent, 2011), a standardised instrument was employed to figure the conformity level of female college students to feminine norms. It is the abbreviated version of the original Conformity to Feminine Norms Inventory that consists of 84 items. Mike Parent and his colleague narrowed down the original CFNI and produced CFNI-45, which had 45 items. The Items reflect Thinness (pursue a thin body ideal), Domestic (indicates leading the household chores), Invest in Appearance (committing to maintaining and improving physical appearance), Modesty (refraining from calling attention to one's talents or abilities), Relational (focused on the value placed on, and effort devoted to friendships), Involvement with Children (indicates women taking the lead to care for children), Sexual Fidelity (keep sexual intimacy contained within one committed relationship), Romantic Relationship (indicates women investing in a romantic relationship), and Sweet and Nice (pertain to being nice without mention of friendships). Each subscale has five items; responses are made on a 4-point Likert scale in accordance with Mahalik et al. (2003) conceptualization of gender role conformity, with higher scores indicating greater conformity to each of the feminine norms assessed. The researchers also accomplished local norming, which provided them representative information of the average distribution of conformity level of Filipino women.

Moreover, the respondents of the study comprised 356 female college students, enrolled in the first semester of 2023-2024 at a recognized state university in Metro Manila. The students are members of the following colleges: College of Engineering and Architecture (CEA), College of Business, Entrepreneurship, and Accountancy (CBEA), College of Education (CE), and College of Arts and Sciences (CAS). The result of the demographic profiling of the respondents showed that there were 16.06% CAS, 10.99% CEA, 10.14% CE, and 62.81% CBEA female college students, 88.67% religious believers, 8.45% neither religious nor non-believers and 2.82% non-believer, 81.41% heterosexual, 11.27% bisexual, 3.94% pansexual, and 3.38% gay, 68.17% low-income, 23.38% middle income, and 33.81% are with high-income household.

Furthermore, researchers both administered with permission of the following respective college an online survey using Google Forms and conducted a face-to-face survey. The data collected were compiled, sorted, and analyzed with the use of Microsoft Excel and Jamovi Statistical Software.

Results and Discussion

Level of Conformity of Female College Students to Female Norms

Table 1 provides an overview of the z-score percentage of female college compared to the normed data. The results show that female college students show average conformity to the following sub-facet of feminine norms: Thinness, Invest in Appearance, Modesty, Relational, Involvement with Children, Sweet and Nice, and Sexual Fidelity. On the contrary, the domestic is between average and above-average conformity, and Romantic Relationships are above average. This suggests that female colleges tend to conform to traditional feminine norms.

Table 1. Level of conformity of female college students to female norms

Sub-facet	Norming Data		Distribution		
	Mean	SD	Above Average	Average	Below Average
Thinness	7.28	4.49	29.50%	**35.40%	35.10%
Domestic	12.3	2.25	**35.40%	**35.40%	29.20%
Invest in Appearance	7.88	3.08	28.40%	**37.10%	34.60%
Modesty	6.94	2.62	23.60%	**45.50%	30.90%
Relational	7.95	2.52	31.50%	**53.90%	14.60%
Involvement with Children	8.32	3.29	33.10%	**40.20%	26.70%
Sweet and Nice	10.4	2.49	30.60%	**40.40%	28.90%
Sexual Fidelity	10.4	3.18	37.90%	**40.70%	29.30%
Romantic Relationship	6.18	3.18	**39.60%	35.40%	25%

Thinness

The thinness domain reflects the women's desire to conform to the pursuit of an ideal thin body. The result suggests that when compared to the norming data that has a composite mean of 7.28 and a standard deviation of 4.49, the z-score percentage indicates that 29.5% of the respondents have above-average levels of conformity, 35.4% have average levels of conformity, and 35.1% have below-average levels of conformity. This implies that the female respondents of the study have a moderate conformity to the thinness sub-facet of feminine norms overall. It is reflected by their agreement in the item sample that suggests that being thin and losing weight will make them happy.

This pattern of results is consistent with the previous literature of Uhlmann (2020) revealing that women struggle with societal pressure to conform to specific body ideals often emphasized in toned and thin attributes. Along with Relajo (2016) that revealed that Filipino culture is overwhelmed with images of idealized, slender bodies. As a consequence, Filipino women perceived as overweight face negative stereotypes making them concerned about their body presentation in public (Dionisio, 2016).

Domestic

The domestic domain shows the urge in women to care for their homes, including cleaning and decorating. When compared to the norming data that has a composite mean of 12.3 and a standard deviation of 2.25, the z-score percentage indicates that 35.4% of the respondents have above-average levels of conformity, 35.4% have average levels of conformity, and 29.2% have below-average levels of conformity, which reveals that overall, female respondents are with moderate to high levels of conformity to domestic, feminine norms. This is defined by their agreement to the domestic norm items that emphasize the need to clean their house and to keep their spaces clean regularly.

The present results are consistent with the rooted and apparent idea that women are the principal homemakers in Filipino culture, which has long been represented in the image portrayal of women in the public sphere, such as in the media. The public images of Filipino women in the public domain are mostly associated with the kitchen, tending to their family needs, partaking in social gossip, and investing in beauty (Talamayan, 2013). Moreover, Cerrato et al. (2018) reported that gender roles still affect the division of labor in the home, women are associated with tasks such as washing, ironing, shopping, cooking, or cleaning as it is considered traditionally feminine work.

Invest in Appearance

Investing in the appearance domain identifies women's expenses toward their needs in appearance. The data suggests that 37.10% of female college students show average conformity to the Invest in Appearance sub-facet of Feminine norms compared to the normed data ($m=7.88$, $sd=3.08$). Meanwhile, 28.40% are above average and 34.60% are below average. This indicates that female college students conform moderately to the CFNI-45 sub-facet of investing in beauty. It is defined by their agreement to its norm item that suggests that they invest time and make an effort to make their looks appealing to the public.

This pattern of results is consistent with the previous literature that women bear the psychological impact of societal expectations regarding physical appearance, supported in Magdaraog (2014) studies in the representation of beauty in Philippine media, and revealed that Filipino women with fair skin were preferred, associating lighter skin and body size and shape once linked with social and economic status. Backing up, Chen et al. (2017) reported that there has been a significant growth in whitening skincare products in the Philippines over the last two decades, driven by societal pressures to conform to standards of fair skin. Failure to adhere to these standards can result in low self-esteem and societal pressure.

Modesty

The sub-domain of Modesty explains the lack of display of one's skills and capabilities and refraining from garnering other people's attention (e.g., I hate telling people about my accomplishments). According to the z-scores, the result reveals that 45.50% of female college students show average conformity to the Modesty sub-facet of Feminine norms as compared to the normed data ($m=6.94$, $sd=2.62$), 23.60% are above average, and 30.90% are below average. This indicates that Female college respondents have moderate conformity to the CFNI-45 sub-facet of Modesty. This can be reflected in their agreement to statements that suggest that females downplay and keep their achievements to themselves.

Supporting the above, it is suggested that women's roles cast women as conservative, shy, fragile, and weak, emphasizing grace, modesty, mindfulness, tenderness, emotional sensitivity, forgiveness, submission, and a strong emphasis on God-fearing. This societal construction of femininity places women in a particular mold, shaping their identities and influencing societal expectations and interactions (Del Mundo, 2023). In the same fashion, modesty in Filipino culture is apparent in the values of "hiya" which represents feelings, including inferiority, modesty, timidity, embarrassment, and a heightened sense of propriety. It goes beyond a simple reaction to wrongdoing and extends to a broader context of self-perception, inhibiting actions and expressions out of fear of social judgment and humiliation (Tablan, 2021).

Relational

The relational domain signifies prioritizing the maintenance of friendship and being dedicated to sustaining relationships. The z-scores result reveals that 53.90% of female college students show average conformity to the Relational sub-facet of Feminine norms compared to the normed data ($m=7.95$, $sd=2.52$); meanwhile, 31.50% results in above-average conformity, which explains that the 14.60% are with below average conformity. This explains that most female college students conform moderately to Relational feminine norms. It is defined by their agreement in the norm sample item that suggests the importance of keeping in touch with friends, as friendships should be maintained.

The result is consistent with the claim that social support is necessary for health and happiness, and women benefit more from social support because of the nature of their social relationships, which include high levels of closeness and self-disclosure (Bedrov & Gable, 2023). In support of this, Filipino immigrants living and working abroad believe that informal support from friends and family and their faith helps them overcome challenges in life (Straiton et al., 2017).

Involvement with Children

The involvement with the children domain entails women aligning themselves with the role of motherhood, which often involves tending to the needs of children and expressing their desire to become parents. The sub-facet conformity of female college students obtained a z score of 40.20% in average conformity, 33.10% in above-average conformity, and 26.70% in below-average conformity compared to the normed data ($m=8.32$, $sd=3.29$). This means that most female college students show a moderate level of conformity to Involvement with Children's feminine norms. It is reflected in their agreement to the sample statement of the norm that highlights their feeling of fulfillment in taking care of children.

This pattern of result is present in the apparent idea that women take an active part in caring for the children; it is reflected in Gacad's (2019) qualitative study studies. The study also highlights that society expects women to fulfill their responsibilities at home and play an appropriate role in being moral mothers. Furthermore, Dalhag et al. (2019) highlights the "ownership" of mothers to their children, making them display a sense of commitment to their connection with mothers and allowing mothers a continuous role in their children's lives.

Sweet and Nice

The sweet and nice domain reflects the behavior of being affectionate and inviting toward others. The findings from the z-scores indicate that 40.40% of female college students exhibit an average level of conformity to the Sweet and Nice sub-facet of Feminine norms compared to the normed data (mean = 10.4, standard deviation = 2.49). Additionally, 30.60% display above-average conformity, while 28.90% demonstrate below-average conformity. The result reveals that female college students conform moderately to the sub-facet of Sweet and Nice. This is defined by their agreement that being nice to others is extremely important.

These results are consistent with the idea that women are to be associated with communal traits, present with traits such as caring, moral, kind, and soft agentic behaviors. Similarly, the "Loob," which reflects kindness to others, exists in Filipino culture. As discussed by Reyes (2015) in his literature review of concepts of loob and kapwa, loob represents a person's will or willed actions directed towards the wellbeing of others (kapwa). It manifests in forms such as kagandahang-loob (beauty-of-will), utang-na-loob (debt-of-will), and lakas-ng-loob (courage). Mothers are recognized as the source of inspiration in the concept of kagandahang-loob, as it reflects unconditional maternal love. This fuels the other values as individuals are believed to reciprocate kindness as they have experienced kagandahang-loob from their mothers at one point. Moreover, Filipino women are believed to embody the values of loob as reflected in selected epics and short stories. Women are characterized as caring and thoughtful, as they assist others without expecting compensation and seek advice from others that shows their regard for others' opinions. Moreover, they are understanding, affectionate, and caring,

allowing others to treat them as doormats, even if it causes their self-esteem, health, and well-being. (Tiangson, 2018; Vinzons & Jose, 2013).

Sexual Fidelity

The sexual fidelity domain reflects the commitment and sexual intimacy to one partner. The results obtained from the z-scores suggest that 40.70% of female college students show an average degree of conformity to the Sexual Fidelity sub-facet of Feminine norms when compared to the normed data (mean = 10.4, standard deviation = 3.18). Furthermore, 37.90% exhibit above-average conformity, while 29.30% indicate below-average conformity. This explains that respondents were moderate in conformity to sexual fidelity norms. It is reflected by their response of conformity to norm samples that highlight their containment in one sexual relationship.

Supported by Cruz et al. (2020) studies, it is found that traditional sexual values rooted in Christian beliefs remain guarded and conservative. Sex is often viewed as taboo, and discussions about it are considered offensive and morally inappropriate, reflecting a generally conservative sexual attitude among Filipinos. Moreover, Catholicism stresses the importance of virginity and judges women based on their sexual purity, categorizing them as "good" or "bad" women, accordingly discouraging them from acts of premarital sex and casual sex (James, 2022; Infante et al., 2014). It is further supported by Becker (2019), who highlights in their quantitative studies the weight of preserving virginity that leads women to restriction, disallowing their social desirability, as well as creating limitations on their freedom of mobility, further reinforcing societal expectations and restrictions related to sexual behavior.

Romantic Relationship

According to romantic relationship sub-domains (e.g., being in a romantic relationship is important), it proposes that women are more into seeking, investing, and being involved in a romantic relationship. The findings from the z-scores indicate that 39.60% of female college students demonstrate an above-average level of conformity to the Romantic Relationship sub-facet of Feminine norms compared to the normed data (mean = 6.18, standard deviation = 3.18). Additionally, 35.40% exhibit average conformity, while 25% display below-average conformity. The results suggest that women have a high conformity level to Romantic relationship norms, supported by their agreement to a sample item that reflects their value of relationship as essential in life.

This pattern of results is consistent in De Castro-Bofill et al. (2016) studies that state that the perception of romantic relationships is closely tied to the influential nature of Filipino family bonds. Implies that Filipino family ties act as a foundation, instilling essential values like loyalty, commitment, and support. Rooted deeply in family relationships, these values create a strong framework for individuals navigating their romantic experiences. In addition to this, Filipino women need to be understood as Gipson et al. (2017) showcase that family ties such as mother and daughter somehow influence the perspective of young Filipino women about dating, sex, and marriage. This influence can be one factor in why young women tend to conform to the feminine norms of romantic relationships.

Difference in the Respondent's Level of Conformity to Feminine Norms

Table 2 shows the ANOVA results for conformity to feminine norms. It indicates that demographic variables such as Religion, Sexual Orientation, and Socioeconomic Status made a notable difference in female college conformity to feminine norms. However, the result reveals that conformity did not differ among different colleges in the university.

Table 2. Difference in the respondent's level of conformity to feminine norms

Case	SS	df	MS	F	p-value
College Department					
SES	0.075	3	0.025	0.550	0.649
Residual	15.971	351	0.046		
Religion					
SES	0.632	2	0.316	7.221	0.001
Residual	15.413	352	0.044		
Socioeconomic Status					
SES	1.133	2	0.567	13.373	0.001
Residual	14.913	352	0.042		
Sexual Orientation					
SES	0.886	3	0.295	6.840	0.001
Residual	15.159	351	0.043		

Note: P-values less than 0.05 are considered significant

Post Hoc Comparisons According to Religion, Socioeconomic Status, and Sexual Orientation

Table 3 reveals the Post Hoc analysis of ANOVA results that tested the comparison among categories in groups and later found strong comparisons between the number of groups.

Table 3. Post hoc comparisons grouped according to religion, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation

		Mean Difference	SE	p-value
Religion				
Nonbeliever	Neither	-0.096	0.076	0.418
	Religious Believer	-0.198	0.067	0.010
Neither	Religious Believer	-0.102	0.039	0.030
Socioeconomic Status				
Low Income	Middle Income	0.014	0.026	0.859
	High Income	0.206	0.039	0.000
Middle Income	High Income	0.191	0.044	0.000
Low Income	Middle Income	0.014	0.026	0.859
	High Income	0.206	0.039	0.000
Middle Income	High Income	0.191	0.044	0.000
Sexual Orientation				
Bisexual	Gay	0.012	0.068	0.998
	Heterosexual	-0.136	0.035	0.001
	Pansexual	-0.066	0.065	0.735
Gay	Heterosexual	-0.148	0.061	0.075
	Pansexual	-0.078	0.082	0.777
Heterosexual	Pansexual	0.070	0.057	0.605

Note: * Post Hoc comparison using Tukey HSD shows the mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

College Department

Gender conformity among female university students is a topic of interest in understanding social dynamics within academic settings. The research looks at how different colleges in an academic setting enforce social norms around femininity. N = 354 female university students from four colleges made up the sample used for data analysis. The results revealed no significant differences in social conformity among female students across the four colleges ($F(3,351) = .550$, $p = .649$). These findings suggest a lack of variation in social conformity across colleges within the university, indicating consistency in gender conformity among female students.

The results are consistent with earlier studies showing the impact of gender necessity and societal pressures on women's choices of college programs (Beutel et al., 2018). While Fadilla et al. (2020) emphasize the significance of conformity in students' career choices, Wiswall and Zafar (2015) emphasize the value of acknowledging individual abilities and preferences in career decision-making.

Religion

Religious beliefs are among the many factors that impact women's conformity to feminine norms. For an understanding of social dynamics, one must grasp how religious beliefs influence women's conformity to gender roles. A variety of religious backgrounds were represented among the 355 female participants in the data analysis. Using developed measures, the degree of conformity to feminine norms was evaluated. To find variations amongst religious groups, statistical analysis was done. An examination of people with varying beliefs showed significant differences in their conformity to feminine norms ($F(2,352) = 7.221$, $p < .001$). Comparing religious believers and nonreligious individuals to nonbelievers, post hoc analysis showed that the former showed higher levels of conformity to feminine norms. However, there was no significant difference in conformity between nonbelievers and those with no clear religious affiliation.

The results support earlier study showing a connection between religious convictions and conformity to gender norms (Power, 2017). It is possible for religious women to feel that in order to be accepted in their communities, they must conform to traditional gender roles. On the other hand, nonreligious women might have more freedom to define who they are and challenge gender stereotypes in society (Abbott & Anaya, 2022).

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation plays a role in shaping women's influence to feminine norms, understanding of how sexual orientation impacts their conformity to gender roles. The data analysis encompassed 355 female participants, representing a diversity of

sexual orientations, with the degree of conformity to feminine norms assessed using established measures. The analysis found differences in conformity to social norms among sexual orientations ($F(3,351) = 6.818, p = .000$). Post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD revealed that heterosexuals showed significantly higher conformity to social norms compared to bisexuals. However, there were no significant differences in social conformity between bisexuals and gay ($p = .998$), bisexuals and pansexual ($p = .735$), gay and heterosexual ($p = .075$), gay and pansexual ($p = .777$), and heterosexual and pansexual ($p = .605$).

Santos et al. (2023) found that heterosexual female college students in the Philippines tend to conform more to traditional gender norms than their homosexual counterparts, potentially influenced by factors like social pressure and parental expectations. It's important to note that not all heterosexual females conform, and not all homosexual females reject traditional norms, highlighting a diverse range of gender expression. Similarly, Budge et al. (2016) discovered a link between gender nonconformity among sexual minorities in the US and experiences of trauma and harassment. This suggests that sexual minorities may demonstrate flexibility in gender roles, while there is a claim that heterosexuals may exhibit less diversity in behaviors and temperaments compared to sexual minorities.

Socioeconomic Status

Socioeconomic status on women's influence to feminine norms is a crucial aspect of understanding women's conformity to feminine norms. Within the analysis of 355 female participants, representing diverse household incomes, the study assessed the level of conformity to gender roles using established measures. The study found that Conformity to Feminine Norms varies based on Socioeconomic Status (SES), with a significant difference among groups ($F(2,352) = 13.471, p = .000$). Post hoc analysis using Tukey's HSD revealed that individuals with Low Household Income and Middle Household Income show significantly higher levels of conformity to feminine norms compared to those with High Household Income. However, there was no significant difference in conformity to social norms between Low and Middle Household Incomes ($p = .859$).

Low- and middle-income women exhibit higher conformity to feminine norms than their high-income counterparts, supported by Stamos et al. (2021) and Clegg et al. (2017). Children in low socioeconomic status (SES) tend to conform more, reflecting Stamos et al.'s qualitative findings. This aligns with Clegg et al.'s cross-cultural study, emphasizing conformity in low SES and independence in high SES. The study suggests these trends may be prevalent in Filipino families in poor settlements. Ullrich et al. (2022) highlight how household resources shape gender roles, with privileged households having an advantage.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the diverse characteristics and conformity levels among female college respondents in relation to feminine norms. The findings underscore the influence of factors such as college department, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status on their conformity to specific norms. Notably, variations in conformity were observed across various facets, revealing patterns in the participants' responses. These insights contribute to a deeper understanding of how societal expectations manifest in the behavior of female college students, offering valuable implications for future research and interventions aimed at promoting individuality and dismantling toxic gender norms.

Contributions of Authors

The authors confirm the equal contribution in each part of this work. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of this work.

Funding

This work received no specific grant from any funding agency.

Conflict of Interests

All authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgment

The authors extend their appreciation to everyone who played a role directly or indirectly in aiding them to complete the research and providing motivation during the months it took to piece together.

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