Measuring Masculinity in Education: Towards a Strengths-Based Approach

Jacob Rubin

UCLA School of Education and Information Studies

Abstract

In recent years, there has been considerable attention given to male gender disparities in college enrollment, educational attainment, and achievement (Thompson 2021; Reeves and Smith 2022; Dominus 2023). Some empirical studies link men's conformity to restrictive and negative masculine beliefs and behaviors (e.g. restricted emotionality, aggression, self-reliance, anti-femininity) with academic underperformance and failing to seek academic help (Yavorsky and Buchmann 2019; DiPrete and Buchmann 2013; Wimer and Levant 2011). However, a growing number of researchers suggest that if negative masculine beliefs are associated with poor educational practices and outcomes, then positive masculine beliefs may be harnessed to reduce such outcomes (Kiselica et al. 2016). Efforts to define the phrase "positive masculinity" draw from the positive psychology positive masculinity (PPPM) paradigm, an ideology that refers to thoughts and actions that "promote more inclusive, empathetic, caring, and egalitarian forms of manhood" (Bates 2023). Further, recent work has aimed to define and operationalize "positive masculinity" as a measurable construct (McDermott et al. 2019; Wilson et al. 2022).

The purpose of this literature review is fourfold: (1) define masculinity and its dominant paradigm, (2) provide a brief history of measuring masculinity, (3) analyze the current body of research relating measures of masculinity with educational outcomes, and (4) explore positive masculinity as an additional paradigm with which to develop measurement tools. At the end of this review, I provide the following recommendations for future research: (1) add positive masculinity subscales to existing measures, (2) reword questions from existing measures in a strengths-based format, and (3) design new measures specific to positive masculinity. By adopting positive masculinity as a component of masculinity measurement, research may move towards identifying strengths-based behaviors that promote healthier educational outcomes.

Defining Masculinity

Masculinity refers to the set of beliefs and behaviors that prescribe and proscribe how individuals enact "maleness" (American Psychological Association 2018). These beliefs and behaviors are constructed in accordance with societal expectations of how masculine individuals should and should not act, think, and feel. Given that societal expectations vary across culture and over time, masculinity exists in a plurality of forms and is ever-evolving. These notions are rooted in Butler's Gender Performativity Theory which suggests that gender identity is "performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler 1990, p. 25). Masculinity thus, as a form of gender identity, is both the performance and expression of cultural norms, historical formations, and human wants and needs. The learned behaviors that are acted upon vary across intersectional contexts such as race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, and ability status.

The phrase *hegemonic masculinity*, popularized in Connell's "Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics", refers to the dominant cultural expectations and practices for men in relation to various subordinated masculinities and femininity (Connell 1987). Although hegemonic masculinity is typically researched within Western contexts, dominant behaviors exist within and across local contexts. Traditional standards of hegemonic masculinity include emotional restrictiveness, attainment of status, aggressiveness, violence, anti-femininity, and aversion to homosexuality (Bates 2023). While hegemonic masculinity recognizes a multiplicity of masculine expressions as endorsed by Gender Performativity Theory, it establishes these expressions in a hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity positions itself, naturally, at the top. As a result, individuals are forced to center themselves in relation to hegemonic expectations (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). Individuals that contest the dominant paradigm often experience

gender role conflict, the "psychological state in which restrictive definitions of masculinity limit men's well-being and human potential" (O'Neil 2015, p. 1; Pleck 1995).

Further, feminist theorists such as Rachel Jewkes et al. (2015) and bell hooks (2010) assess hegemonic masculinity through the lens of power relations and subordination of women. Hegemonic masculinity, by placing itself as the dominant pattern of beliefs and behaviors for men, seeks to legitimize and perpetuate a patriarchal social order. It does not strictly apply to being particularly nasty to women, but rather maintaining practices that assert men's dominance over women (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). This social order exists not only on an individual scale, but also in larger psychological, policy, and economic structures (hooks 2010). In addition, power dynamics are further emphasized through other aspects of identity such as race and sexual orientation. Crenshaw, in discussing how women of color experience subordination, recalls that "intersectional subordination need not be intentionally produced; in fact, it is frequently the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities" (Crenshaw 1989, 1249). Given that individuals express multiple identities, they must navigate multiple sets of social expectations and social systems. As hegemonic masculinity seeks to include and exclude specific identities, ideals, and interactions, individuals experience differential access to power and quality of life.

Measuring Masculinity

As masculinity is performed in a multitude of cultural contexts and changes over time, there exists the question of how to measure it as a construct. Historical attempts at measuring masculinity have adopted the assumption that masculinity and femininity exist on a spectrum as polar opposites. As an individual expresses extreme masculinity more, they express extreme

femininity less. Unfortunately, this assumption has also fed into other incorrect notions, including the beliefs that gay men and "feminine" women are identical, and that it is impossible to express any variation of both masculinity and femininity (Hoffman 2001). An outdated theory underpinning these assumptions is *essentialism*, the idea that biology, rather than social construction, is the basis for differences in gender expression (O'Neil, 2010). Past measurements that adopted this ideology include Terman and Miles' Attitude-Interest Analysis Survey (1936) and the Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory Masculinity-Femininity Scale (1943). Glaring errors in these measurements include referring to homosexual activity as "sexual inversion" and using intelligence testing as a means of determining gender. Further, as Hoffman (2001) notes, "scoring of the [Terman and Miles] instrument involved awarding 'plus' for 'masculine' responses and 'minus' for 'feminine' responses [which] carries its own subtle message" (p. 473). While both scales have now been widely recognized as invalid, it is important to note that current measures have been formed around this context.

In the 1970's and 80's, a series of new instruments were adopted to combat the essentialist viewpoint. In particular, the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI) and Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ) were designed with the belief that individuals develop sex-typed traits through their social environment (Hoffman 2001). Bem, contending that individuals may express stereotypical traits associated with both masculinity and femininity, scored persons based on masculine, feminine, and androgynous scales. In effect, a given person may demonstrate varying degrees of traits as they position themselves in society. Spence's PAQ test also adopted this scoring and added a third section for traits that are viewed as desirable irrespective of gender. This third "M-F" section contends that regardless of biological sex, it is healthy for individuals to express any combination of stereotypically masculine and feminine traits (Bates 2023). Although

both the BSRI and PAQ reject a bipolar state of thinking, these measures' assume that a set of stereotyped traits best defines masculinity when that is simply not true. For instance, in modern society where gender roles change over time, a man may consider his emotional openness to be part of his masculinity despite it being viewed as a stereotypically "feminine" trait. Rather, masculinity may be better represented by socialized norms and expectations.

The current iteration of measures is rooted in this notion, with Pleck's gender role strain paradigm (GRSP) contending that social norms place strain on individuals to act in a certain way (Pleck 1995). Different types of strain may arise when individuals fail to meet standards of traditional masculinity, or when individuals fulfill standards of traditional masculinity and then suffer from negative side effects of these norms. As a result, measures based on the GSRP assess cultural belief systems and individuals' endorsement of these belief systems.

In a review of sixteen modern measures, Thompson and Bennett establish categories that reflect individuals' (1) internalization of social norms surrounding masculinity and (2) external expression of these social norms (2015). For instance, the Brannon Masculinity Scale (BMS), Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS), and Male Role Norms Inventory-Revised (MRNI-R) all seek to assess an individual's internal thinking about social norms in traditional masculinity. The MRNI-R, for example, asks individuals how they perceive all men to act, and includes seven factors: Toughness, Restrictive Emotionality, Self-Reliance, Negativity Towards Sexual Minorities, Avoidance of Femininity, Important of Sex, and Dominance (Levant et al. 2010). However, instruments such as the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) and Adolescent Masculine Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS) ask participants to judge their outward expression of these traditional masculine norms (Mahalik et al. 2003; Chu et al. 2005). Although these two types of measures share factors such as Toughness and Self-Reliance, the

framing differs. While the MRNI-R asks participants if "A man should never admit when others hurt his feelings", the CMNI instead asks participants if they personally agree with statements such as "I hate it when people ask me to talk about my feelings". An interesting survey that straddles both internalization and externalization is the Measure of Men's Perceived Inexpressiveness Norms (M2PIN) (Wong et al. 2013). The M2PIN initially asks men to think about their circle of male classmates, friends, and family, followed by questions about social norms within their peer groups. This strategy assesses an individual's beliefs of social norms in a uniquely local context.

As explored in the next section, male and female students who ascribe to traditional masculinity beliefs and behaviors have been associated with poor educational outcomes such as being more prone to not ask for classroom help, experiencing lower levels of motivation and engagement, and receiving poor grades in specific class subjects. Much of this research links rigid traditional masculine beliefs with negative outcomes, yet also leaves a lingering question. If negative beliefs and behaviors are related to problematic educational outcomes, would promoting behaviors that contrast hegemonic masculinity such as cooperation and emotional resilience foster healthier outcomes? I further investigate this question in the final two sections of this review, *Positive Masculinity* and *Measuring Masculinity (Part 2)*.

Measures of Masculinity and Educational Outcomes

The following section aims to provide a recent literature review of the relationship between masculinity and educational outcomes. In particular, I review academic help-seeking, academic attitudes, and academic performance.

Academic Help-Seeking

Academic help-seeking, a learning and problem-solving strategy used to better understand academic materials, is associated with positive academic performance and outcomes (Brown et al. 2021; Kessels and Steinmeyr 2013). Help-seeking behaviors are often characterized as either *instrumental* or *executive*; while instrumental help-seeking reflects intrinsic motivation and the desire to master academic material for the purpose of learning, executive help-seeking reflects extrinsic motivation and the desire for an academic outcome such as grades (Wimer and Levant 2011). A second common breakdown of the academic help-seeking construct is *adaptive* (intrinsically motivated), *expedient* (extrinsically motivated), and *avoidant* (failing to ask for help) (Parker et al. 2019).

Recent studies of help-seeking patterns suggest that male students are more likely than female students to be extrinsically motivated and female students are more likely to be intrinsically motivated (Schenke et al. 2015; Kessel and Steinmeyr 2013; Wimer and Levant 2011). Further, male students are more likely to adopt an avoidant help-seeking style, rejecting teacher and peer support systems even when help is needed. However, an important distinction to make is that social behaviors and norms of traditional masculinity and femininity are practiced across all students. Both men and women express traditional masculine and feminine norms. In turn, it may be inappropriate to simply compare male and female students, but rather students' adherence to traditional masculinity, alternative forms of masculinities, and femininity. A recent literature review by Martín-Arbós et al. (2021) confirms that we should not simply compare men and women, finding that "there is no agreement on gender or age differences among studies of adolescents or university students" (p. 12). Rather than evaluate help-seeking behaviors strictly

on the lines of gender, one must analyze help-seeking concerning social behaviors and conformity to traditional norms.

Wimer and Levant precisely examine this relationship, investigating college students' adherence to culturally defined masculine norms and help-seeking behaviors (2011). Employing the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI) and Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI-R), researchers measured students' beliefs about cultural male standards and conformity to masculine standards. This study ultimately determined that norms of Self-Reliance and Dominance positively correlated with help-avoidant patterns. These findings suggest that social conventions deter students from asking for help, and even cause students to reject assistance despite when it is needed. In a parallel study, Kimbrell (2014) notes that two additional factors of the CMNI measure, Emotional Control and Power Over Women, were significantly correlated with avoidant behaviors. Kimbrell, researching both men and women, found that the "endorsement of masculine norms by women [in addition to men] also appears to result in inhibited help-seeking attitudes" (2014, p. 45). This confirms the argument that conformity to traditional masculinity, rather than maleness itself, is associated with a reluctance to seek help.

Supplementary investigations that support this claim include:

- Brown et al. (2021) determined a correlation between the Control of Feelings and Mastery masculine subscales and avoidant help-seeking patterns. (Measured used: Traditional Gender Script Questionnaire)
- Marrs et al. (2012) found that while no significant differences exist between male and female students, an affinity to masculine behaviors of self-reliance, assertiveness, and dominance is significantly related to avoidant help-seeking. (Measure used: Bem Sex Role Inventory)

In addition to conformity to hegemonic norms, gender role conflict also affects help-seeking practices (Kimbrell 2014; Kessels and Steinmeyr 2013; Goodwin 2008). Higher scores between the Success and Power, Restrictive Emotionality, and Restrictive Affectionate Behavior Between Men subscales of the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS) are compatible with avoidant help-seeking (Kimbrell 2014; Goodwin 2008). When individuals are afraid of appearing unmasculine or failing to meet traditional standards, they are unlikely to ask for help. In effect, feeling conflicted with traditional masculinity causes individuals to adopt avoidant behaviors.

Ultimately, rigid masculine behaviors such as self-reliance, emotional control, and dominance appear to be associated with poor help-seeking behaviors. Adherence to hegemonic masculine norms, irrespective of gender, appears to relate to avoidant help strategies. Further, other factors that may provide a fuller picture include behaviors such as setting goals and striving for perfectionism as well as contextual factors such as school climate and access to support resources.

Academic Attitudes: Motivation, Self-Efficacy, and Engagement

For the purpose of this literature review, academic attitudes are analyzed through the categories of motivation, self-efficacy, and engagement. As adopted from Schunk and DiBenedetto (2021): "*Self-efficacy* refers to one's perceived capabilities to learn or perform actions at designated levels. *Motivation* denotes the internal cognitive and affective processes that instigate and sustain goal-directed actions and outcomes." (p. 154). *Academic engagement*, though manifested in different contexts, broadly incorporates cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions and practices such as paying attention in class, asking questions, and

persevering through difficult coursework. Greater motivation, self‑efficacy and academic engagement have been noted to significantly predict higher grades and academic achievement (Liang et al. 2019; Yu et al. 2021). In turn, analyzing the interplay between masculinity and academic attitudes is vital to understanding students' educational outcomes.

Employing the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI), Kahn, Brett, and Holmes investigated the association between intrinsic motivation to perform well in school and masculinity (2011). Subscales of the CMNI that predicted poor intrinsic motivation include high scores on the Playboy and Violence sections. However, low scores on sections such as Emotional Control, Dominance, Self-Reliance, Disdain for Homosexuality, Winning, and Primacy of Work correlated with high levels of intrinsic motivation. Leaper and Van (2008) confirm these findings using the Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI). With a population of male and female college students, researchers found that low scores of emotional restrictiveness and traditional dominance increase both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, irrespective of students' gender. An important facet of these two studies is that while some traditional masculinity norms are associated with poor motivation, a moderate expression of other norms may encourage motivation in classroom settings.

Similar to motivation, correlations between adherence to traditional masculine norms, poor self-efficacy, and poor academic engagement are represented in studies utilizing the CMNI (Yu et al. 2021), MRNI (Leaper and Van 2008), Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS) (Galano et al. 2023), and Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS) (Liang et al. 2019; Rogers et al. 2017). In addition, these relationships appear for both male and female students that endorse masculine norms. A unique presentation of this concept comes from Yu et al. (2021), in which seven gender profiles were conceptualized (cool guys, tough guys, resister guys, wild

girls, tomboys, modern girls, and relational girls). Whereas overall analysis displayed insignificant differences in male and female patterns of motivation and engagement, within-gender variations revealed that specific gender profiles such as “cool guys" and “wild girls” had poor motivation and engagement. Gender expression of traditional norms, rather than gender itself, carries more significance in students’ academic attitudes.

Additionally, other facets of identity such as socioeconomic status appear to moderate the relationship among students and their academic attitudes. In a series of qualitative interviews with male college students, Gruys and Munsch determined that more privileged students tend to align with the masculine norm of effortless achievement - “being ‘smart’ and getting good grades was fine, but displaying effort or enthusiasm was not” (Gruys and Munsch 2020, p. 358). In effect, students’ class status plays a role in how they view academic engagement as masculine. If traditional power structures created privilege for some students, then the students that gained privilege may be more aligned with traditional ways of thinking. Gruys and Munsch, however, also found that hybrid forms of masculinity, in which individuals reject some typical notions of masculinity and adopt others, yielded a more positive relationship with academic engagement. Although particular aspects of masculinity are detrimental in classroom settings, other aspects may be harnessed to foster healthier behaviors. This relationship between different forms of masculinity and healthy behaviors requires more exploration.

While adopting a traditional masculinity ideology proves harmful to developing high levels of motivation, self-efficacy, and academic engagement, it is vital to analyze students’ expressions of gender rather than simply the traditional gender binary of male and female students. Further, while the language of most studies is framed in a way that relates negative

norms to negative behaviors, it is vital to investigate positive behaviors and push towards research that also encourages healthy academic attitudes.

Academic Performance

Within the U.S., female students outperform male students on a number of academic indicators including higher grade point averages (GPA), higher rates of college enrollment and graduation, and lower high school dropout rates (DiPrete and Buchmann 2013). Yet despite recent media attention (Thompson 2021, Reeves and Smith 2022, Dominus 2023), this phenomenon is not new - "statistically significant, female-favoring gender gaps in high school GPA [have been identified] for the time points 1972, 1982, 1992, and 2004" (Workman and Heyder 2020, p. 1491). Further, while the female advantage in academic achievement is particularly high in English Language Arts (ELA) grades, there is mixed research on a gender gap in math grades. Voyer and Voyer (2014) identified a female-favoring gap in math high school GPAs, yet Reardon et al. (2019) found variance in math standardized testing score gaps across age, socioeconomic status, and location. In turn, it is vital to view which male and female students succeed, and how notions of masculinity and femininity affect student performance beyond the gender binary.

Reardon et al. (2019) identified that gender gaps in ELA and math test scores are small or negligible from grades 3-5, yet widen as students approach high school. This time period, consistent with the phase of adolescence, may reveal important information about how early teenagers' socialization affects academic behaviors. Engaging middle and high school students, Workman and Heyder (2020) and Bergold et al. (2019) found that students stigmatize academic achievement as feminine. In effect, male students that acted counter to social norms and had high

achievement were at higher risk of being bullied and discouraged from performing well. However, female students had "no higher risk of bullying victimization because high engagement is consistent with the female gender role" (Bergold 2019, p. 319). By feminizing academic achievement, students who are averse to femininity are more likely to produce less effort and experience poor outcomes.

Investigating how endorsement of social teasing and emotional restriction affects academic outcomes, Leaper et al. (2019) compare results of the Meanings of Adolescent Masculinity Scale (MAMS) with high school students' GPAs. Students that conform more highly to traditional masculine standards, researchers determined, are far more likely to have lower grades in English and slightly lower grades in math. Yu et al. (2021), using the CMNI tool, and Yavorsky and Buchmann (2019), using a self-designed Gender Typicality scale, also confirm this result. As students' alignment with traditional stereotypes increases, overall GPA and English GPA decrease. However, all three studies also revealed an interesting alternate trend: female students' conformity to traditional masculinity is associated with a better or no different achievement in mathematics. These findings suggest that the extent to which students endorse traditional norms is not the only factor that affects GPA. Rather, how certain school subjects are typed as feminine or masculine affects students' relationships with those subjects. If excelling in math - a classically male-typed subject - does not weaken a male or female student's social standing, then both male and female students may be more encouraged to perform well in math courses. However, if excelling in English - a classically female-typed subject - harms a male student's social standing, then male students may not feel as compelled to perform well in English courses. Ultimately, the relationship between endorsement of traditional masculinity and

academic performance depends on how students make sense of school subjects and the social meanings surrounding them.

Similar to research on academic help-seeking and academic attitudes, it is important to (1) compare students' endorsement of traditional gender norms rather than solely gender, and (2) analyze how certain aspects of traditional gender norms may be harnessed to reduce negative outcomes.

Summary

A number of researchers employ measures of masculinity to relate students' rigid adherence to traditional norms, such as the emphasis on emotional restrictiveness, dominance, and self-reliance, alongside poor educational practices and outcomes such as avoidant help-seeking behaviors, poor motivation and engagement, and worse overall GPAs. This scholarship has led to an increased understanding of the obstacles students face due to restrictive gender norms. However, as Issaco states, the "conclusion that traditional masculinity ideology is unhealthy and, thus, the opposite (i.e., nontraditional masculinity ideology) is healthy is not that simple" (2015). In order to reduce harmful student behaviors and encourage healthier ones, more research needs to center on what, if any, positive relationships with traditional masculinity and educational outcomes exist. Further, more research must focus on key human strengths beyond traditional masculinity. These findings may encourage individuals to forgo negative aspects of traditional masculinity in lieu of positive beliefs and behaviors.

Positive Masculinity

One such paradigm that explores a strengths-based approach towards masculinity is the Positive Psychology Positive Masculinity (PPPM) paradigm. Positive Psychology, as championed by Seligman (1998), embraces individuals' strengths as opposed to diagnosing and "fixing" the weaknesses. By meeting individuals where they are at, positive psychology aims to encourage wellbeing, self-efficacy, and prosocial behaviors. The PPPM paradigm is an offshoot of Positive Psychology, specifically focused on how to construct healthier versions of masculinity and de-emphasize hegemonic beliefs (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). Specifically, Kiselica et al. eleven (non-exhaustive) positives strengths that may be relevant to traditional masculinity including male relational styles (e.g., developing relationships through activities), male ways of caring (e.g., protection of loved ones), and male courage and risk taking (i.e., when it does not cause harm to self or others). While these strengths are presented as being compatible with traditional masculinity, it is vital to stress that they are neither male nor female specific. For instance, any individual can express courageous and risk-taking behavior in a multitude of cultures or fashions. Likewise, these strengths are not based on biologically determined sex differences, but rather traditional male role socialization. As such, the eleven principles are "human strengths" identified as particularly relevant to traditional masculinity.

Other efforts to define positive masculinity come from O'Neil and Luján (2009) and McDermott et al. (2019). O'Neil and Luján's Positive Masculinity Checklist, aimed for high school and college-age students, asks individuals to read through a set of qualities and order them based on their perceived importance and applicability to positive masculinity (2009). While the Positive Masculinity Checklist is intended for male students, I would argue against it being strictly used for this demographic. Various expressions of masculinity are represented across all

individuals, and limiting this measurement to a male audience disregards this notion. Further, the qualities selected by O'Neil and Luján do not appear to be empirically evidenced as pertaining to masculinity. McDermott et al. (2019) aim to rectify this by asking samples of men and women to rate a list of attributes and behaviors that they perceive as both positive and gendered. This research identified that the most statistically significant positive attributes favored by men had compatibility with traditionally negative aspects of masculinity (e.g. drive for success, risk-taking, having discipline). In turn, McDermott et al. approached a conceptualization of positive masculinity as expressions of traditional masculinity that may, in moderation, help produce positive outcomes. While these findings embrace the positive psychology principle of meeting individuals where they are at, it also fails to leave room for expanding traditional masculinity to include non-gendered human strengths.

Looking to operationalize the construct, Wilson et al. conceive of positive masculinity as "represent[ing] developmental progress towards the embodiment of key human strengths by males, in particular male ways" (2022, p. 5). I find this definition most appealing as it (1) recognizes the ever-changing state of masculinity and views incremental progress as vital to this change, (2) addresses both individual agency and the uniquely male social pressures that shape the beliefs and behaviors of men, and (3) proposes that masculinity incorporate the expression of universally positive qualities, not only positive behaviors that are more compatible with traditional masculine norms.

Establishing a common definition for the construct of positive masculinity enables researchers to investigate positive beliefs and behaviors among students. In turn, positive masculinity may offer new pathways for understanding and fostering healthy academic help-seeking, attitudes, and achievement.

Measuring Masculinity (Part 2)

Positive masculinity has the potential to broaden our conceptualizations of masculinity beyond hegemony. In order to understand the relationship between this construct and educational outcomes, there exists a need to measure it. This requires understanding the extent to which positive masculinity already features as a sub-construct in current instruments of masculinity, as well as gaps that need to be filled. For instance, subscales of the CMNI and MRNI measures such as Self-Reliance and Risk-Taking may already overlap with aspects of positive masculinity; In turn, measures may already be assessing positive masculinity yet simply not interpreting it as such. Ultimately, the construct of positive masculinity may interact with, not stand in opposition to, traditional masculinity.

Content analysis of existing instruments is needed to begin to make these claims. Example recommendations resulting from this content analysis include the following:

Recommendation 1: Add Positive Masculinity Subscales to Existing Measures

Positive human strengths, irrespective of gender, are at the core of positive masculinity. These strengths are broadly classified as positive emotional states (e.g., happiness, well-being, and positive affect), positive cognitive states (e.g., self-efficacy, hope, and flow), and prosocial behaviors (e.g., empathy, forgiveness, and gratitude) (Cole et al. 2021). Assuming that existing measures of masculinity fail to address these attributes, it may be suggested that additional questions and subscales be added. For instance, a subscale entitled “emotional openness” may ask respondents the following Likert-style questions: “In general, I feel comfortable sharing how I feel with others”; “It is worth paying attention to my feelings.” Sample items may be borrowed

from other instruments on positive psychology such as Ryff and Keyes' psychological well-being scale (Ryff and Keyes 1995).

One measure of masculinity that addresses this notion well is the Traditional Machismo and Caballerismo Scale (TMCS) (Arciniega et al. 2008). Designed for Mexican and Mexican-American men, the TMCS captures masculine beliefs associated with *machismo*, such as dominance over women, restrictive emotionality, and violence, as well as beliefs associated with *caballerismo*, such as emotional openness, compassion for family, and respectfulness. In effect, the TMCS scores both positive and negative dimensions relevant to male socialization and is a prime example of incorporating positive masculinity.

Recommendation 2: Reword Questions from Existing Measures

Researching men's endorsement of traditional norms, Hammer and Good found that in addition to relationships with negative behaviors, some traditional masculinity norms (e.g., risk taking, primacy of work) are associated with positive psychology constructs such as personal courage and resilience (Hammer and Good 2010). This research suggests that the traditional masculinity and positive masculinity constructs have overlap. One recommendation that may encourage future research to include this kind of interpretation is to consider rewording questions from standardized masculinity instruments. For example, a sample question from the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory on the Self-Reliance subscale reads, "I hate asking for help" (Mahalik et al. 2003). A potential rephrasing of this question may take the form of "I find value in asking for help". Although future research is required to determine if and how scores are affected, this type of rephrasing approaches masculinity research with a strengths-based lens.

Recommendation 3: Design new complementary measures

A third suggestion that may result from this research is to create entirely new measures that focus solely on positive masculinity. While some subscales in traditional masculinity measures may be relevant to principles of positive masculinity, creating separate tools may be altogether more useful. A recently designed instrument that accepts this argument is Bates' Positive Masculinity Scale (PMS) (Bates 2023). Rooted in McDermott et al.'s (2019) identification of 32 attributes and behaviors that were perceived as positive and particularly relevant to men, the PMS is a five-point Likert scale tool with a five-factor model. The factor loadings for this survey are as follows: "Drive", "Protector and Provider", "Emotional Resilience", "Brave", and "Physical Prowess". Looking at the relationship between the PMS and mental health outcomes, however, Bates found that "PMS scores were not uniformly associated (or nearly so) with and predictive of positive mental health outcomes among men" (Bates 2023, p. 102). Given the newness of this measure, further validation is required on the PMS, and additional research within educational contexts has not been conducted yet.

A caveat with these recommendations

One caveat to these proposed suggestions is that necessary attention also needs to be paid to qualitative and mixed methods studies. Research performed by Gruys and Munsch (2020) and Schwab and Dupuis (2022) provide excellent examples on investigating male college students' diverse conceptions of masculinity. This sort of study should accompany content analysis and theory development in positive masculinity.

Conclusion

Consciously and unconsciously, students assess and redefine their academic beliefs and behaviors with respect to subtle pressures and societal expectations on how to act. Restrictive norms of traditional masculinity harm individuals in ways that devalue all gender and negatively educational outcomes. Further, a large body of research has confirmed that conformity to these norms is associated with help-seeking avoidance, poor academic attitudes, and lower academic achievement. However, most research into masculinity fails to assess potential strengths found within traditional masculine norms as well as universally positive beliefs that may foster healthy behaviors. Although we cannot understand the role of masculinity without understanding traditional norms and dominant power relationships, we also cannot understand masculinity without understanding counters to traditional norms and human strengths. The construct of positive masculinity invites a promising shift towards this conception. While further research is required on how best to measure this construct, potential ideas include: (1) adding positive masculinity subscales to existing measures, (2) rewording existing measurement questions in a strengths-based format, and (3) designing new measurement tools to specifically capture positive masculinity. Ultimately, positive masculinity provides a uniquely beneficial approach to understanding traditional masculinity and fostering healthy academic beliefs and behaviors.

References

American Psychological Association. (2018). APA guidelines for psychological practice with boys and men. Retrieved from http://www.apa.org/about/policy/psychological-practice-boys-men-guidelines.pdf

Arciniega, G. M., Anderson, T. C., Tovar-Blank, Z. G., & Tracey, T. J. (2008). Toward a fuller conception of Machismo: Development of a traditional Machismo and Caballerismo scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 55*(1), 19.

Bates, D. G. (2023). *Development and Initial Validation of a Positive Masculinity Measure* [Ph.D., University of Cincinnati]. https://www.proquest.com/docview/2864464943/abstract/4D088E08FC1342B9PQ/1

Bergold, S., Kasper, D., Wendt, H., & Steinmayr, R. (2020). Being bullied at school: The case of high-achieving boys. *Social Psychology of Education*, *23*(2), 315–338. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-019-09539-w

Brown, D., Barry, J. A., & Todd, B. K. (2021). Barriers to academic help-seeking: The relationship with gender-typed attitudes. *Journal of Further and Higher Education*, *45*(3), 401–416. https://doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2020.1774049

Butler, J. (1990) Gender trouble: feminism and the subversion of gender (London, Routledge)

Chu, J. Y., Porche, M. V., & Tolman, D. L. (2005). The Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale: Development and Validation of a New Measure for Boys. Men and Masculinities, 8(1), 93-115. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X03257453

Cole, B. P., Moffitt-Carney, K., Patterson, T. P., & Willard, R. (2021). Psychology of Men and

Masculinities' focus on positive aspects of men's functioning: A content analysis and call to action. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *22*(1), 39–47. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000264

Connell, R. W. (1987). Gender and power: Society, the person and sexual politics. Stanford University Press.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept. *Gender & Society*, *19*(6), 829–859. https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243205278639

Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241. https://doi.org/10.2307/1229039

Dominus, S. (2023). There Was Definitely a Thumb on the Scale to Get Boys. *The New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2023/09/08/magazine/men-college-enrollment.html

Galano, S., Liccardo, A., Amodeo, A. L., Crispino, M., Tarallo, O., & Testa, I. (2023). Endorsement of gender stereotypes affects high school students' science identity. *Physical Review Physics Education Research*, *19*(1), 010120. https://doi.org/10.1103/PhysRevPhysEducRes.19.010120

Goodwin, M. E. (2008). *Gender role conflict, depression, and personality's effect on help seeking behaviors, attitudes, and academic performance* (p. 2806920) [Doctor of Philosophy, Iowa State University, Digital Repository]. https://doi.org/10.31274/etd-180810-2554

Gruys, K., & Munsch, C. L. (2020). "Not Your Average Nerd": Masculinities, Privilege, and Academic Effort at an Elite University. *Sociological Forum*, *35*(2), 346–369. https://doi.org/10.1111/socf.12585

Hammer, J. H., & Good, G. E. (2010). Positive psychology: An empirical examination of

beneficial aspects of endorsement of masculine norms. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *11*(4), 303–318. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019056

Hoffman, R. M. (2001). The Measurement of Masculinity and Femininity: Historical Perspective and Implications for Counseling. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, *79*(4), 472–485. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.2001.tb01995.x

hooks, b. (2010). Understanding patriarchy. Louisville, KY: Louisville Anarchist Federation.

Jewkes, R., Morrell, R., Hearn, J., Lundqvist, E., Blackbeard, D., Lindegger, G., Quayle, M., Sikweyiya, Y., & Gottzén, L. (2015). Hegemonic masculinity: Combining theory and practice in gender interventions. *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, *17*(sup2), 96–111. https://doi.org/10.1080/13691058.2015.1085094

Kahn, J. S., Brett, B. L., & Holmes, J. R. (2011). Concerns with men's academic motivation in higher education: An exploratory investigation of the role of masculinity. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 19*(1), 65–82. https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1901.65

Kessels, U., & Steinmayr, R. (2013). Macho-man in school: Toward the role of gender role self-concepts and help seeking in school performance. *Learning and Individual Differences*, *23*, 234–240. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lindif.2012.09.013

Kimbrell, A. G. (2014). *The effects of gender role conflict and adherence to masculine norms on help-seeking behaviors and academic performance in African American college students* [M.S., Tennessee State University].

Kiselica, M. S., Benton-Wright, S., & Englar-Carlson, M. (2016). Accentuating positive masculinity: A new foundation for the psychology of boys, men, and masculinity. In Y. J. Wong & S. R. Wester (Eds.), *APA handbook of men and masculinities.* (pp. 123–143). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/14594-006

Kiselica, M. S., & Englar-Carlson, M. (2010). Identifying, affirming, and building upon male strengths: The positive psychology/positive masculinity model of psychotherapy with boys and men. *Psychotherapy*, *47*(3), 276–287. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0021159

Leaper, C., & Van, S. R. (2008). Masculinity ideology, covert sexism, and perceived gender typicality in relation to young men's academic motivation and choices in college. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *9*(3), 139–153. https://doi.org/10.1037/1524-9220.9.3.139

Leaper, C., Farkas, T., & Starr, C. R. (2019). Traditional masculinity, help avoidance, and intrinsic interest in relation to high school students' English and math performance. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *20*(4), 603–611. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000188

Levant, R. F., Rankin, T. J., Williams, C. M., Hasan, N. T., & Smalley, K. B. (2010). Evaluation of the factor structure and construct validity of scores on the Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised (MRNI-R). Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 11(1), 25. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0017637

Liang, C. T. H., Rocchino, G. H., Gutekunst, M. H. C., & Smithson, A. (2019). Conformity to masculinity ideology, a predictor of academic-related attitudes and behaviors. *Psychology in the Schools*, *56*(10), 1583–1595. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22305

Mahalik, J. R., Locke, B. D., Ludlow, L. H., Diemer, M. A., Scott, R. P. J., Gottfried, M., & Freitas, G. (2003). Development of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 4*(1), 3–25. https://doi.org/10.1037/1524-9220.4.1.3

Marrs, H., Sigler, E. A., & Brammer, R. D. (2012). Gender, Masculinity, Femininity, and Help

Seeking in College. *Masculinities & Social Change*, *1*(3), Article 3. https://doi.org/10.4471/mcs.2012.16

Martín-Arbós, S., Castarlenas, E., & Dueñas, J.-M. (2021). Help-Seeking in an Academic Context: A Systematic Review. *Sustainability*, *13*(8), Article 8. https://doi.org/10.3390/su13084460

McDermott, R. C., Pietrantonio, K. R., Browning, B. R., McKelvey, D. K., Jones, Z. K., Booth, N. R., & Sevig, T. D. (2019). In search of positive masculine role norms: Testing the positive psychology positive masculinity paradigm. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *20*(1), 12–22. https://doi.org/10.1037/men0000160

O'Neil, J. M., & Luján, M. L. (2009). Preventing boys' problems in schools through psychoeducational programming: A call to action. *Psychology in the Schools*, *46*(3), 257–266. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20371

O'Neil, J. M. (2010). Is criticism of generic masculinity, essentialism, and positive-healthy-masculinity a problem for the psychology of men? *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *11*(2), 98–106. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0018917

O'Neil, J. M. (2015). Men's gender role conflict: Psychological costs, consequences, and a agenda for change. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Parker, J. S., Shum, K. Z., Suldo, S. M., Shaunessy-Dedrick, E., M. Ferron, J., & Dedrick, R. F. (2019). Predictors of adaptive help seeking across ninth-grade students enrolled in Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate courses. *Psychology in the Schools*, *56*(5), 652–669. https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22223

Pleck, J. H. (1995). The gender role strain paradigm: An update. In R. F. Levant & W. S. Pollack (Eds.), A new psychology of men (pp. 11–32). New York, NY: Basic Books.

Reardon, S. F., Fahle, E. M., Kalogrides, D., Podolsky, A., & Zárate, R. C. (2019). Gender Achievement Gaps in U.S. School Districts. *American Educational Research Journal*, *56*(6), 2474–2508. https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831219843824

Reeves, R. and Smith, E. (2022). Boys left behind: Education gender gaps across the US. *Brookings Institution.*

Rogers, A. A., DeLay, D., & Martin, C. L. (2017). Traditional Masculinity During the Middle School Transition: Associations with Depressive Symptoms and Academic Engagement. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *46*(4), 709–724. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-016-0545-8

Ryff, C.D., & Keyes, C.L.M. (1995). The structure of psychological well-being revisited. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 69*, 719-727.

Schenke, K., Lam, A. C., Conley, A. M., & Karabenick, S. A. (2015). Adolescents' help seeking in mathematics classrooms: Relations between achievement and perceived classroom environmental influences over one school year. *Contemporary Educational Psychology*, *41*, 133–146. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cedpsych.2015.01.003

Schunk, D. H., & DiBenedetto, M. K. (2021). Chapter Four—Self-efficacy and human motivation. In A. J. Elliot (Ed.), *Advances in Motivation Science* (Vol. 8, pp. 153–179). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/bs.adms.2020.10.001

Schwab, J. R., & Dupuis, D. L. (2022). Masculinity and Silence in the Academic Struggles of American Male College Students. Emerging Adulthood, 10(1), 249-263. https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696820983052

Seligman, M. E. P. (1998). Building Human Strength: Psychology's Forgotten Mission. APA Monitor, 29, 2.

Sloan, C., Gough, B., & Conner, M. (2010). Healthy masculinities? How ostensibly healthy men talk about lifestyle, health and gender. Psychology & Health, 25, 783– 803. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/ 08870440902883204

Thompson, D. (2021). Colleges Have a Guy Problem. *The Atlantic*. https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2021/09/young-men-college-decline-gender-gap-higher-education/620066/

Thompson, E. H., & Bennett, K. M. (2015). Measurement of masculinity ideologies: A (critical) review. *Psychology of Men & Masculinities*, *16*(2), 115–133. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0038609

Wilson, M., Gwyther, K., Swann, R., Casey, K., Featherston, R., Oliffe, J. L., Englar-Carlson, M., & Rice, S. M. (2022). Operationalizing positive masculinity: A theoretical synthesis and school-based framework to engage boys and young men. *Health Promotion International*, *37*(1), daab031. https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/daab031

Wimer, D. J., & Levant, R. F. (2011). The Relation of Masculinity and Help-Seeking Style with the Academic Help-Seeking Behavior of College Men. *The Journal of Men's Studies*, *19*(3), 256–274. https://doi.org/10.3149/jms.1903.256

Wong, Y. J., Horn, A. J., Gomory, A. M. G., & Ramos, E. (2013). Measure of Men's Perceived Inexpressiveness Norms (M2PIN): Scale development and psychometric properties. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 14*(3), 288–299. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0029244

Workman, J., & Heyder, A. (2020). Gender achievement gaps: The role of social costs to trying hard in high school. *Social Psychology of Education*, *23*(6), 1407–1427. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11218-020-09588-6

Yavorsky, J., & Buchmann, C. (2019). Gender Typicality and Academic Achievement among

American High School Students. *Sociological Science*, *6*, 661–683. https://doi.org/10.15195/v6.a25

Yu, J., McLellan, R., & Winter, L. (2021). Which Boys and Which Girls Are Falling Behind? Linking Adolescents' Gender Role Profiles to Motivation, Engagement, and Achievement. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, *50*(2), 336–352. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01293-z

Appendix A: Positionality Statement

My research interests originate from my own conceptions of gender identity. As a member of the first generation to consume social media, I have observed stereotypical and unrealistic standards of masculinity and femininity portrayed and shared with widespread reach and frequency. Feeling at odds with normative male standards, I contemplated how gender identity influenced my self-perception and relationships with my classmates. I questioned whether my friends also wrestled with notions of being "too cool for school" and the need to avoid archetypal feminine subjects including literature and art. As an adult, I am curious how these tropes influence gender inequalities within modern education.

Furthermore, my experiences as a student, software engineer, and volunteer student-teacher have shaped and developed my interests in research. Within the Durham Public Schools district, I observed that the majority of struggling students I taught were disproportionately male. Studying computer science and education at Duke University, I questioned why my higher-level courses were increasingly gendered; while my computer science courses were male-dominated, my education courses were female-dominated.

As an aspiring Ph.D. student, I am intrigued by this anecdotal evidence and research surrounding masculinity in contexts of educational identity and achievement.