**EI Study**

After discussing possible study designs, we came up with two ways to conceptualize how precarious manhood (PM) might influence existential isolation (EI) via communal motives, each of which has different implications for the experimental design.

One route might be that the precariousness of manhood exists as “background noise” regardless of whether an individual explicitly endorses precarious manhood beliefs (beliefs that manhood is easy to lose). In this case, simple awareness of the precariousness of manhood status might dampen men’s motivation to connect with others (communal goals), which then presumably increases EI. This occurs because socialization in the male gender role teaches men that interpersonal goals (communality) are inconsistent with their role, so reminders of the precarity of their gender status temporarily suppress communal goals and prepare men to pursue agentic goals (which are consistent with the male gender role). All of this may occur below conscious awareness, and is activated even in the absence of obvious gender threats. Alternatively, simple awareness of the precariousness of manhood status might make men feel more EI, which could degrade their communal goals. If we think that this is the mechanism through which PM and EI are connected, we could randomly assign men to either read about PM or not (via proverbs that describe manhood as something that is hard won, easily lost), then have them complete measures of communal goals and EI. We would predict that men in the PM condition report higher EI mediated by lower communal goals. We would also run the alternate model in which PM decreases communal goals via higher EI.

Another way of thinking about PM is as an individual difference – certain men believe that their manhood is hard won and easily lost, whereas other don’t. In this case, we could measure men’s PM beliefs (using the 7-item measure from Vandello et al., 2008, even though it is not a validated measure of PM beliefs – others have successfully published with it), then measure their communal goals and EI. In this case, we would predict paths from PM to communal goals to EI, although we can also test alternate models of these paths.

We talked about directly threatening men’s gender identity, and measuring communal goals and then EI. However, as Dahl, Vescio, and Weaver (2015) show, gender threats tend to cause reactions involving anger and dominance. Regaining threatened masculinity by, for example, choosing to use a punching bag rather than doing a logic puzzle, is performative in nature and, whether explicitly or implicitly, ultimately about shoring up masculinity. Withdrawing endorsement of communal goals is neither performative nor a direct path to buttress masculinity, but a more subtle repudiation of stereotypically feminine norms. As such, directly threatening men’s gender identity may not work to reduce men’s communality (although it might? We just aren’t sure). In any case, we can determine what we want to manipulate by first conducting a correlational study that includes the following scales:

* EI
* Beliefs in PM
* Conformity to masculine norms inventory
* Masculine gender role stress scale
  + This scale asks men to indicate how stressful certain situations would be, including being perceived of as gay, losing in a sports competition, admitting that you’re afraid of something, etc.
* Communal and agentic norm endorsement

If we see that communal norm endorsement mediates the relationship between belief in PM and EI, but not the association between CMNI or gender role stress and EI, we can assume that a more subtle manipulation of PM would probably be safer route to go in the experiment. If the threat of being perceived as less masculine does not drive EI through lower endorsement of communal norms, but the belief in the general precariousness of manhood does, then a manipulation reminding men that their manhood is in fact precarious would seem more likely to produce higher EI via lower communal norm endorsement.

(Note from JB: The CMNI is about the personal importance to men of adhering to male role norms. Does it make sense to predict that male norm endorsement predicts EI through communal norm endorsement? Or are the X and M variables too similar? Are there subscales in the CMNI that are very close in content to what is measured in the communal / agentic goals scale? Look closely at the items in the two scales.) – Reply from GR: In a scale validation study I found, the correlation between the CMNI and interdependent self-construal was *r* = -.05 (Wong et al., 2011), so there doesn’t appear to be a lot of overlap here. I think that the “Emotional Control” and “Self-Reliance” subscales are closest in qualitative content to communal norms. We can run the analyses with and without these scales to see if their exclusion changes anything. JB’s reply: I like that idea, of running analyses both with and without those two scales that may overlap with communal norm endorsement.

If we see the opposite, where CMNI or gender role stress is a predictor of EI via communal norms, but PM is not, then a gender identity threat would likely be a better way to go. This correlational finding would suggest that gender role threat is the pathway through which EI increases in men, rather than beliefs in the structural tenuousness of manhood. In other words, if men’s stress about being perceived as less masculine (or their responses to the CMNI) is associated with increased EI through lower communal norms, experimentally threatening their manhood would confirm the causal nature of this relationship.

If an interaction or some other combination of effects emerges, we can design a study that includes a PM reminder condition, a gender identity threat condition, and a control condition to determine if one has a stronger effect on EI than the other.

Anything we should include as covariates? Standard demographics (age is pretty common in the self-construal literature. PANAS?