

# THE GENDER ROLE STRAIN PARADIGM AND MASCULINITY IDEOLOGIES

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Feminist scholarship on the psychology of women and gender developed a perspective that viewed gender roles as socially constructed by gender ideologies, rooted in power differences between men and women (Deaux, 1984; Gergen, 1985; Unger, 1979). Pleck (1981) applied these insights to men in his seminal volume *The Myth of Masculinity*. There, he formulated the sex role strain paradigm (later termed the *gender role strain paradigm*, or GRSP; Pleck, 1995). The GRSP is regarded as the major theoretical paradigm in the field of the psychology of men and masculinity (Cochran, 2010; Wong, Steinfeldt, Speight, & Hickman, 2010). It is a quantitative empirical social constructionist feminist perspective (Pleck, 1995), sharing fundamental views of the origin and maintenance of gender roles with feminism and with other social constructionist perspectives in psychology (e.g., discursive psychology; Edley & Wetherell, 1995), sociology (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005), and other social science disciplines (see Chapters 4 and 7, this handbook).

The GRSP views gender roles not as biologically determined but rather as socially constructed entities that arise from, and serve to protect, the patriarchal social and economic order. Traditional gender roles, therefore, undergird power differences between men and women by defining masculinity as dominance and aggression and femininity as submissiveness and nurturance (Levant, 1996b). According to the social constructionist perspective, gender roles of masculinity and femininity are thought of as “performances,” independent of sex (Butler, 1990). Hence, women can perform masculinity, men can

perform femininity, and both sexes can perform any combination and permutation of these gender roles. Yet, in a patriarchal society, tangible rewards are associated with conforming to the sex-aligned and socially sanctioned traditional gendered roles, and negative consequences are associated with failure to conform (Pleck, 1981, 1995). Over time, traditional gendered performances become normative and compulsory and in turn are encoded in everything from the neural pathways of individuals to social interactions (Fausto-Sterling, 2000).

This perspective 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. Further support for this perspective comes from primatological data, which have shown gender-atypical behaviors among the bonobos and the marmosets (Smuts & Gubernick, 1992; Wrangham & Peterson, 1996), undermining the proposition that gender is biologically based. The bonobos, our nearest primate relatives, display an absence of male aggression, which is assumed to be an “essential” male trait (Wrangham & Peterson, 1996). In addition, adult male marmosets nurture their offspring, a behavior not associated with traditional masculinity in humans (Smuts & Gubernick, 1992). Furthermore, a phenomenon recently observed among male baboons showed adoption of equalitarian behaviors under the influence of their female counterparts,

supporting the flexibility of gendered behaviors in primates (de Waal, 2004).

Pleck (1981) proffered the GRSP as an alternative to the older approach, which had dominated research on masculinity for 50 years (1930–1980), that he termed the *gender role identity paradigm* (GRIP).<sup>1</sup> The GRIP drew from early psychoanalytic theory (particularly the drive and ego psychoanalytic theories); it assumed that people have a powerful psychological need to form a gender role identity that corresponds to their biological sex and that optimal personality development hinges on its formation. The extent to which this “inherent” need is met is determined by how completely a person adopts 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, or defensive hypermasculinity (Pleck, 1981).

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—that is, that biological sex determines gender (Bohan, 1997). Pleck (1981) provided a convincing demonstration not only that the GRIP poorly accounted for the observed data in many canonical studies on personality development, but also that such studies often arbitrarily reinterpreted the meaning of the data to provide support for the GRIP. 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 (1981) noted that “if a measure ordinarily indicating good adjustment occurs in non-masculine males, it is arbitrarily reinterpreted to indicate poor adjustment” (p. 86).

In contrast to the GRIP’s essentialism, Pleck (1981) put forth 10 propositions for the GRSP that reflected the view that gender roles were socially constructed:

1. that contemporary gender roles are operationally defined by gender role stereotypes and norms;
2. that gender roles are contradictory and inconsistent;
3. that the proportion of people who violate gender roles is high;
4. that violation of gender roles leads to social condemnation;
5. that violation of gender roles leads to negative psychological consequences;
6. that actual or imagined violation of gender roles leads people to overconform to them;
7. that violating gender roles has more severe consequences for males than for females;
8. that certain prescribed gender role traits (such as male aggression) are often dysfunctional;
9. that each sex experiences gender role strain in its paid work and family roles; and
10. that historical change causes gender role strain.

Since the original formulation of the GRSP, there have been four major clarifications, two of which we address at this point. First, Pleck (1995) indicated that, although they were not explicitly mentioned in the 10 original propositions, gender ideologies are considered to be central to the GRSP and a “vital cofactor in male role strain” (p. 19). The term *gender ideologies* refers to beliefs about the roles thought to be appropriate for men and women. The dominant gender ideologies in a given society thus define the norms for gender roles. They therefore influence how parents, teachers, coaches, peers, and society at large socialize children and consequently how children think, feel, and behave with regard to gender-salient matters (Levant, 1996b; Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1994b). Hence, an 11th proposition should be added to the GRSP, at the beginning of the list: “The dominant gender ideologies in a given society define the norms for gender roles.” Second, although the main contributors to the theory were trained as clinical psychologists (Levant, 1996b; Pleck, 1995), the original theory implied a social psychological (social learning theory) foundation for gender role

<sup>1</sup>Pleck (1981) used the term *paradigm* to contrast these two overarching approaches, but after 3 decades of usage, it would probably be more appropriate to refer to the GRSP as a theory. However, the name seems to have stuck, so changing that usage may be difficult.

socialization (Pleck, 1981). Later, Levant (2011) explicitly framed the GRSP in social psychological terms, using the theories of social cognition and social influence and the constructs of gender roles and social norms.

Thus, in the current formulation, traditional masculinity ideology is posited to exert social influence through interactions resulting in reinforcement, punishment, and observational learning. Traditional masculinity ideology thus informs, encourages, and constrains boys and men to conform to (or comply with, or obey) the prevailing male role norms (both descriptive and injunctive) by adopting certain socially sanctioned (prescribed) masculine behaviors and avoiding certain forbidden (proscribed) behaviors (Levant, 1996b, 2011).

### COMPARISON WITH OTHER THEORIES IN THE PSYCHOLOGY OF MEN AND MASCULINITY

Several recent reviews of research literature on the psychology of men and masculinity have addressed theoretical orientations. Each review put forth a somewhat different classification of theoretical orientations, thus conceptualizing the field in different ways. In this section, we briefly discuss each review and comment on both the classification of theoretical approaches and the relationship of each theoretical approach to the GRSP.

Taking the reviews in chronological order, we first discuss Smiler (2004), who identified five “movements” in the conceptualization and measurement of masculinity that occurred during or after the second wave of feminism in the 1960s. The first movement was the *unipolar masculinity movement*, which created the concept of androgyny. This approach, which Smiler termed *essentialist*, is part of the GRIP, discussed above. The second movement was the *ideology movement*, which identified the norms for the male gender role and developed instruments that measured traditional masculinity ideology, defined as beliefs about the importance of men adhering to traditional norms for male behavior. The third movement was the *strain movement*, which includes the GRSP (Pleck, 1981, 1995) as well as the related but separate gender role conflict (GRC; O’Neil, 2008)

and masculine gender role stress (Eisler, 1995) constructs and research programs. The ideology and strain movements together constitute the GRSP as more recently conceptualized (Levant, 1996b, 2011; Pleck, 1995). The fourth movement was the *social constructionist movement*, which concerns the different ways in which gender is constructed at a variety of social levels, from the interpersonal to the societal, and which led to the idea of multiple masculinities. This movement is the most common approach to studying gender in disciplines outside of quantitative empirical psychology, and it is associated with discursive psychology, a qualitative empirical approach (Edley & Wetherell, 1995; Luyt, 2013), and sociology (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The GRSP shares some features with discursive psychology and sociology, which in turn have influenced the GRSP, particularly in terms of the concept of masculinity ideologies, discussed below.

Smiler’s (2004) fifth movement is *current movements*, which include Pleck’s (1995) clarification of the relationship between the GRSP and social constructionism (which was the third major clarification of the GRSP), and Wade and Gelso’s (1998) male reference group identity dependence theory, which posits that men create “an internal representation of males like oneself and/or of male peers with whom one identifies” (p. 363). Pleck’s clarification pointed out that the GRSP is a social constructionist perspective or, as he put it, “The gender role strain model for masculinity is, in the broad sense, a social constructionist perspective that simply predated the term” (p. 22). Despite this clarification, confusion and disagreement persist as to whether the GRSP is a social constructionist theory, as reflected, for example, in Luyt’s (2013) lumping the GRSP in with the GRIP under the category of gender role theories.

Addis and Cohane (2005) identified four scientific paradigms of masculinity that are related to men’s mental health.

1. The *psychodynamic paradigm* integrates object relations and self-psychological theories (e.g., Krugman, 1995; Pollack, 1995). The psychodynamic paradigm, discussed in Chapter 5 of this handbook, is based on a very large literature that began in the late 19th century, which informed

the essentialistic GRIP, as previously noted. More recent work, such as that of Krugman (1995) and Pollack (1995), has attempted with some success to break from essentialism.

2. The *social learning paradigm* combines what Smiler (2004) described separately as the ideology and the strain movements, which together constitute the GRSP (and also includes GRC, as did Smiler). In the 1980s when the GRSP was first formulated, social learning theory was in its heyday, and, as noted above, the original formulation implied a social learning theory foundation for gender role socialization (Pleck, 1981). However, since then, the “cognitive revolution” has occurred in psychology, and social cognitive theory has all but replaced social learning theory; hence, more recent work in the GRSP relies more on social cognitive theory than on social learning theory (Levant, 2011).
3. *Social constructionism*, which, as discussed above, includes the GRSP in quantitative empirical psychology and other approaches outside of quantitative psychology.
4. *Feminism*, which is similar to social constructionism but emphasizes the gender-based power structure in patriarchal societies as a central organizing principle. As previously noted, the GRSP is a feminist approach because the central construct of masculinity ideology is posited to be rooted in, and designed to maintain, the power differences between the sexes.

Cochran (2010) identified three “paradigms for the psychological study of men and masculinity” (p. 48):

1. *Essentialist, biological, and evolutionary perspectives* focus on correlating psychological characteristics of men with biological processes unique to men.
2. *Gender role identity paradigms*, as previously described, also include Smiler’s (2004) unipolar masculinity movement and part of Addis and Cohane’s (2005) psychodynamic paradigm. However, Cochran (2010) sagely noted that Pollack’s (1995) developmental psychoanalytic approach integrated psychodynamic theory with the GRSP.
3. GRSP, the topic of this chapter.

We are more in agreement with Cochran’s classification, which explicitly names the GRSP, than with the classifications of Addis and Cohane (2005), which identified the GRSP as the social learning paradigm, and of Smiler (2004), who split the GRSP into the ideology movement and the strain movement. Cochran (2010) pointed out that the “gender role strain paradigm has been the most influential of the three” (p. 51). Cochran also noted, as did both Smiler and Addis and Cohane, that recent thinking in the GRSP extends into social constructionism, including the concept of multiple masculinities and of masculinity not as unitary “thing” (Cochran, 2010, p. 51) but rather as the performance of roles.

Wong et al. (2010) conducted a content analysis of articles published in the journal *Psychology of Men & Masculinity* from 2000 through 2008. Although none of the 12 discrete theories were used in a majority of the articles, theories based on the GRSP (including masculinity ideology) or one of its associated theories, such as GRC and masculine gender role stress, were used in 63% of the articles coded. As a result, Wong et al. concluded that “most PMM articles were based on theories associated with the gender role strain paradigm” (p. 176). As previously observed, although GRC and masculine gender role stress theories are distinct enough that they should be considered separate theories influenced by the GRSP, Pleck (1995) noted that “the concept of ‘masculinity ideology’ is central to male gender role strain” (p. 19) and thus it should be considered to be part of the GRSP.

In summary, the GRSP, when understood to be a quantitative empirical social constructionist and feminist psychological perspective, and when conceptualized to include masculinity ideology as a central component as its principal developers intended, appears to have advanced the psychological understanding of men and masculinity. When considered together with other major research programs that have been influenced by the GRSP, such as GRC and masculine gender role stress, the GRSP is part of—perhaps central to—what appears at this point to be the dominant research paradigm in the psychology of men and masculinity.

## MASCULINITY IDEOLOGIES

The GRSP posited the central role of traditional masculinity ideology—a dominant cultural script that organizes and informs the development and maintenance of the traditional masculine role through social cognition and social influence processes that occur over the life span (Levant, 2011; Pleck, 1995). This begins with the gender role socialization of children and continues into adulthood after the internalization of dominant cultural belief systems regarding the male role (Levant, 1996b, 2011; Thompson & Pleck, 1995). In this section, we provide a critical review of the empirical literature on masculinity ideologies, including the historical and theoretical foundation of masculinity ideology, the presence of multiple masculinity ideologies, traditional masculinity ideology, the measurement of masculinity ideologies, women’s and transgender individuals’ masculinity ideologies, adolescents’ masculinity ideologies, conformity to masculine norms, and the psychological correlates of traditional masculinity.

### Historical and Theoretical Foundations of 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 arose 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 (Bem, 1974) and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence & Helmreich, 1978).<sup>2</sup> In contrast, studies of masculinity ideology take a normative approach, in which

masculinity is viewed as a socially constructed set of gender norms. 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 (1995) 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* [italics 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 are patriarchal and thus must socialize boys to develop the set of characteristics that are necessary to perform the behaviors embedded in traditional gender roles. The exceptions that Gilmore found were the Tahitians and the Semai, “virtually androgynous cultures [which] raise questions about the universal need for masculinity in male development, and . . . suggest that cultural variables may outweigh nature in the masculinity puzzle” (p. 201).

This dominant masculinity ideology, which defines the social norms for the male gender role, is

<sup>2</sup>Although the Bem Sex-Role Inventory and the Personal Attributes Questionnaire 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 Bem Sex-Role Inventory as a measure of self-perceived gender-linked personality traits (Choi, Fuqua, & Newman, 2008), and the scales of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire have been recast as Masculinity/Instrumentality and Femininity/Expressiveness (Helmreich, Spence, & Wilhelm, 1981).

postulated to uphold existing gender-based power structures that privilege men, most particularly White, upper class, heterosexual, able-bodied men. This concept of a dominant masculinity ideology is very similar to Connell and Messerschmidt's (2005) sociological concept of hegemonic masculinity, which not only undergirds men's collective dominance over women but also marginalizes men of color and lower class men and subjugates sexual minority men, although all men participate in the "patriarchal dividend" that can bolster a man's self-esteem simply from associating with a desired ingroup—that of the traditional man (Owens, 2003).

### Masculinity Ideologies

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

Overall endorsement and weighting of norms have been found to vary with such dimensions of sociodemographic diversity as age, generation within a family, ethnicity, race, nationality, social class, geographic region of residence, sex, sexual orientation, and ability status (Levant, Cuthbert, et al., 2003; Levant & Majors, 1997; Levant, Majors, & Kelley, 1998; Levant, Richmond, et al., 2003; Levant, Wu, & Fischer, 1996; Pleck et al., 1994b; Tager & Good, 2005; Thompson & Pleck, 1986; Wu, Levant, & Sellers, 2001; see also the review by Levant & Richmond, 2007). In addition, Fischer and Good (1998) undertook a cluster-analytic approach among predominantly White heterosexual college men using the Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS; Thompson & Pleck, 1986). They found five patterns of endorsement, reflecting different masculinity ideologies, which they termed *moderately traditional*, *high status–low violence*, *nontraditional*, *high*

*violence–moderately traditional*, and *traditional*. Evidence for the validity of this set of masculinity ideologies was found by their differential associations with gender role egalitarianism. It is interesting that considerable diversity in masculinity ideologies emerged in a relatively homogeneous sample; future research should replicate this approach with a more diverse sample, in terms of age, race, and sexual orientation and also including women.

Not all studies of masculinity ideologies have looked for differences in overall endorsement and in the weighting of the same set of masculine norms. Some investigators, using the Multicultural Masculinity Ideology Scale (Doss & Hopkins, 1998), have investigated which masculine norms appear to be present across several cultures and which appear to be culturally specific. Doss and Hopkins (1998) found that the norms of hypermasculine posturing and achievement were consistent across Chilean and Black and White populations in the United States; whereas toughness, pose, and responsibility were specific to Chileans, sensitivity was specific to White Americans, and sexual responsibility was specific to Black Americans. Janey, Janey, Goncherova, and Savchenko (2006) found four norms specific to Russians: achievement pose, emotional availability–stability, composed sexuality, and dedicated provider.

Overall, this set of studies has lent support to the view that there are many variants of masculinity ideology. Some variations may reflect mere differences in "emphasis or form" (Gilmore, 1990, p. 3), whereas others may reflect substantive matters. In particular, there is a complex interplay between hegemonic expectations and the subordination of men of color. As Chan (2001) described, men of color are forced to "emulate White American notions of masculinity or accept the fact that [they] are not men" (p. 156). Indeed, hegemonic masculinity's privileging of White masculinity over the masculinities of men of color has a profound influence on racial minority men's endorsements of gender ideologies. 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 result of slavery (e.g., forced separation of families) and economic

necessity (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 potential diversity in masculinity ideologies in the contemporary United States, Pleck (1995) has pointed out that “there is a *particular* constellation of standards and expectations that individually and jointly have various kinds of negative concomitants” (p. 20). This is referred to as *traditional masculinity ideology* because it was the dominant view before the deconstruction of gender that took place beginning in the late 1960s, driven by second-wave feminism.

Traditional masculinity ideology has always been conceptualized as a multidimensional construct. The first investigators to attempt to define traditional masculinity ideology were David and Brannon (1976), who identified four components: 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 with the Brannon Masculinity Scale (BMS), the first instrument developed for the assessment of traditional masculinity ideology (Brannon & Juni, 1984).

### Measuring Masculinity Ideologies

Psychologists have developed a number of scales to measure masculinity ideologies. Thompson and Pleck (1995) argued that such scales should measure norms that are specific to men without overt comparisons to women—that is, to use absolute versus relative norms. Of the 11 measures of masculinity ideology reviewed by Thompson and Pleck, only six used absolute norms. Of these, two were quite limited: One measured women’s attitudes toward men and another was focused solely on male sexuality.

Of the remaining four measures of masculinity ideology, three are directly related to each other. The three related measures include or derive from

the BMS (Brannon & Juni, 1984). The BMS is a 110-item scale; seven subscales tap different absolute norms of traditional masculinity ideology. This breadth is one of its strengths, but its chief weakness is that its dimensionality has never been supported by factor analysis. There is also a 58-item short form of the BMS (Brannon & Juni, 1984).

The MRNS (Thompson & Pleck, 1986) is a 26-item scale developed by factor analyzing the short form of the BMS. The chief strengths of the MRNS are its brevity and that its dimensionality has been supported by factor analysis. The chief limitations of the MRNS are, first, that it assesses only three dimensions of masculinity ideology (status, toughness, and antifemininity), whereas many scale developers view traditional masculinity as involving more than three norms (Mahalik et al., 2003; Thompson & Pleck, 1995). Second, the three-factor structure of the MRNS posited and found by the scale developers does not appear to be stable (Fischer, Tokar, Good, & Snell, 1998).

The Male Role Attitudes Scale (Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1993) used seven items from the MRNS and one item concerning sexuality. The chief advantage of the Male Role Attitudes Scale is its brevity, making it useful for population-based surveys. Its limitations include the small number of items, which cover only a small set of the male role norms, and also its low internal consistency (the coefficient  $\alpha$  for the scale is .56, as reported by Pleck, Sonenstein, & Ku, 1994a).

### Male Role Norms Inventory, Including Revised and Short Form Versions

In this section, we discuss the original Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI), the Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised (MRNI-R), and the Male Role Norms Inventory—Short Form (MRNI-SF). This review recounts some of the limitations in the original instrument and how they were addressed in subsequent versions.

**Male Role Norms Inventory.** The fourth scale discussed in Thompson and Pleck’s (1995) review was the MRNI (Levant et al., 1992). The MRNI was designed as a comprehensive measure of male role norms without overt comparisons to women. In a review of the literature of the late 1980s, the

BMS stood out as the best instrument at the time. However, as noted previously, it had significant limitations. In addition, Levant et al. (1992) noted that the subscale structure of the BMS did not optimally represent the consensus among men's studies scholars at the time on the norms composing the male role. Thus, Levant et al. developed a set of seven traditional norms. The Non-Traditional Attitudes subscale was subsequently developed by reversing the wording of some of the traditional scale items (Levant & Fischer, 1998). The MRNI is thus a 57-item instrument with seven subscales that measure traditional norms (Avoidance of Femininity, Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals, Self-Reliance, Aggression, Achievement/Status, Non-Relational Attitudes Toward Sex, and Restrictive Emotionality) and one subscale that measures nontraditional norms. Its chief advantages, in comparison with the other scales reviewed by Thompson and Pleck, were that it has a broad set of subscales and that it measures multiple masculinity ideologies.

Since its initial development, the MRNI has been used in more than 40 empirical studies, including multicultural investigations in the United States (examining masculinity ideologies in African American, Latino/Latina, Asian American, and European American communities), cross-national studies (in Russia, China, and Pakistan), and studies examining the relationships between masculinity ideologies and other constructs (see Levant & Richmond, 2007, for a review of the MRNI studies reported over the 15-year period from 1992 to 2007). Whorley and Addis's (2006) analysis of the frequency of usage of masculinity measures found that the MRNI is one of the most commonly used measures of masculinity ideologies. However, major limitations of the MRNI were that the factor analysis conducted by Levant et al. (1992) did not support the hypothesized subscale structure, several studies found the internal consistency reliabilities of some of the MRNI subscales to be low, and little information on validity was available at the time of Thompson and Pleck's (1995) review.

**Male Role Norms Inventory—Revised.** These concerns were addressed in a revision, resulting in the MRNI-R (Levant et al., 2007). The initial study

of the 53-item measure 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). General support for the hypothesized dimensionality of the MRNI-R was provided by an exploratory factor analysis in a second study of the MRNI-R (Levant, Rankin, Williams, Hasan, & Smalley, 2010). However, the expected associations of some specific items with their theorized subscales had mixed support, necessitating rethinking the meaning and names of some of the subscales. Specifically, the results suggested a slightly revised seven-factor structure, based on 39 items: Avoidance of Femininity, Negativity Toward Sexual Minorities, Self-Reliance Through Mechanical Skills (renamed from Self-Reliance), Toughness (renamed from Aggression), Dominance, Importance of Sex (renamed from Non-Relational Attitudes Toward Sexuality), and Restrictive Emotionality. The Levant et al. (2010) study also provided support for convergent, discriminant, and concurrent validity.

**Male Role Norms Inventory—Short Form.** Short forms of masculinity instruments have appeared recently, indicating interest in instruments with good psychometric properties that can be completed quickly. Given the centrality of traditional masculinity ideology to the GRSP and the weaknesses of other measures of traditional masculinity ideology discussed above, it seemed important to have a short multidimensional scale with good psychometric properties that measured this construct. Levant, Hall, and Rankin (2013) approached the development of the MRNI-SF by selecting three of the highest loading items for each factor from the exploratory factor analysis of the MRNI-R conducted by Levant et al. (2010), while ensuring that they also captured the construct and avoided redundancy. The aim was to conduct a confirmatory factor analysis on the MRNI-SF and to model both the seven subscales and the total score, which broadly represents traditional masculinity ideology in general. Levant, Hall, and Rankin found first of all that the item-level responses on the new 21-item MRNI-SF loaded, as predicted, on the seven hypothesized



traditional masculine norms. Second, they found the best fit for the bifactor model, in which each measured indicator is modeled as being caused by both a general traditional masculinity ideology latent factor and a specific latent factor corresponding to one of the subscales. This implied that item-level responses on the MRNI–SF reflect both a specific norm of traditional masculinity ideology and a general factor reflecting an overarching traditional masculinity ideology concept.

### Women’s Masculinity Ideologies

One topic that has until recently only been partially addressed is how masculinity ideology operates in both women and men (Whorley & Addis, 2006). Levant and Richmond (2007) summarized four studies using the MRNI total traditional score with U.S. participants from African American, Latino/Latina, and European American communities, reporting that men tended to endorse traditional masculinity ideology to a greater extent than did women and that the effect size of gender was larger than that of race/ethnicity. However, a set of cross-national studies using the MRNI total traditional score found that both men and women from China, Russia, and Pakistan tended to endorse traditional masculinity ideology to a greater extent than did U.S. men and women, that the differences between men and women in these countries were much smaller than those between their U.S. counterparts, and that nationality had a larger effect size than gender (Levant & Richmond, 2007). These nation-level differences in endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology appear to reflect differences in gender empowerment between these countries (Levant, Hall, & Rankin, 2013). In this context, U.S. women’s low endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology may reflect their rejection of male dominance (Levant, 1996a).

These previous results regarding mean differences across genders in the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology are limited by the fact that they assumed, but did not assess, that the MRNI instrument operated in the same manner for men and women—that is, it was invariant. When comparing mean differences, invariance over populations must be present to rule out the possibility of

construct bias, which implies that a test measures something different in one group (men) than in another (women). Recent research (Levant, Hall, & Rankin, 2013) assessed the measurement invariance of the bifactor model of the MRNI–SF across sex groups, with findings of full configural invariance and partial metric invariance, such that factor loadings were equivalent across the sex groups for the seven specific factors, but not for the general traditional masculinity ideology factor. This indicates that both men and women conceptualize the seven masculine norms in the same way, which makes sense because those norms are communicated very broadly in U.S. culture. However, the indicators do not load on the general traditional masculinity ideology factor in the same way for men and for woman. Theoretical explanations for this latter result include the potential that men’s sense of self or identity may be engaged when responding to questions asking to what extent they agree or disagree with normative statements about men’s behavior.

### Transgender Individuals’ Masculinity Ideologies

Only a few attempts have been made to measure the masculinity ideologies of transgender individuals. On the MRNI–R, nontransgender lesbian and gay individuals endorsed the least traditional masculinity ideology, and nontransgender heterosexual individuals endorsed the most traditional masculinity ideology, with self-identified transgender individuals endorsing masculinity ideology in the middle (Fan, 2010). Using qualitative methods, norms associated with hegemonic masculinity were not endorsed by female-to-male-identified individuals, with many advocating for alternative masculinities that were also informed by feminist, antiracist, and queer identities (Green, 2005). Furthermore, transgender men were more concerned about being perceived as male than they were about being perceived as masculine, suggesting that participants were intentionally separating maleness (body) with masculinity (performance; Green, 2005). More important, transgender theory highlights that male-assigned bodies are not the only bodies that express masculinity (Halberstam, 2012). Rather, the

construction of masculinity is dynamic and relational, incorporating the complexities of both construction and embodiment (Scott-Dixon, 2006).

This research, however, must be qualified by the challenges in generalizing results to transgender communities because *transgender* is an umbrella term that encompasses many different gender identifications (Elze, 2007; Harcourt, 2006). Moreover, transgender communities continue to produce new self-identifications, so classification for research purposes continues to be difficult, suggesting that qualitative research methods may be the best approach with this population at this time (Meyerowitz, 2002).

Considering the Addis, Mansfield, and Syzdek (2010) critique about how masculinity ideology tends to get operationalized as stable characteristics, queer and transgender theories offer potentially powerful new frameworks for understanding how transgender individuals transform masculinity ideology. In particular, researchers have advocated for the use of participatory action research to guide research with rather than on transgender individuals (Singh, Richmond, & Burnes, 2013). The process of participatory action research includes participants as collaborators in every aspect of the research process. By using participatory action research, researchers might consider inviting transgender individuals to review existing measures of masculinity ideologies and then to provide feedback on alternative ways of measurement. Of particular interest would be how transgender individuals operationalize masculinity performance compared with male embodiment.

### Adolescents' Masculinity Ideologies

Concern about and conformity to gender norms becomes particularly intense in adolescence (Gambos, Almeida, & Petersen, 1990). To date, only a few attempts have been made to measure the masculinity ideologies of adolescents. As noted above, Pleck et al. (1994a) adapted the MRNS to create the eight-item MRAS to be used with older adolescent boys ages 15–19 in population-based epidemiological surveys. Chu, Porche, and Tolman (2005) developed the Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale, 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 Adolescent Masculinity Ideology in Relationships Scale was derived from adolescent boys' narratives about their perceptions and experiences of masculinity in their relationships. Limitations of this instrument include its focus on relationships, which cover 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 to represent adolescent-specific contexts. Also, although certainly relevant to the adolescent population, the scale developers decided to not include the Fear and Hatred of Homosexuals and Non-Relational 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 had 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 samples drawn from the United States and Scotland 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 inventory with the same five subscales as the MRNI–A. Levant et al. (2012) conducted an exploratory factor analysis, finding a three-factor structure—Emotionally Detached Dominance, Toughness, and Avoidance of Femininity—that resembles that of the MRNS (Status, Toughness, and Antifemininity). Evidence

was found for the internal consistency reliabilities of MRNI–A–r and its factors and for convergent and discriminant validity.

### Traditional Masculinity Ideology and Its Psychological Correlates

In this section, we discuss research using measures of traditional masculinity ideology, including the MRNI and other measures. Early work supported a central tenet of the GRSP, namely that gender norms varied according to the cultural context and social location of the individual. In addition the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology was found to be related to a range of problematic individual and relational variables. However, in the area of men's health research has found that the relationship between masculinity and health behaviors depends on which facets of masculinity are being used as predictors and which dimensions of health behavior are serving as criteria. Finally, we review research on the negative relationship between masculinity variables and attitudes toward seeking psychological help and the factors that mediate and moderate this relationship.

**General correlates.** As noted in an earlier review of the literature (Levant & Richmond, 2007), the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology has been found to support a central tenet of the GRSP, namely that gender norms vary according to the cultural context and social location of the individual. Greater endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology using the MRNI was found to be associated with a host of demographic variables: sex (being male), age (being younger), marital status (being single), race and ethnicity (African Americans endorse traditional masculinity ideology to a greater extent than do Latino and Latina Americans, who in turn endorse traditional masculinity ideology to a greater extent than do European Americans), geographic region of residence in the United States (living in the South vs. the North), and nationality (Chinese and Russians endorse traditional masculinity ideology to a greater extent than do Americans).

Furthermore, MRNI scores were found to be related to a number of variables measuring social location and individual and relational health and

functioning. Traditional ideology was related to generational differences (sons scored as less traditional than fathers); sexual orientation and social support (gay men scored as less traditional than heterosexual men; mixed results were found for the relationship between traditional ideology and social support); relationship violence (batterers in treatment endorsed less traditional ideology); alcoholism (mid-life alcoholics were less traditional); and head injury (mixed results).

Finally, the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology as measured by the MRNI was 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 and 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, alexithymia, and reluctance to seek psychological help.

More recent research on masculinity ideology as measured by the MRNI and MRNI–R has found that endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology was related to college major selection (Leaper & Van, 2008), avoidance of academic help seeking among college men (Wimer & Levant, 2011), and racial group marginalization and ethnocentrism (Liu, 2002). In terms of family variables, MRNI–R scores correlated positively with family conflict and negatively with family cohesiveness and time spent with children (Boyras & Sayger, 2009). In addition, the endorsement of restrictive emotionality emerged as a barrier to forgiveness of discrimination; however, this relationship was moderated by other demographic variables including age, socioeconomic status, personality, and religious coping disposition (Hammond, Banks, & Mattis, 2006). Moreover, the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology moderated the relationship between the exposure to violent video games for young men but not for young women (Thomas & Levant, 2012).

Using another measure of traditional masculinity ideology, the MRNS, Noar and Morokoff (2002) found that greater endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology was associated with more negative condom attitudes, and more negative condom

attitudes were associated with decreased readiness to use condoms consistently. Additional variables associated with greater endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology, as measured by the MRNS, included negative attitudes toward women (Kilian-ski, 2003), ethnic belonging (Abreu, Goodyear, Campos, & Newcomb, 2000), substance use (Pleck et al., 1993), at-risk sexual behavior (Locke, Newcomb, & Goodyear, 2005; Pleck et al., 1993), loneliness (Blazina, Eddins, Burridge, & Settle, 2007), aggression (Jakupcak, Tull, & Roemer, 2005), separation-individuation (Blazina et al., 2007), justifications for division of household labor (Martinez, Paterna, & Yago, 2010), attitudes toward gender equity (Martinez & Paterna-Bleda, 2013), interpersonal competencies (Lease et al., 2010), sexual aggressiveness (Thompson & Cracco, 2008), career selection (Dodson & Borders, 2006), and the belief that sexual performance is linked to masculinity (Thompson & Barnes, 2013).

A newer measure of masculinity ideology, the Masculine Gender Role Dogmatism Inventory (McDermott & Joshi, 2008, as cited in Coughlin & Wade, 2012), is a 28-item scale developed using two samples of college students that yields two subscales, Gender Role Dogmatism and Masculine Gender Role Flexibility. Wade and Coughlin (2012) found that masculinity ideology, as measured by the Masculine Gender Role Dogmatism Inventory, mediated the relationship between reference group identity and romantic relationship satisfaction. In an additional study, Coughlin and Wade (2012) found that men who endorsed traditional masculinity ideology and who also had higher incomes than their spouses were more likely to have poor-quality relationships, whereas men who endorsed nontraditional masculinity perceived this income disparity as having little importance and therefore had higher relationship quality.

We next provide brief discussions of help-seeking attitudes and health behaviors in relationship to masculinity variables, which are covered in greater depth elsewhere in this handbook (see Chapters 31 and 32). It is also important to note that we do not cover the topic of violence in this section because the literature on masculinity and violence is voluminous and is also covered elsewhere in this handbook (see Chapter 28).

**Health behaviors.** U.S. men tend to engage in more than 30 controllable behaviors that increase their risk for disease, injury, and death (Courtenay, 2000a, 2000b), which may at least partly explain why they live an average of 5.2 years less than U.S. women (Miniño, Heron, Murphy, & Kocharek, 2007). The masculine gender role has long been thought to be implicated in men's health risk behaviors: The title of an influential article was "Warning: The Male Sex Role May Be Dangerous to Your Health" (Harrison, 1978). However, recent studies have indicated that the relationships between the masculine gender role and men's health behaviors appear to be more complex than had previously been assumed.

An investigation of the relationships among three multidimensional masculinity constructs and five dimensions of health promotion behaviors found that the relationship between masculinity and health behaviors depends on which facets of masculinity are being used as predictors and which dimensions of health behavior are serving as criteria (Levant, Wimer, & Williams, 2011). The masculinity measures were the MRNI-R, the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory, and the GRCS, looking at total scale and subscale scores. The Health Behavior Inventory—20 (Levant et al., 2011) measured the five dimensions of health promotion behaviors with the following scales: Diet, Preventive Self Care, Proper Use of Health Care Resources (Including Medications), Avoidance of Anger and Stress, and Avoidance of Substance Use.

Levant et al. (2011) reported that when looking at the total scores for the masculinity and health behavior measures, only the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory predicted overall health promotion behaviors and, because it was negatively associated with health promotion behaviors, it was viewed as a risk factor, replicating two prior results (Hamilton & Mahalik, 2009; Mahalik, Lagan, & Morrison, 2006). When looking at the subscale scores for the masculinity and health behavior measures, Levant et al. reported that some masculinity scales were associated with health risk, others were associated with positive health behaviors, and some were associated with both health risk and positive health behaviors. There was no obvious explanation

for this complex pattern of relationships between masculinity constructs and health behaviors, which therefore demanded further investigation.

Levant and Wimer (2014) partially replicated Levant et al. (2011), using a more diverse sample and updated measures. Again, some masculinity constructs were associated with positive health behaviors and others were associated with health risk. The vast majority of the findings that were replicated were associated with health risk, suggesting that traditional masculinity is more associated with health risk than with health promotion and occurred more often in the analyses involving the Avoidance of Anger and Stress and Avoidance of Substance Use subscales, suggesting that these health behaviors are most closely associated with masculinity.

Because negative body image is associated with poor health outcomes (Grogan, 2006), an additional line of research has examined the role of traditional masculinity ideology and the drive for muscularity. The drive for muscularity is associated with the belief that a muscular physique is representative of masculinity (Wienke, 1998). Adherence to traditional masculinity ideology has been linked to masculine body-ideal distress (Kimmel & Mahalik, 2004) and was the most powerful predictor of the pursuit of muscularity, followed by body image discrepancy and low self-esteem (Martin & Govender, 2011). Although GRC was not found to be a significant predictor of muscularity, Schwartz, Grammas, Sutherland, Siffert, and Bush-King (2010) urged that this result be interpreted cautiously because ethnic identity, racial identity, and acculturation factors may have influenced results.

**Help-seeking attitudes.** Reviews of research have demonstrated that men have negative attitudes toward seeking psychological help (Addis & Mahalik, 2003) and that their attitudes are linked with three masculinity variables: traditional masculinity ideology, conformity to masculine norms, and GRC (Levant & Richmond, 2007; O'Neil, 2008, 2012). Self-stigma has been found to partially mediate the relationships between GRC and help-seeking attitudes (Pederson & Vogel, 2007) and between conformity to masculine norms and

help-seeking attitudes (Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011).

A recent study tested a theoretical model of mediated moderation (with one mediator and four moderators) of the relationships between the MRNI-R and the GRCS and attitudes toward seeking professional psychological services (attitudes; Levant, Stefanov, et al., 2013). Self-stigma was the hypothesized mediator, and the hypothesized moderators were depression, general self-efficacy, precontemplation, and barriers to help seeking. After evaluating mediation in the absence of moderation, moderated path analyses were conducted for each moderator. The relationship between the MRNI-R and attitudes was partially mediated by self-stigma, whereas that between the GRCS and attitudes was completely mediated. No indirect or direct paths involving the GRCS were moderated by any moderators. Both depression and barriers to help seeking moderated both Stage 1 (the path from MRNI-R to self-stigma) of the mediated relationships and the direct effects between MRNI-R and attitudes in a process of mediated moderation. Precontemplation moderated the direct effect between MRNI-R and attitudes. The findings suggested that the relationships between masculinity variables and men's negative help-seeking attitudes may be better understood through their relationships with other variables that serve as mediators and moderators.

## TYPES OF MASCULINE GENDER ROLE STRAIN

Pleck (1995), in yet another clarification 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

#### Attempts to assess discrepancy strain.

Discrepancy strain results when one fails to live up to one's internalized manhood ideal, which may closely approximate traditional norms. In formulating the GRSP, Pleck (1981, 1995) hypothesized that discrepancy strain leads to lower self-esteem and

other negative psychological consequences; however, little research to date has empirically tested this hypothesis. The first method used a comparison between ratings of the self-ideal self-concept test and was not very useful (Pleck, 1995). According to Pleck (1995), masculine discrepancy strain can be operationalized by assessing a man's idealized gender role standards (or his perception of the ideal man) and also his perception of his own gender role characteristics, and seeing how the two compare. This can be done by calculating the discrepancy score between responses on measures of these constructs. Unfortunately, only one study using this method found a relationship between gender role discrepancy strain and self-esteem (Deutsch & Gilbert, 1976). According to Pleck (1995), "Other research of this type is limited and has not produced strong confirmation" (p. 14).

In an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Nabavi (2004) developed and assessed a measure of masculine discrepancy strain called the Masculine Attitudes, Stress, and Conformity Questionnaire. Using the same question base, he varied the stems of the questions to reflect the person's endorsement of traditional attitudes about men in society (e.g., "A man should avoid crying in front of people"), whether the participant experiences said male role expectations as stressful (e.g., "It bothers me that men are expected to avoid crying in front of people"), and the participant's behavioral conformity to traditional male role norms (e.g., "I avoid crying in front of people"). Nabavi theorized that gender role discrepancy could be calculated by the difference scores between the corresponding items from the endorsement of traditional attitudes measure and the behavioral conformity measure. From this he derived scores that he referred to as *traditional strain* and *nontraditional strain*. However, the manner in which these scales were scored is unclear, and their relationship with self-esteem was not assessed.

Developing a conceptualization similar to traditional and nontraditional strain through a different approach, Liu, Rochlen, and Mohr (2005) investigated the relationship between real and ideal GRC and psychological distress. In their model, the relationships between real and ideal GRC consisted of four quadrants created by two axes: low-to-high

ideal GRC and low-to-high real GRC. The four quadrants were thus norm-favoring discrepancy (high ideal GRC and low real GRC), norm-rejecting discrepancy (low ideal GRC and high real GRC), norm-favoring consistency (high ideal GRC and high real GRC), and norm-rejecting consistency (low ideal GRC and low real GRC).

Liu et al. (2005) found that the vast majority of participants (80%–90%, depending on the scale) exhibited the pattern of norm-rejecting discrepancy strain, whereas only 5% to 17% exhibited the pattern of norm-favoring discrepancy strain. It can be seen that norm-favoring discrepancy and norm-rejecting discrepancy are conceptually similar to, respectively, Nabavi's (2004) constructs of traditional strain and nontraditional strain. This conceptualization broadens the research perspective on gender role discrepancy strain because gender role discrepancy strain had heretofore been conceptualized only as norm-favoring or traditional discrepancy. Because recent research has suggested that both men and women are rejecting the traditional masculine norms (Levant, Hall, & Rankin, 2013), the concept of norm-rejecting discrepancy could be of significant value to gender researchers. It would also be of interest to determine whether norm-rejecting discrepancy results in strain or not.

Rummell and Levant (2014) conducted two studies with college men, assessing the relationship between masculine gender role discrepancy strain and self-esteem, with each discrepancy strain operationalized differently. The first study used standardized difference scores between two existing measures, the MRNI-R (to assess idealized gender role standards) and the CMNI (to assess actual gender role behavior). For the total discrepancy strain score and the scores for two specific norms (self-reliance and importance of sex), the higher the norm-favoring discrepancy strain, the higher the self-esteem, contrary to hypotheses. The norm-rejecting discrepancy strain for one norm, disdain for sexual minorities, also had a positive relationship with self-esteem.

The second study implemented three recommendations made by Pleck (1995). Here, measures of the endorsement of and conformity to masculine norms, self-esteem, and salience for specific norms

were developed, and salience was assessed as a moderator of the discrepancy strain–self-esteem relationship. The total discrepancy strain score reflected norm-rejecting discrepancy, and it was not significantly correlated with the total self-esteem score; moreover, salience did not emerge as a moderator of the relationship between discrepancy strain and self-esteem. Although these studies had significant limitations, the overall failure to find support for the hypothesized negative relationship between masculine gender role discrepancy strain and self-esteem suggests that the GRSP needs to be updated for a world in which the traditional masculine norms may be weakening.

**Masculine gender role stress.** In addition, there is the work of Eisler (1995; Eisler & Skidmore, 1987) on masculine gender role stress. This approach inquires to what degree participants would experience particular situations that are discrepant with traditional male role norms as stressful. Gender role stress (Eisler, 1995) is thus a form of gender role discrepancy strain—the strain that results when a man perceives that he is not living up to his internalized gender role ideals.

The gender role stress construct stems from the GRSP and the cognitive stress model (Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; Gillespie & Eisler, 1992). In accord with the cognitive stress model (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), vulnerability depends on the extent to which a situation (a) threatens an individual's idiosyncratic commitments or goals and (b) elicits coping mechanisms that the individual is unable to perform adequately. Thus, a situation could promote gender role stress if it was in direct conflict with the gender role norms endorsed by that person. Among men, masculine gender role stress has been associated with traditional masculinity ideology, adverse health habits, anger, anxiety, and cardiovascular reactivity to situational stress (Eisler & Blalock, 1991; Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; Lash, Eisler, & Schulman, 1990; Lash, Gillespie, Eisler, & Southard, 1991; Thompson, 1991).

### **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.

**Traditional masculinity ideology.** First, as detailed above in the discussion of the psychological correlates of traditional masculinity ideology, the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology and conformity to masculine norms has been found to be associated with a range of problematic variables. Furthermore, Brooks and Silverstein (1995) catalogued the behaviors that characterize the “dark side of masculinity” and arise from the “normative socialization of men” and include “various forms of violence, sexual dysfunctions, socially irresponsible behaviors, and relationship inadequacies” (p. 281).

**Gender role conflict.** The second line of investigation involved GRC, for which we provide a brief discussion because this topic is covered in greater depth in Chapter 3 of this handbook. The development of the GRC construct 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).

After an extensive review of the literature, O'Neil (2008) concluded that “GRC is significantly related to men's psychological and interpersonal problems” (p. 358). These psychological and interpersonal problems include depression (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Magovcevic & Addis, 2005; Mahalik & Cournoyer, 2000; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991; Shepard, 2002), paranoia and anxiety (Blazina & Watkins, 1996; Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Good & Mintz, 1990; Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens, & Bartels, 1996; Hayes & Mahalik, 2000; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991), alcohol and substance use (Blazina & Watkins, 1996; Monk & Ricciardelli, 2003), self-esteem (Berko, 1994; Cournoyer, 1994; Hayashi, 1999; Kim, Choi, Ha, & O'Neil, 2006; Mahalik, Locke, Theodore, Cournoyer, & Lloyd, 2001; Sharpe & Heppner, 1991), intimacy (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Fischer & Good, 1998;

Sharpe, Heppner, & Dixon, 1995; Theodore & Lloyd, 2000), type of psychological defenses used (Mahalik, Cournoyer, DeFranc, Cherry, & Napolitano, 1998), and vocational interests (Jome & Tokar, 1998).

### 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 (Watkins et al., 2010), 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 (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; 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. Levant (1992) specifically proposed that mild to moderate alexithymia may result from the normative emotional socialization of boys, a process informed by traditional masculinity ideologies. This is the normative male alexithymia hypothesis, to which we now turn.

**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, 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. Levant (1992) proposed the normative male alexithymia hypothesis to account for a socialized pattern of restrictive emotionality influenced by traditional masculinity ideology that he observed in many men. Working with both research participants in the Boston University

Fatherhood Project and clients in his clinical practice, Levant observed that only with great difficulty and practice could many of the men find the words to describe their emotional states. He theorized that those men had been discouraged as boys from expressing and talking about their emotions by parents, peers, teachers, or coaches, and some were 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 that reflect a sense of vulnerability (such as sadness or fear) or that express attachment (such as fondness or caring). Although restricted emotionality may be adaptive in some ways, particularly in highly competitive or aggressive environments, Levant's 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).

Levant's 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 of which is the restriction of emotional expression. 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).

The view that socialization plays a role in the development of restricted emotionality confronts the conventional view in U.S. 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). Levant's (1998) review of relevant developmental psychology research literature on the emotional socialization of



boys concluded that the essentialistic, conventional perspective that men are by nature less emotional was not supported by the existing evidence. Indeed, evidence has suggested that boys start life with greater emotional reactivity and expressiveness than girls and maintain this advantage until age 1 year (Levant, 1998). However, they become less verbally expressive than girls at about the age of 2 years and less facially expressive by age 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. They noted that few of the 12 studies using clinical samples found gender differences. However, the 32 studies using nonclinical samples presented a very different picture: Of these studies, 17 found males more alexithymic than females, one found females more alexithymic than males, and 14 found no differences between males and females. 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'  $d = .22$ ). Men exhibited higher levels of alexithymia.

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 the scale's incremental validity in predicting masculinity ideology provided evidence supporting the scale's validity. Levant (1998, 2006) developed a psychoeducational program for treating normative male alexithymia, which was recently manualized as alexithymia reduction treatment and assessed in a pilot study (Levant, Halter, Hayden, & Williams, 2009). Levant is currently conducting a clinical trial of the efficacy of alexithymia reduction treatment in remediating normative male alexithymia and improving the uptake of therapy for male veterans.

Finally, Levant and Wong (2013), using an intersectional approach, examined the role of race and gender as moderators of the relationship between the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology and alexithymia. The moderating effect of race on the relationship between endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology and alexithymia was strongly affected by gender: The endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology was more strongly related to alexithymia for White men than for racial minority men, whereas the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology was more strongly related to alexithymia for racial minority women than for White women.

### Assessment of the Gender Role Strain Paradigm and Masculinity Ideologies Literature

The research literature on the GRSP and masculinity ideologies is now quite substantial, having developed over a 30-year time period. The field has accomplished quite a bit, but there is definitely room for improvement. In this section, we critically assess this literature. First of all are critiques regarding measurement and sampling. By and large, this domain of the literature has relied on self-report measures administered to largely White and heterosexual college students in correlational studies, although studies using qualitative interviews, more diverse samples, and more sophisticated designs and analyses have appeared more recently. These latter developments should be encouraged.

There are also several substantive critiques. The first concerns the use of the term *traditional masculinity ideology* (Pleck, 1995) to refer to the dominant masculinity ideology in the United States. Because masculinity ideology varies by culture, many traditions need to be accounted for. Hence, it would be more accurate to refer to this construct as *traditional Western masculinity ideology* to denote its association with the predominantly White Western world.

Another critique concerns findings that men no longer endorse traditional norms, raising the question of the relevance of traditional masculine norms. Women had in many previous studies going back to the 1990s rejected these norms (cf. Levant & Richmond, 2007), but Levant, Hall, and Rankin (2013)

found that men rejected four of the seven norms and the total score. We celebrate this development as good news, but we caution that it does not mean that the traditional Western masculine norms are no longer important. The patriarchal social order and the associated hegemonic masculinity are omnipresent and exert continuous influence on individuals. To put it another way, although most men do not believe that they are heroic figures like the mythic characters portrayed by John Wayne, many also feel badly that they do not measure up. However, these findings certainly suggest that the strength of traditional norms may be waning in the United States. Certain norms, such as disdain for sexual minorities, appear to be very much on the wane in the United States (Rummell & Levant, 2014). This critique also relates to the overall failure to find support for the hypothesized negative relationship between masculine gender role discrepancy strain and self-esteem as posited by the discrepancy strain hypothesis. Taken together, they suggest that the GRSP needs to be updated to account for the weakening of the traditional masculine norms.

Another two critiques that have been raised on the APA Division 51 email list are, first, that traditional masculinity ideology does not represent who men actually are, which is true, but this critique reflects a confusion of sex with gender (Bohan, 1997). Sex (i.e., male) is not the same thing as gender (i.e., masculine), and men can perform any gender script: masculinity, femininity, or any combination or permutation thereof. In short, many men do not define themselves or conform their behavior in terms of the traditional masculine norms; however, they do have to contend with the influence of these norms going back to their early childhoods. The second critique is that traditional Western masculinity ideology tends to focus on negative attributes, which it indeed does. Gender ideologies, as the central construct in the GRSP (a feminist social constructionist perspective), are viewed as the major mechanism for enforcing patriarchy, to which it is implacably opposed.

Finally, a more substantive critique, as pointed out by Addis et al. (2010), lies in the way in which masculinity ideology tends to get operationalized as

stable characteristics (e.g., attitudes, internalized norms). As Addis et al. noted, this “work[s] against efforts to identify contexts in which men who might adhere to traditional gender norms might transgress these norms in adaptive ways” (p. 80). As stated above, the GRSP was originally based on social learning theory, which stressed the contingent and contextual nature of gendered social learning to show how a certain behavior (such as a boy crying) might be punished in some contexts but not in others. However, the operationalization of masculinity constructs, typically using self-report Likert-scaled instruments, results in individual difference variables that function like stable traits. Even though they are attitudes as contrasted with personality traits (such as those measured by the Bem Sex-Role Inventory), they are nonetheless stable traits.

However, this last critique has four important qualifications. First of all, this is not a fatal flaw, because masculinity ideologies are to a significant degree stable (as reflected in the test–retest reliabilities), and many research questions can be addressed with measures of such constructs. Second, although it is likely that masculinity ideologies are dynamic and influenced by context, as noted above, the patriarchal social order and traditional Western masculinity ideology are nevertheless omnipresent and exert continuous influence on individuals. The extent to which any man is able to violate traditional norms may be dependent on intersecting social identity variables because power is not solely determined by gender but is also influenced by these other variables, such as race, class, ability status, and age (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Third, this problem lies not so much with the conceptualization of masculinity ideologies as with its most common way of operationalization. Addis et al. (2010) provided examples of experimental research programs using semantic priming or manipulation of stereotype threat and longitudinal studies using diaries that operationalize masculinity constructs in ways that retain the contingent and contextual nature of gendered social learning. More recently, Vandello and Bosson (2013) provided a detailed discussion of their experimental social psychological research program on “precarious manhood” that also retains the contingent and

contextual nature of gendered social learning. Finally, there is no robust alternative measurement approach to the GRSP. Although there has been a recent call for a social constructionist measurement approach based on the assessment of group-level endorsement of dominant gender representations (the “gender [re]presentation” approach; Luyt, 2013, p. 1), this approach has not yet developed usable scales and shares two thirds of its measurement assumptions with the GRSP.

## FUTURE 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 contingent and contextual factors) of those relationships, and to do experimental, longitudinal, and qualitative research (O’Neil, 2008, 2012; Smiler, 2004; Whorley & Addis, 2006). We agree with all of those recommendations. In addition, given the more explicit foundation of the GRSP in social psychology (Levant, 2011), greater use could be made of the theories of social cognition and social influence, the constructs of gender roles and social norms, and the associated research methods and programs. Moreover, psychologists could incorporate into their research designs insights from the abundant literature on men and masculinity from other disciplines, such as sociology, history, anthropology, archaeology, primatology, and biology.

Although many innovative ideas for future research directions could be discussed, we believe that, after this lengthy review of the literature on the GRSP, it is most important for scholars to reflect on its foundation. The GRSP is, at its very core, a feminist theory. For some, it may not be immediately evident as to why it is important—even critically so—to undergird the study of men and masculinity in feminism. There are several reasons for this. First, when psychologists use feminist theory to inform empirical inquiries and research methods, they elevate the scholarly discourse above the stereotypical and restrictive conceptualizations of masculinity that so often dominate conventional thinking and

public opinion (Addis & Schwab, 2013). There is an ethical component to this as well because, historically, psychological science has provided legitimacy (and, therefore, is partially responsible) for the hegemonic masculinity narrative (Pleck, 1981), just as it did for the hegemonic White narrative (Guthrie, 2004). Second, feminist theory makes apparent how structural inequalities influence all psychological and social phenomena and also asserts that the eradication of social inequities is necessary for optimal psychological and social well-being (Klonoff, Landrine, & Campbell, 2000). Thus, a feminist framework prioritizes social justice within the discipline of psychology (Pleck, 1981). These values are reflected in the mission statement of the Society for the Psychological Study of Men and Masculinity (APA Division 51, 2013), which reads as follows:

- Promotes the critical study of how gender shapes and constricts men’s lives.
- Committed to an enhancement of men’s capacity to experience their full human potential.
- Endeavors to erode constraining definitions of masculinity which historically have inhibited men’s development, their capacity to form meaningful relationships, and have contributed to the oppression of other people.
- Acknowledges its historical debt to feminist-inspired scholarship on gender, and commits itself to the support of groups such as women, gays, lesbians and people of color that have been uniquely oppressed by the gender/class/race system.
- Contends vigorously that the empowerment of all persons beyond narrow and restrictive gender role definitions leads to the highest level of functioning in individual women and men, to the most healthy interactions between the genders, and to the richest relationships between them.

The GRSP is also rooted in social constructionism. Rather than privileging a particular type of masculinity, the GRSP posits the idea of multiple masculinities. A critical examination of the ways in which masculinity operates differently in the lives of individual men is an important next step (Bowleg, 2013; Coston & Kimmel, 2012; Veenstra, 2013) and would be considerably strengthened by integrating

the theory of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991). Although the theory of intersectionality is rooted in the experiences of women of color (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991), several theoretical parallels would be useful to the study of men and masculinity. For example, an intersectional approach might highlight the ways in which individual men, particularly men of color, will construct distinctive masculinities because of their relationship to more than one social group (Richmond, Levant, & Ladhani, 2012). Such research must above all be mindful of the ways in which variations (previously thought to be deviations) from traditional masculinity were once considered to reflect an individual's deficiencies. Thus, any future research must explicitly connect how context, including historical and structural inequalities, inform the construction, embodiment, and enactment of masculinity.

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