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## Research in the Psychology of Men and Masculinity Using the Gender Role Strain Paradigm as a Framework

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*This article introduces the specialty area of the psychology of men and masculinity to the broader community of American psychologists, focusing on research conducted using the gender role strain paradigm. The review covers the rationale for and aims of the psychology of men and masculinity and the gender role strain paradigm. It provides an extensive discussion of masculinity ideologies—the core construct in the strain paradigm—including the definition of masculinity ideology and considerations of masculinity ideology versus masculinity ideologies, traditional masculinity ideology, the measurement of masculinity ideologies, the Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised, women's and adolescent's*

*masculinity ideologies, and conformity to masculine norms. It then takes up the 3 types of masculine gender role strain (discrepancy, dysfunction, and trauma) and the normative male alexithymia hypothesis. Finally, it considers future research directions.*

*Keywords:* psychology of men and masculinity, gender role strain paradigm, masculinity ideologies, normative male alexithymia



## Rationale for a Psychology of Men and Masculinity

Before I begin with a discussion of selected research in the psychology of men and masculinity using the gender role strain paradigm (GRSP) as a framework, it is important to address the question sometimes asked by those not familiar with this field: Why do we need a psychology of men? Isn't all psychology the psychology of men? It is true that boys and men have historically been the focal point of most psychological research, but these were studies that viewed males as representative of humanity as a whole and that regarded the norms of masculinity as the standards for the behavior of both males and females. Beginning in the 1960s, feminist scholars challenged this male-centric viewpoint, making the case for a gender-specific approach, and in the past 50 years have created a new psychology of women. In the same spirit, men's studies scholars from psychology ( O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b; Pleck, 1981), sociology (Connell, 1995), and anthropology (Gilmore, 1990) began, 30 years ago, to examine masculinity not as the universal standard for human behavior but rather as a complex and even problematic construct. In so doing, they developed a new framework for a psychological approach to men and masculinity. This new framework distinguished sex from gender (Sherif, 1979; Unger, 1979), with *sex* referring to the biological attributes that result from being male or female and *gender* denoting the psychological and sociocultural attributes that are associated with a biological sex, such as masculinity and femininity. This allowed these scholars to break with the then-dominant academic view of masculinity as an inherent, essential, and universal expression of biological maleness (which is still the dominant view in public discourse today) and to view masculinity as a social role shaped by stereotypes and norms and even as a social performance that could be enacted by inhabitants of male or female bodies. This in turn allowed these early pioneers to interrogate the traditional norms of masculinity, such as the emphasis on dominance, aggression, extreme self-reliance, and restrictive emotionality, and to view certain problems prevalent among men (such as the devaluation of women, detachment from relationships, disdain of sexual minorities, neglect of health needs, and violence[1]) as unfortunate but predictable results of male gender role socialization processes informed by traditional masculinity ideologies. They have also provided a framework for creating positive new visions for how to be a man in today's world, visions that could support the optimal development of men, women, and children.

This new psychology of men is long overdue and urgently needed. Men have long been disproportionately represented among many problem populations—parents estranged from their children; the homeless; substance abusers; perpetrators of violence; prisoners; sex addicts and sex offenders; victims of homicide, suicide, war, and fatal automobile accidents; and fatal victims of lifestyle- and stress-related illnesses (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995). A new psychology of men might contribute to the understanding and solution of some of these problems, which have long impacted women, men, children, and society in negative ways.

Moreover, due to interminable delays in dealing with many of these problems, we have long been experiencing a crisis of connection between heterosexual men and women (Levant, 1996a), characterized by the continuation of the second shift that burdens employed married women, who are saddled with the brunt of child care and housework (Hochschild, 1989), high divorce rates, and the fact that women initiate two thirds of divorces (Levant & Wimer, 2010). As a result, the pressures on heterosexual men to behave in ways that conflict with various aspects of traditional masculine norms have never been greater. These pressures—pressures to commit to relationships, communicate one's innermost feelings, nurture children, share equally in housework, integrate sexuality with love, and curb aggression and violence—have shaken the traditional masculine norms to such an extent that a masculinity crisis began in the mid-1990s and continues today in which many men feel bewildered and confused and the pride associated with being a man in traditional terms is lower than at any time in the recent past (Levant, 1997). Indeed, the cover of a recent issue of *Newsweek* (September 27, 2010) called men out on this, demanding, "MAN UP! The Traditional Male Is an Endangered Species. It's Time to Rethink Masculinity." Sadly, the response of some men is to get angry, demonize women, and gravitate to antifemi-

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*Ronald F. Levant received the Award for Distinguished Professional Contributions to Applied Research. Award winners are invited to deliver an award address at the APA's annual convention. A version of this award address was delivered at the 119th annual meeting, held August 4–7, 2011, in Washington, DC. Articles based on award addresses are reviewed, but they differ from unsolicited articles in that they are expressions of the winners' reflections on their work and their views of the field.*

[1] Not all men are violent, but most violence is committed by men (Kilmartin, 2010).

nist organizations, such as the National Coalition for Men (http://ncfm.org/en/) and the Promise Keepers (http://www.promisekeepers.org/), which propose to return the man to what they consider his rightful place as the leader of his family by rolling back the gains of the women's movement. A new psychology of men might help men find solutions to the masculinity crisis and the crisis of connection that enhance rather than inflame gender relations and provide them with tools for the reconstruction of masculinity (Levant & Kopecky, 1995).

The purpose of this article is to introduce this specialty area to the broader community of American psychologists, focusing on research conducted using the GRSP. I next introduce the GRSP and then discuss in depth its core construct—masculinity ideologies—including the definition of masculinity ideology and considerations of masculinity ideology versus masculinity ideologies, traditional masculinity ideology, the measurement of masculinity ideologies, the Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised (MRNI–R), women's and adolescent's masculinity ideologies, and conformity to masculine norms. I then discuss the types of gender role strain and the normative male alexithymia (NMA) hypothesis (which posits that men reared to conform to traditional masculine norms will have difficulty putting their emotions into words). Finally, I discuss some future research directions.

## The Gender Role Strain Paradigm

The GRSP, originally formulated by Joseph Pleck (1981) in *The Myth of Masculinity* as the sex role strain paradigm, is the forerunner, in the psychology of men, of social constructionism, having been formulated before social constructionism emerged as a new perspective on masculinity (Pleck, 1995). The GRSP views gender roles not as biologically determined but rather as psychologically and socially constructed entities that bring certain advantages and disadvantages and, most importantly, can change. This perspective acknowledges the biological differences between men and women but argues that it is not the biological differences of sex that make for masculinity and femininity. These concepts are socially constructed from biological, psychological, and social experience.

This perspective, also informed by the work of Hyde (2005), views the genders as more similar than different. Hyde reviewed 46 meta-analyses on gender differences on a wide range of performance and personality variables, finding that 48% were small and 30% were trivial and that within-gender variability is typically greater than between-gender variability. Hence, she proposed the gender similarities hypothesis to replace the gender differences hypothesis.

Furthermore, this perspective, which emphasizes the role of social structural variables in establishing and maintaining gender norms, has received support from Eagly and Wood's (1999) investigation of the origin of sex differences in human behavior, which found that social structural theory (Eagly & Wood, 1999) had greater power than evolutionary psychology (Buss & Schmitt, 1993) in explaining certain sex differences in human behavior.

Pleck (1981) offered the GRSP as an alternative to the older gender role identity paradigm (GRIP), which had dominated research on masculinity for 50 years (1930–1980). The GRIP assumed that people have a powerful psychological need to form a gender role identity that matches their biological sex and that optimal personality development hinged on its formation. The extent to which this allegedly inherent need was met was determined by how completely a person adopted his or her traditional gender role. From such a perspective, the development of appropriate gender role identity was viewed as a failure-prone process, and failure for men to achieve a masculine gender role identity was thought to result in homosexuality, negative attitudes toward women, and/or defensive hypermasculinity. This paradigm sprang from the same philosophical roots as the essentialist view of sex roles—the notion that (in the case of men) there is a clear masculine essence that is historically invariant (Bohan, 1997). Pleck provided a convincing demonstration that not only did the GRIP poorly account for the observed data in many landmark studies on personality development but also that such landmark studies often arbitrarily reinterpreted the meaning of the data. For example, with regard to the study by Mussen (1961), one of the most important studies in the GRIP on the relationship between sex typing and adjustment, Pleck noted that "if a measure ordinarily indicating good adjustment occurs in non-masculine males, it is arbitrarily reinterpreted to indicate poor adjustment" (Pleck, 1981, p. 86).

In contrast, the GRSP proposed that contemporary gender roles are contradictory and inconsistent, that the proportion of persons who violate gender roles is high, that violation of gender roles leads to condemnation and negative psychological consequences, that actual or imagined violation of gender roles leads people to overconform to them, that violating gender roles has more severe consequences for males than for females, that certain prescribed gender role traits (such as male aggression) are often dysfunctional, that each sex experiences gender role strain in its paid work and family roles, and that historical change causes gender role strain (Pleck, 1981, 1995).

In the GRSP, gender ideologies are beliefs about the roles thought to be appropriate for either males or females (which are operationally defined by gender role stereotypes and norms). The dominant gender ideologies influence how parents, teachers, and peers socialize children and thus how children think, feel, and behave in regard to gender-salient matters (Levant, 1996b; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1994b). Specifically, through social interactions resulting in rein-

forcement, punishment, and observational learning, masculinity ideologies inform, encourage, and constrain boys (and men) to conform to the prevailing male role norms by adopting certain socially sanctioned masculine behaviors and avoiding certain proscribed behaviors (Levant, 1996b). In the GRSP, gender roles and gendered behavior are thus thought to be the result of social cognition and social influence processes, instructed by gender ideologies. As noted above, this paradigm springs from the same philosophical roots as social constructionism—the perspective that notions of masculinity and femininity are relational, socially constructed, and subject to change.

## Masculinity Ideologies

### *Masculinity Ideology*

Thompson and Pleck (1995) proposed the term *masculinity ideology* to characterize the core construct in the body of research assessing attitudes toward men and male roles. Masculinity ideology is a radically different construct from the older notion of masculine gender role identity. Masculine gender role identity arises out of the GRIP and "presumes that masculinity is rooted in actual differences between men and women" (Thompson & Pleck, 1995, p. 130). This approach has attempted to assess the personality traits more often associated with men than women, using such instruments as the Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI; Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978).[2] In contrast, studies of masculinity ideology take a normative approach, in which masculinity is viewed as a socially constructed set of gender norms for men. Whereas the masculine male in the identity/trait approach is one who possesses particular personality traits, the traditional male in the ideology/normative approach "is one who endorses the ideology that men *should* have sex-specific characteristics (and women should not)" (Thompson & Pleck, 1995, p. 131). Thompson and Pleck summarized the evidence supporting the proposition that gender role identity and gender ideology are independent constructs and have different correlates.

On the basis of his classic ethnographic study of masculinity ideology, Gilmore (1990) suggested that

> there is something almost generic, something repetitive, about the criteria of man-playing, that underlying the surface variations in emphasis or form are certain convergences in concepts, symbolizations, and exhortations of masculinity in many societies but—and this is important—*by no means in all* [emphasis added]. (pp. 2–3)

Hence, a common set of standards and expectations is associated with the male role throughout most (but not all) of the world. These similarities derive from the fact that men perform the same social roles across almost all cultures—procreation (father), provision (worker), and protection (soldier). Therefore, virtually all societies must socialize boys to develop the set of characteristics that are necessary to perform the behaviors embedded in those roles. The exceptions that Gilmore found were the Tahitians and the Semai, "virtually androgynous cultures [that] raise questions about the universal need for masculinity in male development, and . . . suggest that cultural variables may outweigh nature in the masculinity puzzle" (Gilmore, 1990, p. 201).

This dominant masculinity ideology, which defines the social norms for the male gender role, is postulated to uphold existing gender-based power structures in the Western World that privilege men, most particularly upper-class, White, heterosexual, able-bodied, Christian men. Connell and Messerschmidt (2005), in their update of the hegemonic masculinity concept, noted that hegemonic masculinity not only undergirds men's collective dominance over women but also marginalizes men of color and lower-class men and subjugates sexual minority men.

### *Masculinity Ideologies*

The GRSP asserts that there is no single standard for masculinity nor is there an unvarying masculinity ideology. Rather, since masculinity is a social construction, ideals of manhood may differ for men of different social classes, races, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, life stages, and historical eras. Following Brod (1987), we therefore speak of masculinity ideologies, although we do so, as Smiler (2004) noted, by looking for differences in overall endorsement and in the weighting of the norms of masculinity, rather than a completely different set of norms for each group.

In support of this view, despite the near universality of the dominant form of masculinity ideology, differences in overall endorsement and in the weighting of the norms have been found according to differences in such dimensions of diversity as age, generation within a family, ethnicity, race, nationality, social class, geographic region of residence, sex, sexual orientation, and disability status (Levant, Cuthbert, et al., 2003; Levant & Majors, 1997; Levant, Majors, & Kelley, 1998; Levant & Richmond, 2007; Levant, Richmond, et al., 2003; Levant, Wu, & Fischer, 1996; Pleck et al., 1994b; Thompson & Pleck, 1986; Wu, Levant, & Sellers, 2001). Some variations may reflect mere differences in "emphasis or form" (Gilmore, 1990, p. 3), whereas others may reflect substantive matters.

In the United States, male-dominated power structures have been reduced to varying degrees in different subcul-

[2] Although the BSRI and the PAQ were initially intended to assess the personality traits differentially associated with men and women, subsequent research raised serious questions about the appropriateness of using the BSRI as a measure of self-perceived gender-linked personality traits (Choi, Fuqua, & Newman, 2008), and the scales of the PAQ have been recast as Masculinity/Instrumentality and Femininity/Expressiveness (Helmreich, Spence, & Wilhelm, 1981).

tures by the influence of feminism, resulting in new variants of masculinity ideology. In addition, some cultural variations appear to be based upon historical adaptations. For example, the acceptability of women making more decisions in the home and having employment outside of the home in the African American community may be the by-product of slavery (e.g., forced separation of families) and economic necessity (Lazur & Majors, 1995; Watkins, Walker, & Griffith, 2010). Still others, such as the "cool pose" of young inner-city African American men, may be a form of resistance to their marginalization by hegemonic masculinity (Majors & Billson, 1992).

### *Traditional Masculinity Ideology*

Despite the diversity in masculinity ideology in the contemporary United States, Pleck (1995, p. 20) pointed out that "there is a *particular* constellation of standards and expectations that individually and jointly have various kinds of negative concomitants." This is referred to as *traditional masculinity ideology* since it was the dominant view prior to the deconstruction of gender that took place beginning in the late 1960s.

Traditional masculinity ideology is thought to be a multidimensional construct. David and Brannon (1976) identified four components of traditional masculinity ideology: that men should not be feminine ("no sissy stuff"), that men should strive to be respected for successful achievement ("the big wheel"), that men should never show weakness ("the sturdy oak"), and that men should seek adventure and risk, even accepting violence if necessary ("give 'em hell"). These dimensions are assessed by the Brannon Masculinity Scale, the first instrument developed for the assessment of traditional masculinity ideology (Brannon & Juni, 1984).

### *Measuring Masculinity Ideologies*

Psychologists subsequently developed a number of scales to measure masculinity ideologies (see Thompson & Pleck, 1995, for a review of 11 scales). According to a recent study (Whorley & Addis, 2006), the two most commonly used measures of masculinity ideologies are the Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS; Thompson & Pleck, 1986) and the Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI; Levant et al., 1992).

The MRNS is a 26-item scale developed through factor analysis of the Short Form of the Brannon Masculinity Scale (Brannon & Juni, 1984). The chief limitation of the MRNS is that it assesses only three dimensions of masculinity ideology (Status, Toughness, and Antifeminity), whereas many men's studies scholars and scale developers view traditional masculinity as having more than three norms (Thompson & Pleck, 1986).

Levant et al. (1992) found redundancy and conceptual overlap between particular subscales of the Brannon Masculinity Scale; suggested norms that might have been included to more fully measure traditional masculinity ideology, including fear and hatred of homosexuals and nonrelational attitudes toward sexuality; and developed the MRNI. The MRNI is a 57-item scale with eight theoretically derived subscales: Avoidance of Femininity, Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals, Self-Reliance, Aggression, Achievement/Status, Nonrelational Attitudes Toward Sexuality, and Restrictive Emotionality, all of which measure traditional norms, and Non-Traditional Attitudes Toward Masculinity, which measures violations of traditional male norms. Multicultural and other investigations using the MRNI over a 15-year period (1992–2007) were summarized by Levant and Richmond (2007). The chief limitations of the MRNI are that the subscale structure has not been supported by factor analysis (Levant et al., 1992) and the reliability of some of the MRNI subscales has been less than adequate in various studies (Levant & Richmond, 2007).

Given these limitations of both the MRNS and the MRNI, there was a need for a better instrument to assess masculinity ideologies in which multiple norms were supported by factor analysis and for which there was evidence of reliability and validity.

### *The Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised*

The MRNI was revised as the MRNI–R to address these concerns ( Levant, Rankin, Williams, Hasan, & Smalley, 2010; Levant et al., 2007). This revision entailed several tasks. First, the original MRNI was created in the late 1980s, and some of the language was dated; hence, language revisions eliminated outdated terminology and questions. Second, my colleagues and I have found over many years of usage that the original definitions of some of the male role norms are not adequately conceptualized, in particular the Self-Reliance and Achievement/Status norms, which tapped socially desirable behavior for both men and women. Hence, we reconceptualized the new Self-Reliance norm as a more extreme form of self-reliance, as reflected, for example, in the refusal of some men to ask for directions when lost. We also distilled what seemed to be the traditionally masculine aspects of achieving high status—namely, dominance—and substituted a Dominance subscale for the Achievement/Status subscale. Third, because the Non-Traditional Attitudes subscale often had low internal reliability and because it was composed of negatively worded items that recent research suggests tap method effects (DiStefano & Motl, 2006), we decided to drop this subscale entirely and focus the MRNI–R exclusively on traditional masculinity ideology.

The MRNI–R is a 53-item measure with items rated on 7-point Likert-type scales, with higher scores indicating higher levels of endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology. Seven subscales assess individuals' endorsement of different dimensions of traditional masculinity ideology,

including Avoidance of Femininity, Negativity Toward Sexual Minorities, Self-Reliance, Aggression, Dominance, Nonrelational Sexuality, and Restrictive Emotionality. The initial study found evidence for the reliability of the subscales and significant sex and racial/ethnic differences in the pattern of scores, similar to those that have been found in studies using the original MRNI (Levant et al., 2007). The second study (Levant, Rankin, et al., 2010) found support for the hypothesized dimensionality of the scale and, to a lesser extent, item placement. Evidence was also found for internal consistency of the MRNI–R total score and the seven factor scores. Analyses of the males' scores provided evidence for convergent validity, divergent validity, and concurrent validity. Data are currently being collected for a confirmatory factor analysis.

### *Women's Masculinity Ideologies*

It is important to consider that both men and women may hold specific masculinity ideologies. As Whorley and Addis (2003, p. 656) noted, "when we study masculinity only in men we can easily fall prey to an implicit essentialism by failing to distinguish . . . [sex and gender]; thoroughly studying masculinity means understanding how it operates in the lives of both men and women." Accordingly, men and women may have different views regarding appropriate norms for male behavior. In some societies (e.g., China and Russia), men and women have been found to be quite similar in their views of masculine norms (Levant & Richmond, 2007). However, in studies of U.S. participants of various races and ethnicities, women tend to reject traditional masculinity ideology to a much greater extent than do men (Levant & Richmond, 2007). These differences may reflect the influence of feminism on U.S. women (and the lack thereof on Chinese and Russian women) and suggest that traditional masculinity ideology may be a point of contention between the genders (Levant, 1996a, 1997). Given these gender differences, it is important to study masculinity ideology in both men and women (and boys and girls). To date, this has been done by comparing men's and women's scores on the MRNI, which was originally developed based on a mixed-gender sample. Although, as noted above, we have thought of multiple masculinities for men in terms of differences in overall endorsement and in the weighting of the norms of masculinity, future research on women's masculinity ideologies might consider investigating their dimensionality separately from that of men and perhaps even developing a unique instrument for women using a mixed-methods approach, starting with focus groups and individual interviews to generate items.

### *Adolescents' Masculinity Ideologies*

To date, only a few attempts have been made to measure the masculinity ideologies of adolescents. Pleck, Sonenstein, and Ku (1994a) adapted the MRNS to create the 8-item Male Role Attitude Scale to be used with older adolescent boys ages 15–19 in population-based epidemiological surveys. Limitations of this instrument include the small number of items that cover only a small set of the male role norms, its low reliability (the coefficient alpha for the scale is .56 as reported by Pleck et al., 1994a), and the fact it has not been developed to be administered to younger teens or teenage girls.

Chu, Porche, and Tolman (2005) developed the Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS), a scale that assesses attitudes and beliefs about appropriate behavior for males within interpersonal relationships. Designed specifically for use with adolescent boys (ages 12–18), the AMIRS was derived from adolescent boys' narratives about their perceptions and experiences of masculinity, particularly in their peer relationships. Interestingly, the AMIRS was negatively associated with self-esteem, which suggests the problematic consequences that may be associated with boys' endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology. Limitations of this instrument include its focus on relationships, which covers only a subset of male role norms, and the fact that it has not been designed to be administered to teenage girls.

An adolescent version of the MRNI has been developed, the Male Role Norms Inventory—Adolescent (MRNI–A; Brown, 2002). The reading and comprehension levels of the MRNI were adapted to create an instrument developmentally appropriate for use with younger populations. Items for the adolescent version were based on the MRNI but were changed in two major ways. First, items were adapted and new items were created to represent adolescent-specific contexts, for example, "It is ok for a boy to ask for help fixing a flat tire on his bike," and "Boys should not be afraid to go inside a 'haunted house.'" Second, while certainly relevant to the adolescent population, the scale developers decided to not include the Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals and Nonrelational Attitudes Toward Sexuality subscales because they believed that including such scales might create an insurmountable obstacle to collecting data from young adolescents. Hence, the 43-item MRNI–A has five subscales: Restrictive Emotionality, Avoidance of Femininity, Aggression, Achievement/Status, and Self-Reliance. Levant, Graef, Smalley, Williams, and McMillan (2008) found that the MRNI–A showed good overall internal consistency for the scale as a whole in both samples but that the reliability of the subscales ranged from just barely adequate to poor. Evidence for convergent validity for the MRNI–A was found for both boys and girls, and evidence for discriminant validity was found for girls but not for boys.

Given the limitations in subscale reliability and discriminant validity for boys, the MRNI–A was revised in the hopes of improving its reliability and validity. The result was the MRNI–A—Revised (MRNI–A–r), a 41-item inven-

tory with the same five subscales as the MRNI–A. Levant, Rogers, et al. (2011) conducted an exploratory factor analysis, finding a three-factor structure—(a) Emotionally Detached Dominance, (b) Toughness, and (c) Avoidance of Femininity—which resembles that of the MRNS (Status, Toughness, and Antifeminity). For the sample as a whole, the MRNI–A–r and its factors had internal reliabilities ranging from .71 to .89. Some support was found for convergent and discriminant validity.

### *Conformity to Masculine Norms*

The Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik et al., 2003) is a widely used instrument that is designed to measure conformity (or nonconformity) to the dominant masculinity norms. The CMNI is sometimes described as a measure of the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology. Although the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology (measured with the MRNI–R) and the conformity to masculine norms (measured with the CMNI) are related constructs, there are some important differences. The MRNI–R measures an individual's internalization of cultural belief systems and attitudes toward masculinity and men's roles, whereas the CMNI measures the individual's personal conformity to those norms. Thus, a man could endorse the norm of restrictive emotionality as the expectation for boys and men, believing that they should conform to certain socially sanctioned masculine behaviors and to avoid certain proscribed behaviors, but not be able to conform to these expectations himself.

## Types of Masculine Gender Role Strain

Pleck (1995), in an update of the GRSP, pointed out that his original formulation of the paradigm stimulated research on three varieties of male gender role strain, termed *discrepancy strain, dysfunction strain,* and *trauma strain.*

### *Discrepancy Strain*

Discrepancy strain results when one fails to live up to one's internalized manhood ideal, which may closely approximate traditional norms. There have been several attempts to examine discrepancy strain. The first method used a comparison between ratings of the self-/ideal-self-concept test and was not very useful (Pleck, 1995). More recently, Liu, Rochlen, and Mohr (2005) investigated a form of discrepancy strain using the gender role conflict (GRC) construct. Finally, there is the work of Eisler and Skidmore (1987), using the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale. This approach inquires to what degree participants would experience particular situations that are discrepant with male role norms as stressful.

### *Dysfunction Strain*

Dysfunction strain results when one fulfills the requirements of the masculine norms because many of the characteristics viewed as desirable in men can have negative side effects on the men themselves and on others, including those close to them. Support for this tenet of the GRSP comes from two lines of investigation, one involving traditional masculinity ideology and the other the GRC construct.

First, as noted in an extensive review of the literature (Levant & Richmond, 2007), the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology as measured by the MRNI has been found to be associated with a range of problematic individual and relational variables, including reluctance to discuss condom use with partners, fear of intimacy, lower relationship satisfaction, more negative beliefs about the father's role, lower paternal participation in child care, negative attitudes toward racial diversity and women's equality, attitudes conducive to sexual harassment, self-reports of sexual aggression, lower forgiveness of racial discrimination, alexithymia, and reluctance to seek psychological help. However, mixed results were found on the relationship between endorsement and social support among gay men.

The second line of investigation involved the GRC construct, the development of which was stimulated by the GRSP (O'Neil, 2008). O'Neil (2008) indicated that GRC related to all three types of gender role strain but commented that "Pleck's dysfunction strain has the most theoretical relevance to GRC because this subtype implies negative outcomes from endorsing restrictive gender role norms" (p. 366). The centerpiece of the GRC research program is the Gender Role Conflict Scale I (O'Neil, Helms, Gable, Davis, & Wrightsman, 1986), which assesses four domains of GRC in men: (a) success, power, and competition; (b) restrictive emotionality; (c) restrictive affectionate behavior between men; and (c) conflict between work and family relations. After an extensive review of the literature, O'Neil (2008, p. 358) concluded that "GRC is significantly related to men's psychological and interpersonal problems. . . ."

### *Trauma Strain*

The concept of trauma strain has been applied to certain groups of men whose experiences with gender role strain are thought to be particularly harsh. This includes men of color (Lazur & Majors, 1995), professional athletes (Messner, 1992), veterans (Brooks, 1990), and survivors of child abuse (Lisak, 1995). It is also recognized that gay and bisexual men are normatively traumatized by male gender role strain by virtue of growing up in a heterosexist society (Harrison, 1995; Sánchez, Westefeld, Liu, & Vilain, 2010). Beyond the recognition that certain classes of men may experience trauma strain, a perspective on the male role socialization process emerged in the 1990s (Levant & Pollack, 1995) that viewed socialization under traditional masculinity ideology as inherently traumatic. I (Levant, 1992) specifically proposed that mild to moderate alexithymia

may result from the normative emotion socialization of boys, a process informed by traditional masculinity ideologies. This is the NMA hypothesis, to which I now turn.

### The Normative Male Alexithymia Hypothesis

Literally, alexithymia means *without words for emotions.* Sifneos (1967) originally used the term to describe the extreme difficulty certain psychiatric patients had in identifying and describing their feelings. This pattern was particularly evident in patients with psychosomatic illnesses, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), substance use disorders, and chronic pain disorders (Levant, Hall, Williams, & Hasan, 2009).

In addition to the appearance of alexithymia in clinical populations, variability along a continuum of alexithymia symptoms has also been observed in nonclinical populations. I (Levant, 1992) proposed the NMA hypothesis to account for a socialized pattern of restrictive emotionality influenced by traditional masculinity ideology that I observed in many men. Working both with research participants in the Boston University Fatherhood Project and with clients in my clinical practice, I observed that only with great difficulty and practice could many of the men find the words to describe their emotional states. I theorized that those men had been discouraged as boys from expressing and talking about their emotions by parents, peers, teachers, or coaches and that some had been punished for doing so. Hence, they did not develop a vocabulary for, or an awareness of, many of their emotions.

In particular, these men showed the greatest deficits in identifying and expressing emotions reflecting a sense of vulnerability (such as sadness or fear) or expressing attachment (such as fondness or caring). While restricted emotionality may be adaptive in some ways, particularly in highly competitive environments, my clients often reported significant difficulties in their personal lives and presented with a variety of problems, including marital difficulties, estrangement from their children, substance abuse, domestic violence, and sexual addiction (Levant & Kopecky, 1995).

My clinical observations are consistent with a central tenet of the GRSP that societal forces differentially shape men according to the degree to which they have been reared as boys to adhere to the norms of traditional masculinity. One normative masculine role requirement is the restriction of emotional expression. I (Levant, 1992, 1995, 1998) drew on the GRSP to theorize that mild to moderate forms of alexithymia would occur more frequently among men whose socialization as boys was informed to greater degrees by traditional masculinity ideology. Indeed, empirical research has found a relationship between the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology and alexithymia in men. Levant, Richmond, et al. (2003) indicated that even after controlling for demographic differences, traditional masculinity ideology accounts for unique variance in alexithymia in men.

The view that socialization plays a role in the development of restricted emotionality confronts the conventional view in our society that boys and men are essentially hardwired to be less emotional and more logical than are girls and women. This more conventional view derives from presumed biologically based gender differences in the experience and expression of emotion (see Wester, Vogel, Pressly, & Heesacker, 2002, for a review). My (Levant, 1998) review of relevant developmental psychology research literature on the emotion socialization of boys concluded that the essentialistic, conventional perspective that men, by nature, are less emotional is not supported by the existing evidence. Indeed, evidence suggests boys start life with greater emotional reactivity and expressiveness than girls and maintain this advantage until 1 year of age (Levant, 1998). However, they become less verbally expressive than girls at about the age of 2 years and less facially expressive by 6 years. This developmental change suggests that socialization shapes gender-appropriate emotional behavior and may account for gender differences in emotional awareness and expressivity (Levant, 1998).

To assess the extent of gender differences in alexithymia, Levant et al. (2006) reviewed 45 published studies that examined such gender differences. The 13 studies using a psychiatric or medical sample were examined separately from those that used a nonclinical sample (primarily college students). The investigators noted that few studies using clinical samples found gender differences. However, the 32 studies using nonclinical samples presented a very different picture: Seventeen of these studies found males more alexithymic than females, one found females more alexithymic than males, and 14 found no differences between males and females. Yet this narrative review still left open the issue of the magnitude of the gender difference in alexithymia, as well as the extent of the distinction between clinical and nonclinical samples, if any.

The alexithymia literature was next meta-analyzed to determine whether there was empirical support for gender differences (Levant, Hall, et al., 2009). An effect-size estimate based on 41 existing samples found consistent, although expectedly small, differences in mean alexithymia between women and men (Hedges's $d = .22$). Men exhibited higher levels of alexithymia. There were no significant moderator effects for clinical versus nonclinical population or alexithymia measure used, although there were relatively few clinical samples and non-Toronto Alexithymia Scale measures.

This line of investigation has led to the development of clinical assessment and intervention tools. Levant et al. (2006) developed the Normative Male Alexithymia Scale. Results of analyses of gender differences, relations with other instruments, and its incremental validity in predicting

masculinity ideology provided evidence supporting the validity of the scale. I (Levant, 1998, 2006) developed a psychoeducational program for treating NMA, which was recently manualized as alexithymia reduction treatment (ART) and assessed in a pilot study (Levant, Halter, Hayden, & Williams, 2009). I am currently planning a randomized clinical trial of the efficacy of ART in remediating NMA and improving the uptake of therapy for male veterans suffering from PTSD.

## Future Directions

I have introduced the psychology of men and masculinity, covering the rationale for and aims of the psychology of men and masculinity and the GRSP. I have also discussed masculinity ideologies, masculine gender role strain, and the NMA hypothesis. It is now time to turn to future research directions.

Recent reviews of the literature have highlighted the need to investigate healthy aspects of men's gender roles, to go beyond the study of the simple relationships between independent and dependent variables by including investigation of mediators and moderators (including contextual factors) of those relationships, and to do experimental research (O'Neil, 2008; Smiler, 2004; Whorley & Addis, 2006). Three new lines of investigation in my research program are responsive to these recommendations. The first, focused on health, has found in a recent study that the relationship between men's health behavior and masculinity variables varies according to the specific dimension of health behavior and the specific masculinity variable and, further, that some facets of masculinity are associated with protective factors, whereas others are associated with risk factors (Levant, Wimer, & Williams, 2011). The second has tested a theoretical model of the variables that mediate and moderate the negative relationships between each of two masculinity variables (endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology and GRC) and men's attitudes toward seeking mental health services (Levant, Rankin, & Halter, 2011). The third has investigated the external validity of the NMA construct in an experimental investigation using semantic priming, hypothesizing that alexithymic men (as compared to nonalexithymic men) will show negative priming on a lexical decision-making task when emotion words are used as primes (Levant, Allen, Shook, Rogers, & Lien, 2010).

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