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# Stuck in the Present: Gaps in the Theoretical Past and Applied Future of the Psychology of Men and Masculinities

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Hundreds of articles addressing masculinity and psychology have arisen in at least the last 30 years (Wong & Wester, 2016). The dominant narrative of the psychology of men and masculinities (PMM) has been that norms related to masculinity or what it means to be a man in the U.S. relate to hundreds of concerning outcomes, such as higher levels of psychological distress, aggression and violence, sexism and prejudice, and physical health problems (e.g., cardiac health and substance abuse) and lower levels of life satisfaction, relationship quality and satisfaction, help-seeking behavior and attitudes, and self-esteem (see Gerdes, Alto, Jadaszewski, D’Auria, & Levant, 2017; O’Neil, 2008; Wong, Ho, Wang, & Miller, 2016). While theoretical conceptualizations of masculinities in the psychology of men and masculinities literature are so varied that agreed upon definitions do not exist (O’Neil, 2012), social constructionist and social learning perspectives are most commonly used the field (Wong, Steinfeldt, Speight, & Hickman, 2010). However, the proper homage to early social learning and social constructionist theorists from early 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars is rarely cited in the PMM literature. In addition, PMM has done little to explicitly address the practical implications of these deeper theoretical roots.

In short, the psychology of men and masculinities has hoisted itself prominently as a subfield of psychology, espousing how constructs related to masculinities can be harmful because of socially learned and/or constructed norms associated with masculinity. However, PMM has done less to cite and integrate its theoretical roots to the appropriate original sources and has fallen short in addressing the clinical implications of the patterns of findings that have arisen. PMM scholars taking social constructionist or social learning perspectives must do more to cite original and primary sources on the constructed or learned nature of gender. In so doing, a clearer direction can emerge for effective interventions to be designed which ameliorate the harmful outcomes associated with how masculine norms may operate in U.S. men’s lives.

### **Theoretical Gaps in the Psychology of Men and Masculinities**

Social learning and social constructionist theories have dominated the literature in the psychology of men and masculinities (Addis & Cohane, 2005; Wong et al., 2010). Addis, Reigeluth, & Schwab (2016) described social learning and social constructionist perspectives of masculinity as “complementary.” Specifically, they described how they can operate within the same framework (p. 82):

The social construction of masculinity produces gendered social norms for men’s thoughts, feelings, and actions. These masculine norms then affect the ideologies, belief systems, and social reinforcers and

punishers to which individual men are exposed. Exposure to socially constructed gender norms is then the primary mechanism through which gendered social learning operates.

Since at least the 1980s, these gendered social norms have been argued to create stress, strain, and conflicts for men (Levant & Pollack, 1995; O’Neil, 2008; Pleck, 1981). However, the notion that masculinity is a set of socially constructed gender role norms dependent upon cultural and situational contexts is much older than oft-discussed in the psychological literature on men and masculinity in psychology. Social constructionist and social learning theories applied to masculinity are often cited (e.g., Smiler, 2004) as beginning with Pleck (1981) and the Gender Role Strain Paradigm. Yet, as Datchi and Cole recently suggested (2016), the psychology of men and masculinity may benefit from a more extensive discussion of the theoretical origins of the social construction of masculinity. For example, in the most comprehensive volume of on the psychology of men and masculinity – the *APA Handbook of Men and Masculinities* (Wong & Wester, 2016) – there is rare discussion of literature prior to Pleck (1981), even in chapters on the history of men and masculinity in psychology (Brooks & Elder, 2016) and theoretical patterns (Addis, Reigeluth, & Schwab, 2016). This is a vast departure from academic discussions on masculinity in other fields (e.g., sociology, anthropology), which root the social constructionist theoretical roots of masculinities in the U.S. to at least the early 20<sup>th</sup> century (Kimmel, 2012). In short, the origins of gender role theory applied to masculinity are much older than typically claimed in the dominant narratives of the psychology of men and masculinity and incorporating this into PMM scholarship requires a level of interdisciplinary integration this field has been lacking. Before addressing that effort, an outline of current prominent PMM theory trends is needed.

### **Gender Role Strain and Gender Role Identity**

The Gender Role Strain Paradigm (GRSP; Pleck, 1981; 1995) has been regarded as the major theoretical paradigm in the psychological study of men and masculinity (Levant & Richmond, 2016; Wong, Steinfeldt, Speight, & Hickman, 2010). The GRSP considers sex-aligned gender roles as socially constructed rather than biologically rooted. Pleck (1981; 1995) described how various consequences are associated with (non)conformity to socially constructed gender role norms. Pleck (1981) described 10 propositions for the GRSP, including that: gender roles are defined by gender stereotypes, gender roles are contradictory and inconsistent, violating gender roles is common but has psychological consequences, and consequences of violating gender roles lead people to overconform to them. The former two of these propositions have theoretical roots roughly 100 years old, rather

than a few decades. Research and theory on contradictory and inconsistent gender roles defined by stereotypes are traceable at least as far back as the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Subsequent research using measures conceived with the GRSP as a theoretical framework (e.g., the Male Role Norms Inventory; Levant et al., 1992) has produced hundreds of significant findings across at least 90 studies relating endorsement of beliefs about male role norms to various positive and negative outcomes (Gerdes et al., in press). According to Levant and Richmond (2016) among others (e.g., Blazina, 2001), the GRSP arose in response to what has been presently deemed the Gender Role Identity Paradigm (also referred to as the Gender Identity Model by Blazina, 2001 and the Male Sex Role Identity Model by Pleck, 1981).

The Gender Role Identity Paradigm (GRIP) has been traced to Terman and Miles, 1936. They described masculinity and femininity as essentially immutable sex differences rooted in biology:

The belief is all but universal that men and women as contrasting groups display characteristic sex differences in their behavior, and that these differences are so deep seated and pervasive as to lend distinctive character to the entire personality, (Terman & Miles, 1936, p. 1-2).

This paradigm described that people have a psychological need to form a gender role identity that aligns with their sex (Blazina, 2001). Levant and Richmond (2016, p. 24) described that this perspective “dominated research on masculinity for 50 years (1930-1980).” This perspective’s “dominance” is problematic considering essentialist beliefs have been associated with various troublesome outcomes, such as prejudice (Haslam, Rothschild, & Ernst, 2002), stereotyping (Keller, 2005), and gender polarization (Gaunt, 2006). Men specifically are often stereotyped with biologically essentialist labels more often than women (Gerdes, Jwayyed, Mitcheltree, & Yoder, 2016).

Many have argued (e.g., Addis, Reigeluth, & Schwab, 2016; Brooks & Elder, 2016; Levant, 2011; Smiler, 2004) that Pleck’s and others’ (e.g., David & Brannon, 1976) responses to the GRIP in the 1970s and 1980s is where the modern confluence of social constructionist and social learning theories applied to gender – in the form of gender role theory – on the psychology of men and masculinities began. However, the work of Mead (1935), Linton (1936), Horney (1932), and others place role theory perspectives in a social constructionist framework regarding gender and masculinity much earlier in the historical scientific narrative, even if those particular terms (i.e., social construction) were not being used in this

context at the time. In short, the GRSP has been described by many as the “response” to the GRIP of Terman and Miles. However, various historical sources challenged essentialist gender theories (e.g., Terman & Miles) roughly 50 years earlier than Pleck. I argue below that gender role theory on masculinity can be traced back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the backdrop of feminism’s first wave.

### **Situational, Contextual, and Cultural Masculinities**

The contextual and situational nature of masculinity has emerged as a major topic in the psychology of men and masculinity in recent years (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010; O’Neil, 2015; Vogel & Heath, 2016; Way et al., 2014; Wester, 2008). In the newly published *APA Handbook of Men and Masculinities*, editors Wong and Wester (2016) note, “there are diverse meanings associated with being male that vary across time, situations, social groups, and cultures,” (p. xviii). Hofstede (2016) discussed a plethora of research which provides empirical support that masculinity is nationally and culturally dependent. The work of Way (2011) described ways in which boys resist socialized gender norm stereotypes especially prior to puberty. However, in light of this call for situational and contextual research on masculinities, the scholars that conducted this research decades ago are rarely discussed.

In the last 10 years, psychological research has shown that men’s flexibility in their gender role beliefs may affect their mental health (McDermott, Schwartz, & Rislin, 2016). McDermott, Schwartz, & Rislin also described, as Pleck (1981; 1995) and earlier evidence in this paper suggests, that while men are likely to be flexible in their gender role ideology, strict adherence to gender role norms can be problematic for mental health, well-being, and a host of concerning outcomes (Gerdes et al., in press; O’Neil, 2012; Wong et al., 2016). However, violating gender norms is not a new concept that arose with the “discovery of gender” (Smiler, 2004) in the 1970s. As Connell (1995, p. 198) described:

The history of masculinity, it should be abundantly clear, is not linear. There is no master line of development to which all else is subordinate, no simple shift from “traditional” to “modern.” Rather we see, in the world created by the European empires, complex structures of gender relations in which dominant, subordinated and marginalized masculinities are in constant interaction, changing the conditions for each others’ existence and transforming themselves as they do.

I argue, contrary to what PMM scholarship has identified, the transformations that Connell described were being illuminated in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century rather than the latter half.

### **Challenges to Essentialist Perspectives on Gender in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century**

In 1923, Vaerting, Mathilde, and Mathias reviewed findings circa 1900 displaying evidence that there are no “instincts” specific to males or females; there are no differences in mental capacities between males and females; men and women are equally capable at every vocation; and what is deemed “masculine” or “feminine” in the U.S. may be very different from what constitutes these labels in other cultures (see p. 8). Examples of particular historical figures who illuminated the cultural and contextual influences on gender are described in greater detail below. However, at present, the social construction of masculinities and cultural influence on masculinities described by Addis and colleagues (2016), Hofstede (2016), Wester (2008), and other prominent PMM researchers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should cite more original sources than psychologists from the 1980s since material from decades earlier is available. Below are a few historical sources which modern PMM scholars should consider incorporating into current literature on the socially learned and constructed aspects of masculinities.

#### **Margaret Mead**

Margaret Mead (1901-1978) was an anthropologist and contemporary of Franz Boas. “Boasian” paradigms in anthropology, including Mead’s work, sought to establish evidence of cultural variability in humans (Murray & Darnell, 2000). While Mead’s work began in the vein of cultural anthropology more broadly (e.g., Mead, 1928), she was one of the first anthropologists to focus more closely on gender as culturally influenced (e.g., Mead, 1935; 1949). As Banner (2003) described, Mead expanded the “constitutional types” of men and women.

In her groundbreaking work, *Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*, Mead (1935) argued that gender norms are rooted in culture rather than personality. Pleck (1981, pp. 143 & 150) acknowledged the work of Margaret Mead in support of his propositions regarding gender role strain. However, the discussion and mention of Mead’s works were limited and are virtually never cited in more recent PMM scholarship broadly. As Murray and Darnell (2000, p. 568) noted, Mead, “helped to disseminate a culturalism opposed to biologism to a mass audience.” In other words, Mead was one of the first to widely disseminate to the cultural relativism of gender that challenged gender essentialist belief systems (e.g., GRIP). Therefore, current psychologists seeking original references for source

material of the cultural relativism of gender should start with Mead, 1935 and 1949, but should not stop there.

### **Ralph Linton**

Anthropologist Ralph Linton (1893-1953) is seen as one of the most prominent early references in the social sciences (Silverman, 2003) regarding the cultural influences on gender and their implications for mental health (Linton & Devereaux, 1956) and personality (Linton, 1961). Arguably his most famous text, *The Tree of Culture* (1955), is still cited (Silverman, 2004). Though Linton did not work closely with Boas as Mead, he made similar claims to Mead regarding the cultural relativism of gender (Linton, 1936). His work more explicitly focused on the impact of societal factors on gender roles and related identities. He described how attitudes and activities are prescribed onto men and women by their societies in such a prominent way that “biological factors involved seem to be secondary to the cultural ones,” (1936, p. 119). He further noted (p. 116), “the psychological characteristics ascribed to men and women in different societies vary so much that they can have little physiological basis. [...] The delicate, fainting lady of the middle eighteen-hundreds is as extinct as the dodo.” Linton also compared masculine norms in the U.S. to norms in other cultures. For example, he contrasted the bread-winning culture of men in the U.S. to the normalization of the intense manual farm labor of women in Madagascar.

Linton’s work also paralleled Vaerting, Mathilde, & Mathias’ earlier summary regarding the influence of societal factors in men’s role development in adolescence. Linton (1936) noted that boys become men when they are recognized as mature by society’s expectations rather than a biological or “physical maturity.” This argument specifically adds support for the claim that secondary sex differences do not appear before puberty (Vaerting, Mathilde, & Mathias, 1923). Together, these points seem to echo what current researchers have espoused: puberty’s effect on boys’ masculine gender role socialization is profound and lends evidence to the notion masculine gender roles are constructed by society (Smiler & Heasley, 2016; Way, 2011; Way et al., 2014).

### **Karen Horney**

The gender role socialization of boys, or in Freudian language, the “masculinization,” was a popular topic in psychology while Mead and Linton were writing on the cultural relativity of gender from an anthropological standpoint. When Freud described the “castration anxiety” of boys (caused by the mother in Freud’s view), it was Karen Horney (1885-1952) who noted that boys’ fear of the feminine and feelings of inadequacy about his manhood were in play (Horney, 1932). Horney problematized the masculine “ideal,” critiquing Freud’s stereotypes of women as “infantile” and “incapable of responsibility,” (1932, p. 146). Horney

is commonly cited as one of the first feminist psychologists (Goodwin, 2008) because she actively challenged Freud's sexist and gender essentialist views. In her words:

The view that women are infantile and emotional creatures, and as such, incapable of responsibility and independence is the work of the masculine tendency to lower women's self-respect. When men justify such an attitude by pointing out that a very large number of women really do correspond to this description, we must consider whether this type of woman has not been cultivated by a systematic selection on the part of men (1932, p. 146).

Horney attributed some of this "masculine tendency" and "systematic selection" to a so-called, "fear of the feminine." In current PMM scholarship, this "fear of the feminine" provides the foundation for the theoretical basis for one of the most dominant paradigms in the psychology of men and masculinities: gender role conflict (O'Neil, 2008; 2015). However, Horney is rarely acknowledged in this work. Even in the APA Psychology of Men and Masculinities handbook's chapter on gender role conflict (O'Neil & Denke, 2016), Horney is not cited. As is the case with both Horney and Mead, concepts from progressive women in the 1930s are often bypassed in modern PMM scholarship to cite men's work approximately 50 years later.

### **Other Influential Figures**

In the 1940s, a number of scholars took these arguments for gender construction further. Perhaps the most comprehensive historical work of role theory specifically came from sociologist Talcott Parsons. In his classic text, *The Social System*, he described in detail the way roles are learned and the influence that role enacting and ideologies have on individuals (Parsons, 1951). Hughes (1945) differentiated between *situated* and *master* identities, which provided a non-gender-specific way of describing what we now have labeled gender role identity (gender as personality traits) and gender role strain (situated gender identities). Ways in which sex roles could be "incompatible" when imposed upon individuals whom they did not fit for was argued by Komarovsky in 1946. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir explicitly described how gender forms as "different ways of life" rather than fixed character types (Blazina, 2003). Even in popular psychology works, such as Scheinfeld's (1944) *Women and Men*, a summary of the feminist movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century includes a description of the importance feminists placed on establishing that, "women and men were what they were largely because of differences in

training, experiences, and opportunities,” (pp. 5-6) rather than biological sex differences.

More recently, various researchers have examined non-essentialist masculinity within particular time periods in early 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. history: Armengol (2014) on the Great Depression and Roper (2007) on post-World War I veteran culture. Armengol argued that art and literature during the 1930s actually challenged hypermasculinity despite attempts in politics and the media to “remasculinize” U.S. men. For example, he noted Steinbeck’s characters in *Of Mice and Men* (1937) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), displayed men’s connectedness, softness, and “feminine” patterns of manhood via themes such as emotional connection and community-mindedness.

In a similar vein, Roper’s work suggested veterans of WWI were drawn into “relationships of care” and various emotional capacities that challenged the “traditional” role of men at the time. Roper and Armengol both seem to suggest similar conclusions from very different frames of reference: within traditional masculine roles (i.e., men as soldiers and bread-winners) masculine norms could not only be violated but changed within particular groups of men depending on situation and context. These results suggest men during the Depression and in the aftermath of WWI may have expanded their experiences of manhood to include emotionality and social connection.

The cultural and environmental influences on gender are apparent in countless examples throughout U.S. history of men enacting “flexible” gender roles. Abraham Lincoln challenged men’s gender expression by publicly displaying masculine and feminine aspects of his self (Williams, 2002). Martin Luther King Jr. challenged the masculine norms of men in power (i.e., violence and aggression) with peace. In psychology, Carl Rogers challenged the norm that men restrict emotions when he created an entire theoretical framework around them. Nicholson (2001) discussed how Abraham Maslow’s development as a psychologist was directly intertwined with his experiences of masculinity, especially regarding dominance and sexuality (though Maslow tended to use highly gendered and sexualized language). Others, including Bederman (1995) and Rotundo (1993), have attempted to show transformations of masculine stereotypes and manhood in U.S. culture as far back as the late 1800s. For other examples of men throughout history who challenged gender role norms, see Farrell (1987) and Lorber and Farrell (1991).

In summary, this evidence suggests men’s flexibility in enacting their gender roles has in fact been flexible for a long time, not “discovered” in the 1980s by male psychologists discussing masculinity. Various scholars across disciplines for decades have addressed the “inconsistent gender roles” rooted in stereotypes that Pleck described. The works of those mentioned here provide ample support to suggest essentialist perspectives on masculinity (e.g., Terman & Miles, 1936) were

being challenged much earlier than Pleck and others in the 1970s and 1980s. In fact, this evidence suggests theoretical foundations for conceptualizing men's gender roles as socially learned and constructed may actually be older than Terman and Miles' gender role identity perspective. While essentialist conceptions of gender role identity may have "dominated" research on masculinity for the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Levant & Richmond, 2016), Mead, Linton, Horney, and myriad others laid a theoretical and practical foundation for socially constructed gender roles that is helpful in contextualizing the psychology of men and masculinity, yet, rarely acknowledged.

If roughly 100 years of research suggests masculinities are socially constructed and/or learned, the implication is that harmful aspects of enacting them can be addressed with interventions designed to mitigate them. That is, if "masculinity" is socially constructed, it can be deconstructed or reconstructed. However, effective interventions designed to mitigate harmful correlates of enacting particular constructions of masculine norms in the U.S. are few and far between. By reconnecting present research in the psychology of men and masculinities to the older and deeper theoretical roots that should be further acknowledged in the field, interventions designed to deconstruct or reconstruct masculine norms in U.S. society may gain more traction.

### **Beyond Essentialism: Bridging PMM History and Future through Theory and Practice**

The evidence presented thus far substantiates two primary theses: 1.) current psychology of men and masculinities scholarship does little to acknowledge the interdisciplinary and feminist roots of the dominant social learning and social constructionist perspectives pervading recent literature, and 2.) the popular concepts of contextual, situational, and cultural masculinities were not "discovered" in the 1970s and 1980s, but rather stem from early 20<sup>th</sup> century social sciences literature. The combined conclusion of these points is that roughly 100 years of social science research has led to the prevalent finding that the limitations of gender essentialism for men and masculinities are profound, but little has been done to move beyond it (Blazina & Bartone, 2016). Particularly in psychology, acknowledgement of the interdisciplinary and feminist roots of the social construction of gender is lacking compared with a field such as sociology (e.g., Kimmel, 2012). Harkening back to the feminist and interdisciplinary roots of the social construction of masculinities offers solutions for how psychologists can transcend the limitations of gender essentialism. Research suggests men are viewed within lenses of biological and essentialist stereotypes (Gerdes, Jwayyed, Mitcheltree, & Yoder, 2016). In addition, 78% of completed suicides in the U.S. are men – a rate about four times higher than that of women (Center for Disease

Control and Prevention, 2009). In 2009, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention reported that 43 percent of all suicide deaths in the U.S. were men ages 25-54 – the highest rate of any age/gender group by a wide margin. This suggests men may not be experiencing psychopathological symptoms (e.g., depression) at substantially lower rates than women, but they are clearly seeking help at a much lower rate. It has been argued (Rochlen, 2005) that strict adherence to dominant “masculine norms” in the U.S. (e.g., self-reliance) may be partly responsible. If strict adherence to masculine norms relates to detrimental outcomes, psychological interventions should be designed to reduce the possible mediating or moderating effects of strict adherence to problematic masculine norms. Research in the psychology of men and masculinity has claimed that two important influential factors for men’s lack of seeking mental health resources are men’s overall lack of help- and health-seeking behaviors (e.g., Addis & Mahalik, 2003) and that therapeutic processes have traditionally been incongruent with the norms of masculinity (Brooks, 1998) from the dominant (i.e., heterosexist, patriarchal) culture in the U.S. (Connell, 1995). While men have been reported to seek mental health resources at much lower rates than women, it has been argued that this is due to how men enact norms of masculinity in particular situations and contexts rather than inherent biological components (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Intersecting variables, including age, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation contribute to the way in which men’s identification with and enacting of masculine norms prevents health-promoting mental health and help-seeking behaviors (Vogel & Heath, 2016). For example, self-reliance has been identified as a masculine norm that correlates with numerous negative mental health outcomes (Gerdes & Levant, 2015). If part of the culture of masculinity is to only rely on one’s self, and if this leads to negative health outcomes as extreme as substantially higher rates of suicide, mental health professionals must critically examine the way psychological services are marketed to and implemented with men in the context of therapy as related to masculine norms.

If men are less likely to seek help in the first place, and once they do seek services such as talk psychotherapy, therapeutic methods do not operate within the masculine norms men may be accustomed to, it may further marginalize this group from mental health resources. As Rochlen and Hill (2005, p. 228) described:

Ideal clients [are described] as emotionally expressive, comfortable with ambiguity and vulnerability, and able to ask for help. Yet authors describe men’s socialization process as one that promotes the avoidance of emotional expression, the absence of weaknesses or vulnerabilities, and the need to solve problems without the help of others.

In this light, the potential incongruence that arises between therapeutic processes and masculine norms needs further attention. The phenomenon Rochlen and Hill described may also skew reporting numbers such as those included in the DSM because psychologists and mental health professionals may be missing manifestations of psychological disorder symptoms if they are presented within masculine-normed frameworks different from that of a “typical” client. In other words, many men may be experiencing symptoms of depression and other disorders in ways clinicians may not be trained to be aware of. Addis (2008) described this in regards to depressive symptoms as “masked depression” in men, which makes diagnosing depression in men using DSM criteria difficult. For example, anecdotally, a clinician disclosed to me that they diagnosed a male client with a depressive disorder who presented with anger issues that they believed were symptoms of depression in the client. While anger is not a symptom that falls under the DSM diagnostic criteria for depressive disorders, this clinician used the “masked depression” concept to justify the depressive disorder they believed their client was presenting with.

In order to investigate how masculine norms may interact with the norms of various therapeutic modalities, additional discussion of how masculine norms are operationalized and addressed the psychology literature is warranted. Masculine norms have been identified in various ways in the PMM literature. For example, one widely used measure of conforming to masculine norms is the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik et al., 2003). This measure includes 11 identified masculine norms: winning, emotional control, risk-taking, violence, power over women, dominance, playboy, self-reliance, primacy of work, disdain for homosexuals, and pursuit of status. Higher scores on the subscales measuring these norms have been associated with a number of negative outcomes, including unhealthy alcohol and marijuana use, binge drinking, increased substance use, not seeking help for emotional difficulties or healthcare services, negative health behaviors, getting into physical fights, difficulty managing anger, risky automobile and sexual behavior, sexism, internalized homophobia, masculine body ideal distress, poor sexual functioning, lower self-esteem, and increased psychological distress (see Gerdes & Levant, 2015). Another widely used measure in psychological studies with men is the Male Role Norms Inventory (MRNI; Levant et al., 1992). In the most recent version of the MRNI (the short form MRNI-SF; Levant, Hall, & Rankin, 2013), seven norms were identified: restrictive emotionality, self-reliance through mechanical skills, negativity toward sexual minorities, avoidance of femininity, importance of sex, dominance, toughness. The MRNI has been empirically linked to dozens of variables spanning a wide array of constructs, including interpersonal relationships, reference group identity, self-efficacy and self-esteem, help-seeking and health behaviors, emotions and

alexithymia, sexism, gender role conflict, life satisfaction, religious orientation, body awareness, masculinity, and fatherhood (see Gerdes et al., in press).

With this in mind, while many have noted that multiple masculinities exist (e.g., O'Neil, 2012; Vogel & Heath, 2016), the way masculine norms have been operationalized and often correlated within the literature seems to adhere to more rigid definitions of measurable constructs including the norms discussed here. In other words, psychologists have taken a construct often-claimed as socially constructed ("masculinity"), and created a rigid definition of the norms associated with the construct, despite claiming the construct itself is flexible, situational, and contextual. This may be interesting, but is extremely limiting in how "masculinity" has been operationalized.

What is clear from the literature that has attempted to empirically construct quantitative measures assessing so-called "traditional" or "hegemonic" masculine norms, is that identified norms of the culture of masculinity in the U.S. may be associated with various negative mental health and related outcomes. In response to this, various researchers have claimed that positive conceptions of masculinity and strengths-based work with men are necessary to be effective in clinical work with them (e.g., Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010; Wong, 2006). The positive psychology-positive masculinity paradigm (PPPM; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010; Kiselica, Benton-Wright, & Englar-Carlson, 2016) was proposed as a strengths-based approach to conceptualize, work with, and empower men in ways that do not pathologize them. However, little quantitative support has been evidenced for this particular approach (Gerdes & Levant, 2015). In summary, two camps seem to exist in PMM: 1.) those who claim masculinity is socially constructed, then operationalize it with narrow and limiting sets of "norms" (e.g., Levant & Richmond, 2016; O'Neil, 2015), or 2.) those who make a positive reframe of a gender-essentialist approach (e.g., Kiselica et al., 2016). The former uses methods counter-intuitive to its roots in social constructionism while the latter does little to account for the 100+ years of social constructionist literature at the heart of the origins of PMM. As an example, Kiselica and colleagues (2016) suggest stereotypes of "men" (broadly) and ways to work with them in therapy. This seems to reinforce the essentialist idea that there are broad norms or stereotypes which are applicable to all or most men. Thus, neither camp provides ways to deconstruct or reconstruct socially constructed masculine norms in helpful, non-essentializing ways.

In short, the psychology of men and masculinity has presented various negative outcomes associated with hegemonic masculinity while a positive reframe of traditional masculinity (i.e., the PPPM) has little empirical support. This leads to a severe gap in the literature: men being left without ways to construct their own healthy visions of masculinity associated with fewer negative outcomes. Attention

to the contextual, situational, and cultural aspects of masculinities may create pathways for these “healthier” visions.

### **Constructing more Adaptive Masculinities**

As described throughout this paper, research on the psychology of men and masculinities has noted the contingent and contextual nature of gendered social learning (Addis et al., 2010). The outcomes for any man who conforms to particular norms that may or may not be defined or experienced as “masculinity” may be culturally and situationally dependent. For example, it may be beneficial for men to pursue status, take risks, and desire to win as long as substance use, self-reliance, or sexism do not accompany them (Gerdes & Levant, 2015). It should be up to men to construct their own masculinities. The theme of the APA Handbook of Men and Masculinities (Wong & Wester, 2016) seems to address the situational/contextual nature of masculinity across a myriad of domains (e.g., culture, family context, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, and age). If male socialization relates to so many negative outcomes, discussion of how clients conceptualize and enact “masculinity” as it interacts with or intersects with other identities may be crucial for understanding why and how male socialization is impactful. For example, increasing attention has been given and should continue to be given to how “masculinity” intersects with identities related to being a man of color or sexual minority such as gay, queer, or trans. The benefits of psychological androgyny for men have been also prominently noted (e.g., McDermott et al., 2016), and this is not a new concept (see Bem, 1974).

Defining, conceptualizing, and exploring what healthy manhood might look like to men may vary widely across individuals. However, men’s movements have often served to reinforce gender essentialist stereotypes rather than deconstruct them (Gelfer, 2009). Thus, we must learn from early feminists. Just as feminism expanded what might be considered appropriate for women, a movement in the psychology of men and masculinities must be created to provide positive alternatives to negative aspects of male gender role socialization (O’Neil, 2015). Specifically addressing conformity and nonconformity to masculine norms as well as potential stress related to gender role conflict may provide avenues to explore men’s gender identity conceptions related to masculinity (Mahalik, Talmadge, Locke, & Scott., 2005; O’Neil, 2008). Masculine norms may also intersect differently in the context of heritage, culture, and family norms, which suggests assessing family and cultural factors related to gender roles may be of particular importance to men’s gender identity development (see Rabinowitz & Cochran, 2002). Cultural factors are also important considerations for psychologists, specifically in building self-awareness and acknowledgment of their own biases (Liu, 2005). However, additional research strategies are needed to implement these

concepts in ways that align a social constructionist perspective with the appropriate methodologies to use within this paradigm.

### **Future Research: Learning from our Interdisciplinary Past**

Psychologists must learn from their anthropological and sociological predecessors in conducting research that matches the employed paradigm. Margaret Mead studied cultural differences by having her “boots on the ground” and gaining personal insight from the experiences of others. However, little research in PMM scholarship has focused on techniques that might address the contextual nature of masculinity because correlational research with college students is so relied upon (Wong & Horn, 2016). Future research should focus on identifying the contexts in which conforming to certain masculine norms may be either beneficial or detrimental. In the meantime, generally conforming to the “masculine norms” that have been operationalized in the psychological literature must not be regarded as wholly negative nor accepted as fully positive. A third path must exist which envisions a more complex set of relationships between variables and a definition of masculine norms that is based on the experiences of men broadly rather than the researchers who study them.

One way of expanding our understanding of men and masculinities from a psychological perspective includes expanding the methods used for assessing these constructs empirically. Isacco (2015) suggests using qualitative methods such as Grounded Theory. Burkley and colleagues (2016) offer evidence for specific constructs in which to measure the contingent nature of masculinity. Wong and colleagues across a number of studies and at least two measures describe how subjective experiences of masculinity may account for broader notions of how men experience masculinity (see Wong et al., 2013; Wong et al., 2011). Margaret Mead did not give college students questionnaires on personal beliefs in order to study cultures from the socially constructed perspectives of those who constructed them. She went to them. PMM researchers would benefit by following suit 80 years later to better match social constructionist perspectives with the appropriate research techniques, such as qualitative and mixed methods (Ponterotto, 2005).

In short, the way quantitative measures of male or masculine limits the degree to which the socially constructed nature of “masculinities” can actually be studied. This is extremely important to acknowledge considering that the way men experience masculinity may be different from how it is being defined in the psychological literature and by society writ large (Gerdes, 2016; Wong & Horn, 2016). Expanding the ways masculinity is defined, operationalized, and measured can expand how counselors view clients who identify as men, and more importantly, expand men’s conceptions of their own gender identities in ways that improve mental health while being congruent with their gender identities.

## Conclusion and Moving Forward

This manuscript displays arguments and examples of scholarly discussion of the social construction of masculinity were alive and well in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in the U.S. We must acknowledge these theoretical roots as the origins of modern theoretical assumptions in the psychology of men and masculinity, just as sociology has done regarding men and masculinity (e.g., Kimmel, 2012). This analysis provides a complete narrative to the modern development of social constructivist and social learning perspectives of masculinity which are so often cited in the psychology of men and masculinities. In short, PMM's theoretical roots should be commonly cited as originating in at least the early 1900s, rather than the 1980s with Pleck (1981). Appropriate citations for doing so might include Mead (1935; 1949), Linton (1936; 1956; 1961), and Horney (1932).

Although it has taken decades for detailed counter-arguments to the dichotomizing of masculinity and femininity by those such as Terman and Miles (1936) to appear, various individuals were preaching and living counter-examples much earlier early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century in ways not often discussed in the psychology of men and masculinity. While the benefits of psychological androgyny for men have been prominently noted (e.g., McDermott et al., 2016), we must be reminded this is not a new concept (see Bem, 1974). In the face of gender inequality, scholars during feminism's first wave in the U.S. in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century provided theoretical foundations for gender as a social construct broadly. Vaerting and colleagues noted in 1923 (p. 115):

In the United States, where the movement toward equal rights for both sexes is farther advanced than in Europe, the disappearance of the ultra-feminine type was already so marked by the year 1910 that voices were raised in warning [...] that within a few years American women would no longer be distinguishable from men.

Over 100 years after 1910, voices are being raised ever louder, not in “warning,” but in the name of social justice. Progressing the theoretical frontiers of the future of the psychology of men and masculinity must start by acknowledging an older and deeper picture of its roots that began with Mead, Linton, Horney, and other pioneers in social constructionist theory of the psychology of men and masculinity.

Properly rooting the social construction of masculinities in the feminist social science research it originated from can help progress interventions and movements designed to ameliorate the harmful outcomes associated with men's conformity to archaic and narrow conceptions of masculinity. If “masculinity” is

socially constructed, it can be reconstructed or deconstructed. Just as feminism expanded the social acceptance of how and what it means to be a woman, modern movements and interventions for men must broaden what is socially accepted as masculine to include healthier concepts.

If scholars and the public alike continue to define and measure masculinity as a narrow purview of hegemonic norms, this progress will continue to be stymied. High suicide rates and low rates of help-seeking behavior combine to perpetuate the cycle of a mental health system that needs to be working better for men. Research on men and masculinities in psychology has identified some of the problematic norms that may be increasing the risk of poor mental health, but in so doing, men have only been further stigmatized. If given a dichotomous choice between being a “masculine” man and being mentally healthy, it is clear many men choose the former. Mental health professionals must bring to light a new way of conceptualizing men and masculinities to embrace more diversified and authentic ways of being men. In so doing, masculine gender identity can be embraced in healthy ways, rather than extinguished altogether. We must meet men where they are through empathy and provide the theory, research, and therapeutic supply in an atmosphere rich for thriving that meets the authentic demand of health-promoting gender identities for men. Instead of reinforcing gender stereotypes or abolishing them altogether, interventions must prevent the abolishment of the personal identities of men’s authentic gender self-conceptions while providing and encouraging non-oppressive ways to conceptualize what men perceive and create as personally masculine. This balance has not yet been struck.

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