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## Masculinity Ideology and Subjective Well-Being in a Sample of Polish Men and Women

**Abstract:** Masculinity ideology is defined as a blend of cultural beliefs, types of behavior, and roles generally associated with men and boys. Previous studies have showed mixed effects of adherence to masculine ideology on men's subjective well-being, indicating negative but also positive relationships. The present study focuses on agency, that is the core of stereotypic masculinity (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007), and its relationship to subjective well-being by analyzing data from a representative Polish sample of the European Social Survey (ESS). Participants were 1751 adults, aged 17 years and older (of whom 771 were men). A structural equation model was applied. The results demonstrated that agentic values (specifically valuing power and achievement) were good predictors of male and female subjective well-being. That is, the less men and women valued their own power and achievements, the lower their subjective well-being was. As expected, this association was stronger for men. Additionally, regardless of gender, we demonstrated that age was a negative predictor and that number of years of education a positive predictor of subjective well-being. This association was stronger for men.

**Key words:** agency, gender, health, masculinity, subjective well-being

### 1. Introduction

Masculinity is a mixture of expectations, beliefs, and historical norms socialized and located in a particular culture (Kimmel, 1997), and reflected in gender stereotypes (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). These gender stereotypes express widely shared beliefs about who women and men are, and also construct men's and women's values, that is, cognitive representations of basic motives, or rather as stable life goals that are important to people within a special culture, and guide their perception, judgments, and behavior (Schwartz, 1992). In general, men are perceived as more agentic (e.g., active, decisive) than women, while women are perceived as more communal (e.g., caring, emotional) than men (Abele, 2003). Consequently, some of Western society's typical masculine characteristics refer to, for instance, being tough (Prentice & Carranza, 2002), or powerful, dominant, and focused on success and achievements (Kimmel, 2004). The latter two characteristics seem to be crucial for masculine identity

nowadays. That is, men's common belief of what it takes to be a man can be equated to being successful, presenting risky behavior, and realizing many achievements (Leaper & Van, 2008). These types of behavior enable men to achieve high status in society, gain respect, and fulfill the role of the family's breadwinner (Eagly, 1987).

#### 1.1. Masculinity and its Impact on Subjective Well-Being

A pressure to adhere to stereotypic masculine beliefs may impact men's subjective well-being (e.g., Brooks, 2010). For instance, it was documented that adherence to masculinity strengthens psychological distress (Hayes & Mahalik, 2000) and is harmful for social relationships (Lease, Çiftçi, Demir, & Boyraz, 2009). On the contrary, agency is positively associated with subjective well-being and life satisfaction (Helgeson, 1994; Pöhlmann, 2001; Saragovi, Aubé, Koestner, Zuroff, 2002; Welzel & Inglehart, 2010). Agentic traits are also associated with the feeling of competence (Locke & Nekich, 2000), self-

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efficacy and self-esteem (Wojciszke, Baryła, Parzuchowski, Szymkow-Sudziarska, & Abele, 2011).

The variety of masculinity measurements impedes the exploration of the relationship between masculinity and subjective well-being. For instance, the study by McCreary, Newcombe, and Sadava (1999) evidenced that the higher ratings on the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale, the greater alcohol use reported among men. In contrast, the same study found that masculine components referring to agency (e.g., assertiveness, confidence), measured by the Agency Factor of the Extended Personal Attributes Questionnaire were negative predictors of alcohol problems.

Moreover, for instance, Sloan et al. (2014) showed that, in general, adherence to masculine norms predicted worse types of health behavior. However, agency traits were predictive of increased physical activity regardless of gender, but also of less saturated fat intake for men. Also Sloan et al. (2014) evidenced that some aspects of masculinity predict health-promoting behavior. That is, men who represent a healthy lifestyle use masculine-relevant themes to avoid unhealthy practices, and construct themselves as autonomous, which is a valued masculine position.

## 2. Present Study

In the present work, we examine the consequences of the adherence to masculinity values (i.e., agentic values) for Polish men with the use of a representative sample. As masculinity is largely socialized and recent findings documented that some masculine traits are also predictive of health behavior among women (Sloan, Conner, & Gough, 2014), we included both women and men in our analyses. As such, this study expands current work on masculinity in three significant ways. Firstly, the review of literature linking masculinity with well-being, reveals some fluidity in masculine research as on one hand, at least for North American culture, reliance on masculine values has negative consequences for men's health (Courtenay, 2000). On the other hand, adherence to some masculine values is linked to better well-being (Sloan et al., 2014). We review those findings to form the prediction that adherence to agentic values (i.e., beliefs in one's own power and achievements), a subcomponent of masculinity (e.g., Abele & Wojciszke, 2007) has a positive relationship to women's but particularly men's well-being. Secondly, we expand the scope of previous research and, for the first time, focus on a Polish, representative sample consisting of women and men, in order to explore reliance on masculine values. And lastly, in accordance with the literature on subjective well-being (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001), we examine the impact of the usual predictors of subjective well-being, such as age, education, and gender.

This study aims to further explore the relationship between agency and subjective well-being. Power and achievements (agency) seem to be crucial for estimating masculinity and reflect how men are perceived stereotypically (Abele & Wojciszke, 2007). The importance of valuing agency as a masculine characteristic is also reflected in the construction of commonly used masculine scales. For example,

the Brannon Masculinity Scale (Brannon & Juni, 1984) includes such agentic subscales as "Toughness" or "Being admired and respected"; the Conformity To Masculine Norms Inventory (Mahalik et al., 2003) embraces such agentic factors as "Winning" or "Dominance".

Some previous scholars on masculinity and health included female participants (McCreary et al., 1999), however the majority did not. We include females in the analysis, since as stated above, some previous studies showed general effects of valuing agentic traits is predictive for better well-being, in contrast to self-reliance and restrictive emotionality (Gutiérrez, Jiménez, Hernández, & Puente, 2005). However based on a specific emphasis put on agency in reference to men, we suspect that the link between agency and well-being would be stronger for men than for women.

Moreover, previous research on men and masculinity has been criticized for not including samples from different cultures (Whorley & Addis, 2006), as understanding men and masculinity ideology is based on a particular group's perspective and may take different forms depending on that group (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993). In contrast, the focus of previous studies has been mainly on North American samples (Coughlin & Wade, 2012). So far, Lease et al. (2013) compared Norwegian, North American, and Turkish men, and demonstrated that these nations differ in terms of men's endorsement of masculinity norms. To specify, they documented that Norwegian men had significantly lower scores on a measure of masculinity ideology than both Turkish and US men. To date, no research has been conducted in Poland, although it is important to cross-reference findings with other countries for validation (see Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek, 2007). We use European Social Survey (ESS) data, collected biennially in the majority of European countries. The sample of every wave of this survey is representative of the specific society. Thus, in comparison to other studies, in which many of the results are based on non-representative student samples (e.g., Mahalik et al., 2003; Lease et al., 2013), our analyses provide a significant contribution to the field. Poland is the largest country in Central and Eastern Europe that, after nearly 50 years, was liberated from communism in 1989. Although communists promoted non-traditional gender values (e.g., equal contributions between men and women to the country's economic growth), adherence to traditional values among Poles remained very high. This is reflected, for instance, in the number of declared Polish Catholics (92.2% according to the Pew Research Center, 2011). On the other hand, Polish society is masculine driven, i.e., motivated by the male individual's own achievements and success (Hofstede, 2001), and very high level of uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede, 2001), which indicates a low tolerance to non-traditional behavior and attitudes. Therefore, the cultural context of post-communist countries might influence our understanding of masculinity as well. Being aware that aforementioned Hofstede's findings (2001) might be a bit outdated, we still expect that adherence to traditional masculine beliefs might be very important for the well-being of Polish men, and feelings of "not fulfilling" gender rules might have negative consequences for them. In other words, we hypothesize that

adherence masculine values (i.e., power and achievements) will be a predictor for Polish men's health; that is, the less men perceive themselves as successful and with many achievements, the lower they evaluate their subjective well-being. In addition, basing on Erickson's (1950, 1959) model of development, we hypothesize that age is positively related to valuing being respected.

## Method

### 2.1. European Social Survey (ESS)

The data used in these analyses are from the Polish sample of Round 5 of the ESS. The sample is representative and consist of all persons aged 15 years and above (no upper age limit), who reside within private households in each country. The ESS contains the Portrait of Values Questionnaire (Schwartz, Melech, Lehmann, Burgess, & Harris, 2001), which can be used to study masculinity. Specifically, to indicate masculinity, the values power (PO) and achievement (AC) can be used with items such as "Being very successful is important to him" and "He hopes people will recognize his achievements." A recent analysis of ESS data (Davidov, Schmidt, & Schwartz, 2008) indeed showed that the aforementioned pair of values cluster together, and they were labeled accordingly as self-enhancement (PO and AC).

To evaluate subjective well-being, we used the most common measures of subjective well-being, that is happiness and life satisfaction. These measures have been evaluated in ESS in every round, including Round 5, and they follow, in general, a "hedonic well-being approach which emphasizes positive feelings" (European Social Survey, 2015, p. 2). In the ESS survey, happiness is defined as emotional responses and measures their current feelings, while life satisfaction is conceptualized in terms of people cognitive and evaluative responses and measures how people assess their life as a whole (Clark & Senik, 2011).

In addition, we included an item measuring subjective physical health in our analysis.

The criteria for accepting the models were based on commonly used cut-off values for model evaluation (Brown, 2015; Hu & Bentler, 1998). Taking into account the large sample used in our study, we did not solely rely on the chi-square fit index, as it is inflated by the sample size (Brown, 2015). Therefore, we also considered other fit indices: for absolute fit, the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) should be below 0.08; with respect to parsimony correction, the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA) should be below 0.08; and for comparative fit indices, the comparative fit index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) should be above 0.95.

### 2.2. Participants and Design

The Polish ESS survey was conducted between October 2010 and February 2011 via pen-and-paper interviews, and covered the entire Polish territory. The response rate for the main questionnaire was 70.26%, resulting in a total sample size of 1751, of whom 841

were men. To obtain a culturally coherent sample, we included only people whose parents were born in Poland, that resulted in 771 men,  $M_{age} = 42.56$ ,  $SD_{age} = 18.26$  and 855 women  $M_{age} = 44.97$ ,  $SD_{age} = 19.25$ .

## 2.3. Measures

### 2.3.1. Subjective well-being

In general, we understand subjective well-being as a perception of quality of life; it indicates a positive orientation towards life by including happiness and life-satisfaction (Diener, 1984; George, 2010). Research has shown that various measures of subjective well-being are mostly interrelated and that they frequently constitute a single dimension (Slocum-Gori, Zumbo, Michalos, & Diener, 2009). Thus, in our analyses, we operationalized subjective well-being by including two items measuring mental well-being (subjective happiness and life satisfaction) and one item measuring physical well-being (subjective health). Thus altogether, subjective well-being was measured with three items: happiness ("Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are?", evaluated on a 10-point scale, ranging from 0 = extremely unhappy, to 10 = extremely happy), satisfaction ("All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life on the whole nowadays?", evaluated on a 10-point scale, ranging from 0 = extremely dissatisfied, to 10 = extremely satisfied.), and subjective physical well-being i.e., subjective health ("How is your health in general? Would you say it is...?", with the responses being evaluated on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 = very good, to 5 = very bad. To facilitate the interpretation of the results, we recoded the answers so that 5 represented very good health.

All items measuring subjective well-being were a part of the European Social Survey (ESS).

### 2.3.2. Agency

We used four items to measure agency operationalized as valuing power and achievements. Participants replied to the following task: "Now I will briefly describe some people. Please listen to each description and tell me how much each person is or is not like you: "Being very successful is important to him/her. He/she hopes people will recognize his/her achievements", "It is important to him/her to be rich. He/she wants to have a lot of money and expensive things", "It is important to him/her to get respect from others. He/she wants people to do what he/she says", and "It is important to him/her to show his/her abilities. He/she wants people to admire what he/she does". The answers were evaluated on a 6-point scale, ranging from 1 = *very much like me* to 6 = *not like me at all*.

Additionally, we also decided to include age and education in years, as meta-analyses show that these variables are positively related to subjective well-being<sup>1</sup> (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001). Finally, we included gender of participants (coded as 0 for men and 1 for women).

The measures of agency utilized in this study, were a part of the European Social Survey (ESS).

<sup>1</sup> The meta-analyses also indicate an income as a potential predictor of subjective well-being, but our preliminary analyses did not reveal the link between income and men's and women's health.

### 3. Results

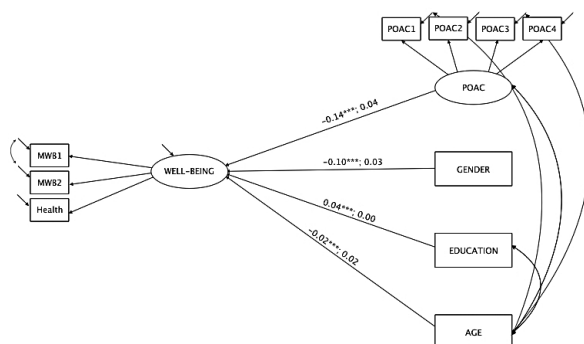
#### 3.1. Measurement Model

In order to validate whether the two scales used in the study, Agency and Subjective Well-Being, reflect the two different constructs, we conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (Brown, 2006) by using a Robust Maximum Likelihood estimation procedure in MPlus7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012). We specified a measurement model that comprises the two latent factors underlying the respective scale's items. These latent factors were allowed to correlate and the covariance of the errors of the manifest variables was set to be zero, except of one as indicated in the modification indices. This modification index was most likely due to the fact that the two items were measured with the use of the reverse answer format (Brown, 2015). As indicated by the criteria for model acceptance in the Method section, due to the large sample size we did not rely on the significant chi-square statistic as it is dependent on the sample size (chi-square(13) = 78.18  $p < .001$ ). The other indices indicated the overall model fit were good: chi-square/df = 6, RMSEA = 0.056 (90% LCI = 0.04; 90% UCI = 0.07), CFI = 0.97; TLI = 0.95, which suggests that values of power and achievement ( $\omega = 0.67$ ) and subjective well-being ( $\omega = 0.52$ ) indeed constitute two separate factors.

#### 3.2. Structural Model

In order to test whether subjective well-being is related to the participants' gender and how much they value power and achievement, we conducted a structural equation model to test those relations. Additionally, we included age and education in years as standard predictors of subjective well-being based on the previous literature (e.g., Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004). Moreover, based on modification indices we included codependences in the model as indicated in the Figure 1. Specifically, this relates to age and valuing power

**Figure 1. Structural model showing the relationship between all predictors and subjective well-being**



Unstandardized coefficients and their standard errors are presented, and dotted lines present insignificant paths. Asterisks indicate significant paths (\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ).

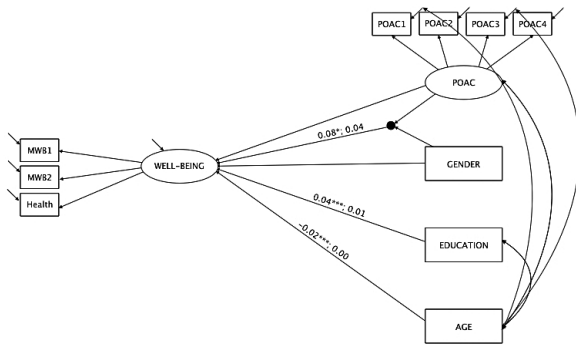
and achievements, as well as age and number of years in education (Schwartz, 2003). Additionally, based on model modification indices, we allowed for the correlation of age with the residual of the power indicators, both addressing value of public recognition and respect. While taking into account, for instance, Erickson's (1950, 1959) model of development, the hypothesis that age is positively related to the valuing of being respected might be justified. As indicated by the criteria for model acceptance in the Method section, due to the large sample size we did not rely on the significant chi-square statistic as it is dependent on the sample size (chi-square(29) = 160.20,  $p < .001$ ). The other indices indicated the overall model fit were good: chi-square/df = 5.52.

RMSEA = 0.05 (90% LCI = 0.04; 90% UCI = 0.06), CFI = 0.96; TLI = 0.94. Similar to previous studies (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2006), we observed a positive relationship between subjective well-being and education. A one-year increase in the number of years' education is associated with a 0.04 change in the latent score of subjective well-being. In other words, the more educated people are, the higher their subjective well-being. Moreover, we observed a negative relationship between subjective well-being and age. A one-year increase in age is associated with a  $-0.02$  change in the latent score of subjective well-being. In other words, the older people are, the lower their subjective well-being. More importantly, however, a one-unit change in the valuing of power and achievement is associated with a  $-0.14$  change in the latent factor of subjective well-being. That is, the lower people value power and achievement, the lower their subjective well-being. Finally, gender was also an important predictor of subjective well-being, in a sense that women had  $-0.10$  lower scores than men on a latent subjective well-being scale. Because we predicted that the relationship between the valuing of power and achievement and subjective well-being would be different for men and women, we ran a second analysis by employing the Klein and Moosbrugger (2000) procedure, implemented in MPlus7 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2012), which allowed us to construe the interaction term of an observed variable and a latent variable with the variance of the latent factor fixed to 1. The specified model is presented in Figure 2. As predicted, the interaction between gender and the valuing of power and achievement was significant. As presented in Figure 3, the relationship between the predictors and the valuing of power and achievement is stronger for men than for women as indicated by a steeper slope for men than for women<sup>2</sup>.

To conclude, our study documented that age and income are significant predictors of subjective well-being. That is, we showed negative links both for age and subjective well-being, and for income and subjective well-being. More importantly, we evidenced that the lower people value power and achievement, the lower subjective well-being they report, regardless of their gender. Finally, we showed that the link between agency and subjective well-being is stronger for men than for women.

<sup>2</sup> The analysis conducted separately for men and women indicated that for men the relationship of valuing power and agency with subjective well-being was significant ( $B = -.02$ ;  $SE = 0.06$ ;  $p = .005$ ), and for women ( $B = -.01$ ;  $SE = 0.07$ ;  $p = .05$ ). The analysis of the interaction of gender and valuing power and achievement presented in the main text indicates the significance of that gender difference as plotted in Figure 3.

**Figure 2. Structural model showing the relationship between all predictors and subjective well-being**



Unstandardized coefficients and their standard errors are presented, and dotted lines present insignificant paths. Asterisks indicate significant paths (\*\*  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < .001$ ).

**4. General Discussion**

Our results show that valuing one’s agency (specifically own power and achievements) is a significant predictor of subjective well-being (specifically happiness, life satisfaction and subjective health) for both Polish men and women. That is, the less men and women value their own agency (specifically their power and achievements), the lower their subjective well-being is. As expected, this association is stronger for men. Additionally, regardless of gender, we demonstrated that age is a negative predictor and number of years’ education a positive predictor of subjective well-being.

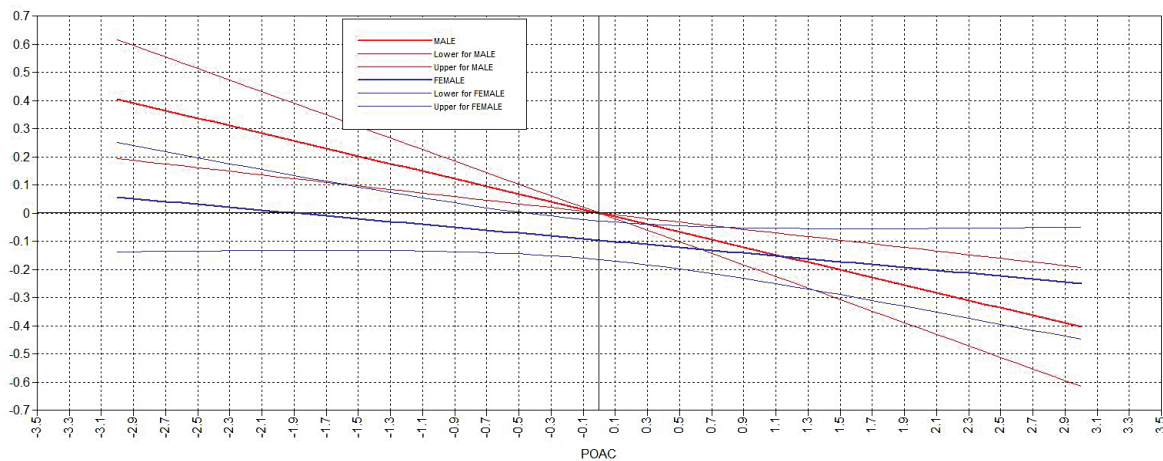
The latter finding regarding age is partially in accordance with findings previously evidenced in the literature on subjective well-being. In line with this research, a negative relationship between age and subjective well-being was often found (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008). However, the findings about the relationship between age and subjective well-being are inconsistent.

For instance, a positive relationship between age squared and subjective well-being was found (e.g., Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; Ferrer, Carbonell & Gowdy, 2007), indicating a U-shaped curve with higher levels of subjective well-being at younger and older age points and the lowest levels of subjective well-being occurring in middle age. Other studies show that there are no age differences in subjective well-being (e.g., Inglehart, 1990), indicating that high subjective well-being is available to people of all ages (Myers & Diener, 1995). Moreover, not only actual age but also age identity (namely subjective or ideal age) was found to predict subjective well-being. Among older adults, a younger age identity positively predicted their subjective well-being (Logan, Ward, & Spitze, 1992; Westerhof & Barrett, 2005). In addition, the lower the difference between actual age and age identity, and the less fear related to aging, the higher the subjective well-being (Kotter-Grühn, Kleinspehn-Ammerlahn, Gerstorf, & Smith, 2009; Uotinen, 2005).

The link between education and subjective well-being in past research is more straightforward. Since education is related to income (Dolan, Peasgood, & White, 2008), past research documented not only a positive relationship between education and subjective well-being, but also between income and subjective well-being (e.g., Blanchflower & Oswald, 2004; life satisfaction but not happiness in Kahneman & Deaton, 2010). In addition to these direct effects, a positive indirect effect of education on subjective well-being via health was also found in samples from the US and Sweden (Bukanya, Gebremedhin, & Schaeffer, 2003; Gerdtham & Johannesson, 2001). Furthermore, in a sample from Latin America, a positive effect of higher education on overall happiness was discovered, but only if social mobility and relative economic standing were not included in the analysis (Graham & Pettinato, 2001).

In this reading, however, our principal focus will be on the impact of the adherence to masculine beliefs on subjective well-being. As was hinted in the first sections of

**Figure 3. Interaction plot with 95% confidence bands**



Y-axis represents the Subjective Well-Being and X-Axis represents valuing power and achievement (POAC). Please note, that the scaling of the POAC is reversed and high scores represent low valuing of power and achievement.

**Table 1. Means, standard deviations and correlation coefficients for all the items and latent variables**

	M	SD	POAC2	POAC3	POAC4	WB1	WB2	WB3	Age	Education	Gender	WB
<b>POAC1</b>	3.69	1.29	.24***	.34***	.36***	-.06*	-.07**	-.20***	.26***	-.06*	.18***	
<b>POAC2</b>	2.82	1.32		.30***	.23***	-.05*	-.03	.00	-.06*	.00	.02	
<b>POAC3</b>	2.97	1.31			.53***	-.12***	-.13***	-.20***	.22***	-.14***	.06**	
<b>POAC4</b>	2.89	1.26				-.17***	-.19***	-.29***	.36***	-.25***	.08**	
<b>WB1</b>	6.99	2.22					.73***	.38***	-.21***	.18***	.00	
<b>WB2</b>	7.32	2.02						.38***	-.22***	.16***	.00	
<b>WB3</b>	3.68	0.95							-.57***	.31***	-.10***	
<b>Age</b>	43.83	18.82								-.30***	.06*	
<b>Education</b>	12.47	3.47									.01	
<b>Gender</b>	0.53	0.50										
<b>POAC</b>									0.50***	-.24***	.00	-.39***
<b>WB</b>									-.58***	0.32***	-.06**	

Asterisks indicate significant paths (\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ ).

POAC1 – Important to be rich, have money and expensive things (imprich)

POAC2 – Important to get respect from others (iprspt)

POAC3 – Important to show abilities and be admired (ipshabt)

POAC4 – Important to be successful and that people recognize achievements (ipsuces)

WB1 – How satisfied with life as a whole (stflife)

WB2 – How happy are you (happy)

WB3 – Subjective general health (health – recoded)

this article, the majority of studies refers to North American culture and should be generalized to include other cultures with some caution. Thus, the first important finding of this study is that masculinity (understood in terms of agency) is an important predictor of men's and women's subjective well-being also in Polish society. Our findings corroborate well with the work of Sloan et al. (2014), who demonstrated that agentic traits (e.g., being independent, active, and competitive) are predictive for a healthier lifestyle, in particular for men.

The previous literature is not so rich on women. On one hand, it is clearly documented that women live longer than men, and this is true for many cultures. On the other hand, studies on subjective well-being generally document that women report lower subjective well-being than men (Pinquart & Sorensen, 2001). However, the image of women has been increasingly changing, and more agentic traits have been associated with them. This is especially true for women who enter male-dominated fields and hold positions that were previously reserved for men. As a consequence and in accord with Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1984; Eagly, Wood, & Diekmann, 2000), women may have embraced these role requirements rather than stereotypical female requirements, and many women might internalize values of being successful and powerful this in turn may also impact on their subjective well-being.

As with any research, this study's limitations should be noted. Firstly, our results refer only to one subcom-

ponent of masculinity: agency (i.e., valuing success and achievements). Although agency seems to be a key characteristic of masculinity among different cultures, its other components might be important as well. According to our review, while agency has a positive relationship to subjective well-being, other subcomponents of masculinity may show a reverse pattern. A thorough and systematic analysis of how various subcomponents of masculinity affect well-being would therefore be very informative.

Another limitation of our study is that we used a single-item to evaluate the subjective health of participants. This was a consequence of utilizing ESS data, however such measures are commonly used for subjective well-being (Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999) because they are short, and they also enable cross-national comparisons since happiness and life satisfaction translate well across cultures (George, 2010). Moreover, it has to be highlighted, that this one item became a part of a three-item latent variable. The use of CFA allowed us to include items with different response format and account for the measurement error as it involves the correction for attenuation accounting for the reliability of the scales.

Finally, the results obtained affirm that the understanding of masculinity might vary between different cultures. Therefore, unique cultural values play a role in defining what is seen as appropriate masculinity for members of a specific culture. Future research can expand this study's scope by including measures of cultural identity

or collectivism, which might influence the internalization of cultural definitions of masculinity. This might contribute to a better understanding of how masculinity is culturally constructed.

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