

# The male gender role and men's psychological distress: A review

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*This review examines the psychological research surrounding masculinity and the attendant concepts relating to the male gender role. Its specific focus is within what has been called the 'social learning paradigm' (Addis & Cohane, 2005, p.637). The social learning paradigm is consistent with a social constructionist approach in that it views human behaviour as not arising from innate essentialist traits, but instead as being influenced and constructed by the interaction between the environment and the individual's own cognitions and behaviour (Bandura & Walters, 1963). However, the review notes that there is disagreement and debate surrounding the social learning paradigm's relationship to the social constructionist view of masculinity and so also details the social constructionist view in order to highlight this. It gives an outline of some of the theoretical views and the pertaining measures that have been designed to research masculinity and the male gender role, and also focuses on the psychological distress that has been theorised to arise as a result of the norms associated with that role.*

## **Masculinity. What is it?**

**F**OR OVER 40 years there has been an increasing focus on men within psychological research. Drawing on feminist theory, researchers began to focus their attention on what it means to be a man (e.g. Bernard, 1981; Brannon, 1976; Brown, 1986; Pleck, 1981) and the concept of *masculinity* began to be studied and utilised within psychology. The very conception of masculinity as a hypothetical construct is one that is subject to widespread discussion, disagreement and misunderstanding. One of the main points to have arisen from this research is the differentiation between *sex*: a biological definition dependent on genetics and bodily organs, and *gender*: social, cultural and psychological characteristics that have come to be aligned and associated with male or female sexes, (Mintz & O'Neil, 1990; Horrocks, 1994). Further to this, two broad theoretical positions have been taken up, essentialism and constructionism (Bohan, 1997). Essentialism encapsulates the theoretical idea that gender resides within the individual, and views it as something that is innate, and, therefore, consistent and internal, unaffected by the social context in which the individual operates.

Constructionism, on the other hand, as represented here by the social learning paradigm, sees gender as something that is *learned* by interaction with the environment and is, therefore, contextually specific.

A range of contemporary research undertaken in the field of social psychology and masculinity has adopted a constructionist approach, and for that reason this review will also adopt that theoretical overview. Consistent with a constructionist viewpoint is the concept of *gender role norms*. Gender role norms can be defined as socially and psychologically enacted behaviours that are in line with socially constructed ideas about what it means to be masculine or feminine within a particular cultural context (Levant, 1996). These roles are imparted through socialisation processes, and in this way men learn the expected norms of masculine behaviour for their culture (Pleck, 1995). This 'normative perspective' (Thompson & Pleck, 1995, p.130), encapsulates the overarching paradigm that has dominated theory and research on masculinity. Within this paradigm certain theoretical concepts have dominated and four of those will be considered here: masculine *gender role strain*, masculine *ideology*, masculine *gender role*

*conflict* and *conformity to gender role norms*. Much of the literature that will be covered in this review pertinent to men's distress uses these concepts and their related scales; therefore it is important to spend some time here covering the theoretical background to these psychometric instruments in order to understand them more fully.

### **Gender role strain**

Joseph Pleck (1995) was one of the first researchers to note the inherent problematic characteristics of adherence to gender role norms. Pleck originally pointed out in his book *The Myth of Masculinity* (1981) that throughout the history of psychology, the psychological health of men and boys was seen to be dependent on accepting and incorporating biologically rooted essentialist gender traits in order to build a stable and secure male identity. He used the term 'gender role *identity* paradigm' to encapsulate this ideal, which he felt permeated previous theoretical work on gender in psychology. Instead, Pleck outlined a view that saw masculine behaviour as being shaped by ideologies that vary over time and within social and cultural context. The predominant 'traditional' view of masculinity, therefore, contributed to men's psychological distress by being inconsistent, impossible to achieve and inherently harmful. He called this way of viewing masculinity, 'the gender role *strain* paradigm' which holds the proposition that gender role norms for males are problematic, both when they conform to them and when they do *not*. This idea is taken further with the framing of three theoretical psychological states that Pleck outlines as implicit in the gender role strain paradigm: gender role *discrepancy* strain, gender role *dysfunction* strain and gender role *trauma* strain. *Gender role discrepancy strain* is the idea that as 'traditional' gender role norms are often contradictory and inconsistent, most men will fail to live up to these and thus violate them. Violating these norms will necessarily lead to negative psychological consequences such as low self-

esteem. Pleck suggests that 'life cycle inconsistencies; historical change; and inconsistencies between men's and women's expectations,' (1981, p.142) make it nigh on impossible for men to meet the demands of these roles. *Gender role dysfunction strain* is the idea that even *if* men are able to attain conformity with these norms, the normative ideals themselves are psychologically damaging. He offers the example of the normative ideal that men should have restricted familial participation – the male 'breadwinner' role – as having inherent negative psychological side-effects. The third theoretical state, *gender role trauma strain*, is the idea that even if male gender role norms are attained, the socialisation process that is necessary for this to happen will be traumatic and fraught with negative psychological consequences. One example of this, may be a young boy who is deprived of the comfort of his mother at a certain age because the masculine gender role norm is 'big boys don't cry.'

### **Masculinity ideology**

Pleck later moved on to frame the idea of masculinity ideology (Pleck, Sonenstein & Ku, 1993.) This theoretical concept essentially reframed the idea of masculinity as existing wholly within a society's norms for male behaviour, and instead saw masculinity as 'the individual's endorsement and internalisation of cultural belief systems about masculinity and male gender,' (Pleck, 1995, p.19). In other words, what someone believes they *should* do as a man within a particular setting. The fact that these are culturally and temporally defined means that that there are differing masculine ideologies available. This viewpoint coincides with social theorists who argue that there are *many* different masculinities, (Connell, 1995; Kimmel, 1997). However, despite these available alternative masculinities, there exists a particular dominant form of expectations and standards that apply to men, and this has been termed variously 'hegemonic masculinity' (Connell, 1995, p.77) and '*traditional* masculinity ideology,'

(Levant & Richmond, 2007). There remains a research focus on this particular type of masculinity ideology and several studies have outlined characteristics of traditional masculinity. For example, Brannon (1976) described four themes that act as prescriptive and proscriptive norms for how a man should behave: (i) 'No sissy stuff' – men should not appear feminine; (ii) 'Be a big wheel,' – gain dominance and power through status; (iii) 'The sturdy oak,' – be strong, independent and unemotional; and (iv) 'Give 'em hell,' – take risks, seek out violence and be adventurous. Similarly, Levant (1992) proposed seven traditional male role norms: non-relational attitudes, restrictive emotionality, homophobia, avoiding femininity, aggression, status seeking, and self-reliance. This latter conceptualisation led to the development of the Male Role Norms Inventory (henceforth MRNI), a scale which was designed to assess both traditional and non-traditional masculinity ideologies, (Levant & Richmond, 2007). The relationship of masculinity ideology to men's psychological distress has been addressed in many studies and Levant and Richmond's (2007) review demonstrated widespread use of the MRNI in researching masculinity ideologies. Examples of these studies will be considered later on in the review. Next, however, the theoretical concept of masculine gender role conflict will be examined.

### ***Masculine gender role conflict***

Gender role conflict (O'Neil, Good & Holmes, 1995; O'Neil, 2008) is a singular theoretical ideal that incorporates Pleck's theoretical states included in the gender role strain paradigm, but has evolved and expanded its conceptualisation to include and define delineated patterns of negative consequences of male gender role socialisation in specific domains. Gender role conflict (henceforth GRC) is defined as 'a psychological state in which socialised gender roles have negative consequences for the person or others' (O'Neil, 2008, p.362). The theoretical position of GRC is wholly

within the gender role strain paradigm in that GRC is seen to occur when men *conform* to masculine ideology norms, but also when they *deviate from*, or *violate them*. The GRC conceptualisation attempts to represent the complexity of men's experience with gender role norms by providing a definition of this psychological state that describes within it four psychological domains (cognitive, affective, unconscious and behavioural), four categories of situational context (gender role transitions, intrapersonal GRC, interpersonal GRC, and GRC experienced from others) and three types of personal experience (violations, restrictions and devaluations). The interaction between each and any of these domains, contexts and experiences is complex and, therefore, highly individualised.

As well as outlining what the psychological make-up of GRC consists of, O'Neil has also conceptualised theoretical *patterns* of GRC. These patterns are conceived as the areas in which GRC is most likely to occur. These are: restrictive emotionality, conflict between work and family relations, restrictive affectionate behaviour between men, and success/power/competition. These patterns were derived from the development of the Gender Role Conflict Scale (henceforth GRCS; O'Neil et al., 1986) in which factor analysis of 85 items generated to assess GRC resulted in the four patterns listed above. The GRCS uses self-report items to assess the 'degree of conflict in comfort in particular gender role situations' (Tsan et al., 2011, p.1). Since its conception the GRCS has been a widely deployed psychometric scale that has been used to measure GRC in various contexts. For example, O'Neil's (2008) review of research using the GRCS noted that in the preceding 25 years, 232 empirical studies had utilised the scale.

### ***Conformity to gender role norms***

Drawing on the social learning paradigm, James Mahalik developed the gender role norms model (Mahalik et al., 2003) of masculinity. He utilised past work on social

norms (Cialdini & Trost, 1998; Sherif, 1936) to explain an individual's masculinity as a construct that is mediated by whether and how men conform to societal expectations for what constitutes masculinity. One major difference in theoretical thinking from role strain or role conflict models, Mahalik notes, is that there are both costs *and* benefits for conformity to masculine role norms.

Within the model, the societal sources of masculine role norms are seen to be shaped by the most dominant and powerful groups in a society, and there is similarity here to Connell's conception of 'hegemonic masculinity' and men's complicity or resistance to it (Connell, 1995). These dominant groups shape the standards and expectations of a particular gender role. These standards and expectations are then communicated to an individual through descriptive, injunctive and cohesive norms (Reno, Cialdini & Kallgren, 1993). Descriptive norms are norms that refer to what is commonly done, sometimes called 'the norms of *is*' (Kallgren, Reno & Cialdini, 2000, p.1002). They refer to what is observed by individuals within a social context. With reference to masculinity, this could apply to men observing what men commonly *do* within a variety of social situations. Injunctive norms refer to how people are *expected* to behave. Sometimes called 'the norm of *ought*,' (ibid.) injunctive norms can be seen to 'motivate action by promising social sanctions for normative or counter-normative conduct' towards what should or shouldn't be done within a particular social context (Reno, Cialdini & Kallgren, 1993, p.104). Cohesive norms refer to observing how popular or influential people within a culture behave (Ludlow & Mahalik, 2001).

However, there are many factors that will affect *how* an individual will receive and filter these gender role norms. For example, Mahalik et al. (2003) cite socioeconomic status and racial identity as a group factor that will affect how the norms are received by individuals within those groups. Following on from this, these factors affect the *extent* to which an individual displays conformity or

non-conformity to the dominant male gender norms. It is this conformity or non-conformity to dominant masculine gender role norms that forms the basis of the psychometric scale the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (henceforth CMNI). The scale conceptualises conformity to masculine norms as ranging along a continuum that moves from extreme conformity, through moderate conformity and moderate non-conformity, to extreme non-conformity. The self-report items that make up the scale include cognitive, affective and behavioural components. Although the relatively recent development of the CMNI (Mahalik et al., 2003) means that it has not had sufficient time to have been employed in a wide range of studies, it has still been involved in a sizeable body of research. The uses to which this and other scales have been put are discussed in the following section.

### **Research findings**

The concepts above and their attendant self-report scales have dominated research into masculinities over the period in which it has been a research topic of interest. The focus of this section of the review will be on providing an overview of the research that looks at masculinity and relates it to both men's psychological distress and the therapeutic context. As noted earlier, the breadth of this type of research is extensive and so space limitations mean that only a limited amount of examples are able to be provided. In order to provide a coherent summary of these findings they will be grouped into three contexts: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and therapeutic.

#### ***Intrapersonal contexts***

Intrapersonal contexts include depression, anxiety, stress, self-esteem and shame. For example, in a study using male university counselling centre clients as participants, Good et al. (1996) found a significant relationship between depression scores within a psychological distress measure (Symptom Checklist-90-Revised) and scores on the

GRCS. Cournoyer and Mahalik (1995) noted that scores on the GRCS were significantly correlated with measures of depression, (Beck Depression Inventory) anxiety (State-Trait Anxiety Inventory) and self-esteem (Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory) for both college-aged and middle-aged men, although in differing patterns of gender role conflict. This pattern of GRC relationship to measures of psychological distress is also evident when the participants are drawn from diverse samples. For example, GRC and psychological distress were empirically related in studies using Chinese-Canadians (Wester, Kuo & Vogel, 2006), Mexican-Americans (Fragoso & Kashubeck, 2000), and Australians (Theodore & Lloyd, 2000). However, as a counterpoint it should be noted that other studies have used differential cultural samples (Asian-American men) and have found no significant relationship between men's GRC and psychological distress (Liu & Iwamoto, 2006).

#### *Interpersonal contexts*

Interpersonal context studies have demonstrated a relationship between scores on the GRCS and measures of interpersonal functioning. These include marital satisfaction (Sharpe, Heppner & Dixon, 1995), attachment (Blazina & Watkins 2000; DeFranc & Mahalik, 2002), interpersonal and sexual violence towards women (Senn et al., 2000; Glomb & Espelage, 2005), and overall interpersonal functioning (Mahalik, 2000). Similarly, use of the MRNI has demonstrated the effects of gender role strain in an interpersonal context. Jakupcak, Lisak and Roemer (2002), for example, used the MRNI in studying the interaction between gender role stress and endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology and found that this interaction was related to measures of relationship violence.

As with the GRCS and MRNI, studies using the CMNI have demonstrated a relationship between male gender role socialisation and interpersonal and intrapersonal contexts. Both types of context are encom-

passed in the idea of 'health behaviours' (actions that influence health outcomes). These can either be interpersonally and intrapersonally favourable or unfavourable (e.g. smoking, exercising, diet, substance abuse, risky sexual behaviours). This conceptualisation of male distress was looked at by Mahalik, Burns and Syzdek, (2007) who found that men who scored higher on the CMNI, thus indicating a greater conformity to traditional masculine norms, also reported lower incidents of health promoting behaviour. The relationship between health behaviours and conformity to masculine norms has also been found to exist cross-culturally in Costa Ricans (Lane & Addis, 2005), Kenyans (Mahalik, Lagan & Morrison, 2006), Italians (Tager & Good, 2005) and Australians (Mahalik, Levi-Minzi & Walker, 2007).

#### *Therapeutic contexts*

One of the main concepts to have arisen from this area of research, and the one to be most widely studied, is that of *help-seeking*. Good, Dell and Mintz, (1989) carried out one of the first studies in this area, and since then there have been a plethora of studies that demonstrate a relationship between the traditional male gender role and reluctance to seek psychological help (see O'Neil, 2008, and Addis & Mahalik, 2003, for more in-depth reviews). For example, with regard to psychological help-seeking Berger et al. (2005) found that higher scores on the MRNI (indicating greater endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology) reflected negative attitudes towards psychological help-seeking. Related to this is the way that therapy is viewed by men; Owen, Wong and Rodolfa (2010) reported a relationship between counselling centre clients' greater conformity to masculine norms and the perceived helpfulness of their therapist's actions. Attitudes towards, and conceptualisation of, therapy was also shown to be connected to conformity to masculine norms in a study by McKelley and Rochlen (2010). They had men in two conditions

(assigned as *therapy* or *executive coaching*) listen to a short extract from a therapy session. Men with higher scores on the CMNI viewed *therapy* less favourably, and demonstrated higher stigma towards help-seeking.

### **Positive Psychology – a recent movement**

What is clear from the above is that much of the focus has been on the *distress* caused by adherence to traditional male role norms. However, more recent research has attempted to encompass what can be seen as positive aspects of this adherence. For example, Hammer and Good (2010) attempted to integrate the concepts behind the recent movement of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2003) and aspects of the conformity to masculine norms theoretical position. Positive psychology suggests that a focus on building strengths needs to be utilised in a clinical context alongside more traditional therapeutic aspects, such as the focus on suffering (Seligman, Rashid & Parks, 2006). The beneficial aspects of masculine norm conformity (as measured by the CMNI) were, therefore, re-framed in this paper as *strengths*. The authors demonstrated relationships between measures on the CMNI and measures of positive psychological constructs (i.e. scales measuring endurance, grit, resilience, etc.) In this way, extreme conformity to the domain of self-reliance could be conceptualised as autonomy and viewed as a strength, extreme conformity in the domain of risk-taking could be viewed as courage, and extreme conformity in the domain of status seeking could be reframed as endurance.

### **The social construction of masculinities and discursive psychology**

Outside of the social learning/gender role strain paradigm, research has focused less on the individual and more on the *contextual* nature of masculinity. It has been pointed out that regardless of whether masculinity is in-born (as in the essentialist view) or taught

(as in the social learning paradigm) the fact remains that *both* these ontologies of masculinity see it as something that men possess (Addis, Mansfield & Syzdek, 2010). Social constructionist writers, however, see gender as not residing within the person, but instead as something that resides in social interactions (Bohan, 1997). In this interpretation, gender is *enacted* by the person within a transaction that is bound by a cultural context; it is a social *process* that continually construes one another as belonging to a certain gender category (Marecek, Crawford & Popp, 2004). Language, therefore, plays a vital part in how gender is constructed. As Davis and Gergen (1997) point out, 'facts are dependent upon the language communities that have created and sustained them' (p.5).

It has been said that to social constructionists, gender is not viewed as a noun, but as a verb (Addis & Cohane, 2005). It is worth noting here that there appears to be some confusion about this distinction. Pleck (1995) writing on social constructionism states that 'the gender role strain model for masculinity is, in the broad sense, a social constructionist perspective that simply predated the term,' (p.22). Tager and Good (2006) also place the gender role strain paradigm squarely within social constructionism by stating, 'this study extends empirical data regarding the social construction perspective of gender roles by exploring cross-cultural difference in masculine role norms,' (p.264). Whereas it is possible to see how this interpretation came about (masculinity is '*socially constructed*' as gender norms, rather than being something that is biologically innate) it does not incorporate social constructionism's micro-focus on language and the way that it is used to reflect the ways we construct each other in interactions. Also, whereas some social constructionist studies state that the gender role strain paradigm views people as 'blank slates' that are 'socialised', (Courtenay, 2000, p.6) and draw comparisons with the social constructionist view that people are *active* participants in the construction of gender, others have pointed

out that they are theoretically similar in how they 'emphasise in varying degrees how social forces [re]construct and reinforce social views regarding gender,' (Blazina, 2011, p.99). Therefore, it would appear that the important difference is one of *emphasis*: role strain theorists' emphasis is on the *effects* of socially shaped gendered behaviours whilst social constructionists' emphasis is on the *process* of how gender is actively constructed at a particular level.

What a social constructionist perspective allows is a wide contextual variation in masculinities. This emphasis on the contextual is becoming more prominent in the field of studying men and masculinities (e.g. Blazina & Shen-Miller, 2011) especially in terms of cross-cultural study. Role strain researchers have found cultural differences in levels of endorsement of male norms, including in African Americans (Wade, 2008) Asian Americans (Liu & Iwamoto, 2006) Chinese Canadians (Wester, Kuo & Vogel, 2006) and Mexicans (Fragoso & Kashubek, 2000) reinforcing the idea that there are a variety of culturally based masculinities available to men. Although some writers have viewed overlap in conformity to masculine ideologies as 'reflecting many cultures' historically common societal needs for defence, reproduction and social arrangements,' (Kilmartin & Berkowitz, 2005, pp.24–25, cited in Mahalik et al., 2007), the differences in endorsement of male role norms suggest that context plays a large role in how notions of what it means to be a man are constructed and endorsed. It is important to note that there is no '*traditional*' masculinity that can operate across cultures and timescales. The traditional masculinity referred to above needs to be seen for what it is: that is, traditional masculinity for the American male at the end of the 20th century.

The social constructionist focus on language and social interaction has been taken up by proponents of discourse analysis (Burr, 2003; Potter & Wetherell, 1987), which studies how people use language in

their interactions to build specific accounts that have implications for the interactants. The issue of power is foremost here, as it shapes and constrains the way that people are able to construct their identities. This focus on power has traditionally been the domain of Foucauldian discourse analysis, which adopts a macro level of analysis in which 'top-down' approaches examine how the dominant discourses within a context are spoken *through* people (Burr, 2003). This is in contrast to 'bottom-up' approaches which have a more micro level focus in which attention is paid primarily to the action orientation in interactions; that is, what the language that people use is accomplishing, what it is *doing*. These two levels of analysis, micro and macro have not been viewed as mutually exclusive and have, in fact, been synthesised into an approach termed critical discursive psychology (Coyle, 2007).

Discursive psychology 'treats the objects of traditional psychology research as products of discourse' (Hepburn & Jackson, 2009, p.177). The term 'discourse,' as Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out, has been used in many different ways, but within discursive psychology is taken to mean 'all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds' (p.7). In the field of masculinities, this perspective has been adopted by Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherell who used critical discursive psychology to study how UK men construct and negotiate masculinities (Edley & Wetherell, 1997; Edley & Wetherell, 1999; Wetherell & Edley, 1999). Their 1997 paper used critical discursive psychology to study how young men used debates within particular contextual communities (e.g. within a sixth-form college) to construct the ways in which they can be viewed as men. It revealed that constructions of masculinity were positioned against what was seen to be the dominant form of masculinity within that particular context (i.e. rugby playing 'hard men'). Therefore, the participant's masculine identities are constructed 'in dialogue' with the form of masculinity they are posi-

tioned relative to. What is evident here is a focus on power, as the young men *outside* the dominant contextual order (i.e. the non-rugby players) struggle to produce a version of their own masculinity. The hegemonic version of rugby playing masculinity provides the context within which the young men are *able* to construct their masculine identities.

### **Summary of findings, and implications for future research**

This review has looked at the prevailing research in the psychological study of men and masculinity over the past 40 years. What has become evident is that certain theoretical positions and methodologies have dominated during this period. The gender role strain paradigm which encompasses ideas such as gender role conflict and conformity to gender role norms has been the prevalent theoretical psychological perspective. Indeed, a content analysis of the journal *Psychology of Men and Masculinity* from 2000–2008 (Wong et al., 2010) revealed that 53 per cent ( $N=82$ ) of articles were based within the gender role strain paradigm. The theoretical ideas contained within this paradigm have given rise to a variety of research instruments that are intended to give an objective measure to the concepts expounded by the theories, and quantitative measures such as the GRCS, MRNI, and the CMNI have been widely employed in a variety of contexts. In fact, a review by Whorley and Addis (2006) of the methodological trends in the psychological research of men and masculinities between 1995 and 2004 revealed that 84 per cent ( $N=167$ ) of the studies they reviewed used quantitative methods. Of these quantitative methods, 59 per cent used a primarily correlational design. The methodological reliance on quantitative measures and correlation appears narrow and gives cause for concern. Much of the quantitative research covered in this review has a research design in which a theoretical measure of 'masculinity' or 'gender role strain' is taken and then statistically correlated with a theoretical measure

relating to psychological distress, that is, help-seeking. There are several problems with this approach. Firstly, the reliance on self report measures in an area that carries with it such social stigma, gives rise to the distinct possibility of responses being unduly influenced by social desirability. Secondly, correlational designs can only imply causality and do not allow researchers to investigate the processes by which masculinity norms may come to cause psychological distress. The reliance on quantitative methods does not allow the exploration of *how* masculinities are constructed and negotiated within different cultural, temporal and societal contexts.

Most recently, however, researchers in the field have begun to question the constructed conception of masculinity that has dominated the field. Addis, Mansfield and Syzdek (2010) question the ontological assumptions behind the construct of 'masculinity' and question the utility of research derived from it. They feel that the construction of masculinity that has been studied is generally non-contextual, non-contingent and ahistorical, and is, therefore, problematic for the social psychological study of gender as it locates it as something internal to individuals and, therefore, is likely to promote an essentialist view. They state that as masculinity has become understood as something that is flexible and contingent upon the context of the social world in which it is enacted, there has grown a need for research which views masculinities as 'nested layers of highly situated and contested social practices' (p.81). Yet, while other leading researchers in the field agree that study in the psychology of men and masculinity has 'paid too little attention to the contingent and contextual effects of gendered social learning in men' (O'Neil, 2010), some feel that 'masculinity' is a 'vital construct' (Brooks, 2010, p.107). Brooks argues from a situated and contextualised position in that he looks at the usefulness of the construct for his clinical work with men. He states that the research in male gendered social learning has allowed him and his

clients to be able to conceptualise ‘masculinity’ and its deleterious effects, and disagrees that researching the construct promotes an essentialist bifurcation of the sexes with the social learning paradigm. In response, Michael Addis, (2010) contends that although clinical utility may show that a construct may be useful, Brooks offers no evidence for this. His point, therefore, is that in order for research to be valuable it must be able to be subjected to a ‘scientific system of checks and balances,’ (p.111). What this debate reveals, is that although Addis, Mansfield and Syzdek call for ‘compatible perspectives on ontology (*what* is gendered social learning), epistemology (*how* can we understand its effects), and practical ethics (toward what *social ends* should we be working)’ there appears to be a fissure developing between those researchers who wish to keep a focus on the ontological and epistemological aspects of research into men and those who are more concerned with the utility of these concepts within clinical practice. Whether, as the field moves forward, this fissure will become wider, remains to be seen.

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