

Differential Reactions to Men and Women's Gender Role Transgressions: Perceptions of Social Status, Sexual Orientation, and Value Dissimilarity

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This study examined the influence of gender role transgressions on perceptions of men and women's social status, homosexual orientation, and value dissimilarity. Because past research has shown that men who transgress gender role norms are punished more harshly than women, it was hypothesized that male transgressors would be perceived more negatively than female transgressors in each of these domains. Participants read vignettes of two hypothetical gender role transgressors, one described using gender role personality traits and another described using gender role behaviors. The trait-based male gender role transgressor was perceived to be lower in social status and was considered more likely to be homosexual than the female transgressor. The behavioral-based male gender role transgressor was perceived to be lower in social status, and was perceived to be more value-dissimilar than the female gender role transgressor.

Key Words: gender role transgressions, men's social status, women's social status, homosexual orientation, value dissimilarity

Gender role norms are some of the most powerful social norms taught to individuals, who internalize them through the process of gender role socialization (Mahalik,

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2000). Because social norms often determine our expectancies for the personality traits and behaviors that men and women both adopt and enact (Deaux & Major, 1987; Eagly 1987), failing to conform to these socially prescribed gender roles may result in being perceived and evaluated negatively (Mahalik, 2000). Thus, even though men and women internalize and display both masculine and feminine characteristics, people still expect men to be masculine and women to be feminine and reward and punish them accordingly (McCreary, 1994).

EXPLAINING PEOPLE'S NEGATIVE REACTIONS TO MALE GENDER ROLE TRANSGRESSIONS

Prior research examining gender role transgressions has generally observed that, although both males and females are likely to be evaluated less positively when they do not conform to gender role stereotypes, males tend to be viewed more negatively than females when they transgress gender roles (Antill, 1987; Archer, 1984; McCreary, 1994). To explain this phenomenon, a number of theoretical models have been proposed. One approach, the *social status model* (SS), suggests that differences in social status between male and female gender roles influence the way men and women are viewed when they violate gender-based norms (Feinman, 1981, 1984; Rosenkrantz, Vogel, Bee, Broverman, & Broverman, 1968). According to the SS model, since men (and therefore the male gender role) generally have a higher level of social status and prestige than women (and the female gender role), when men do not conform to their socially sanctioned gender norms, they lose status and, as a result, are perceived more negatively than women. Likewise, when women depart from their gender-based norms, they are changing their behaviors in a direction that is higher in status and prestige and therefore will be perceived in a more positive manner than male transgressors. Evidence supporting the SS model comes from several sources. For example, Feinman's (1981, 1984) research has shown that a woman's movement into the more highly valued male role is more acceptable than a man's movement toward the less valued female role. Similarly, Sadalla, Kenrick, and Vershure (1987) showed that men who act in a less dominant manner are perceived to be significantly less desirable than men acting in a more dominant manner.

Herek (1984, 1994) proposed a second possible explanation for why gender role transgressions are tolerated less in males than in females, what McCreary (1994) has called the *sexual orientation model* (SO). The basis for this model comes from prior research showing that feminine-typed gender role characteristics in men, as opposed to masculine-typed gender role characteristics in women, increased the likelihood of men, but not women, being perceived as homosexual (e.g., Deaux & Lewis, 1984; Herek, 1984; O'Neil, 1981; O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995). Furthermore, surveys indicate that gay men are perceived more negatively than lesbians, heterosexual men, and homosexual women in a variety of domains (Herek, 1994, 2000; Kite, 1994; Kite & Whitley, 1998; Whitley, 1988). Therefore, the SO model states that male gender role transgressions are punished more harshly than female gender role transgressions because cross-gendered roles are closely associated with being labeled a homosexual for men and bring with them all of the negative evaluations that accompany homosexuality in men (Herek, 1984; McCreary, 1994).

The *perceived value dissimilarity* (PVD) model provides a third explanation for the harsher evaluation of men who transgress their gender-based roles. The PVD model is based on Schwartz's theory of the psychological structure of human values and the extent to which people believe that members of an out-group differ from themselves with regard to these values (see Schwartz & Bilsky, 1987). According to this perspective, those who are thought to violate a group's shared norms (i.e., by holding, or being perceived to hold, a different set of values from those of the observer) present a threat to the group and, as a result, will be perceived more negatively than those who are thought to share the group's norms (Esses, Haddock, & Zanna, 1993). Haddock and his colleagues have examined attitudes toward gays (Haddock, Zanna, & Esses, 1993) and men's attitudes toward women (Haddock & Zanna, 1994) using the PVD approach and found that individuals who perceived a greater degree of value dissimilarity between themselves and either women or homosexuals held more negative attitudes about those groups. Thus, because greater perceived value dissimilarity is associated with more negative attitudes, it is possible that male gender role transgressors are treated more harshly than female gender role transgressors in part because they are perceived to differ from the perceiver *vis a vis* these universal values.

Although these three theoretical explanations are presented separately here, it should be clear that they are not mutually exclusive. For example, because both homosexuals and people whose values are perceived to differ from the group's are perceived more negatively, they should both be seen as lower in social status. Similarly, those lower in social status might be perceived to have values different from certain referent groups. Thus, it is likely that those who violate gender role norms will be perceived as lower in social status, homosexual in sexual orientation, and a threat to the group's values (as evidenced by greater levels of PVD).

COMPARISON OF THE MODELS

While no study to date has tested how gender role transgressions influence PVD, McCreary (1994) examined how these transgressions influenced both SS and SO. In this study, McCreary asked a group of college students to rate a male or female target, described in either a male- or female-typed manner, on variables assessing social status and perceived homosexuality. Although the findings did not support the SS model, strong support emerged for the SO hypothesis such that male gender role transgressors were more likely to be perceived as homosexual than female gender role transgressors (McCreary, 1994). This finding supports the notion that gender role transgressions in males may be punished more harshly because people assume it is symptomatic of a homosexual orientation, something that is perceived more negatively for men than for women in North American society.

There are two important limitations, however, to McCreary's (1994) study. The first is that, when describing his targets, McCreary used stimuli that combined both gender role traits (i.e., aggressive, rough, and strong for men and temperamental, emotional, and neat for women) and gender role behaviors (i.e., likes outdoor sports, likes team sports, for men and likes clothes and takes interest in cooking for females). Given that research shows gender role traits and behaviors are only corre-

lated moderately with one another (Archer, 1989; McCreary, 1990; Spence, 1993), people's reactions to transgressions in these two domains should be examined separately. That is, people's reactions to gender role transgressions may be different if the transgression is trait- or behavioral-based. To date, however, this difference has not been studied.

A second limitation to McCreary's (1994) study was that he used target stimuli that were *gender diagnostic* (Lippa & Arad, 1997), meaning the descriptors used were meant to reflect common beliefs about what differentiates males from females. Current gender role researchers use gender stereotypes, as opposed to biological sex, to conceptualize and operationalize gender role norms (both traits and behaviors). Conceptualizations of gender role development emphasize the notion that men and women adopt both masculine- and feminine-typed personality traits and act in both masculine- and feminine-typed ways. Self-report questionnaires such as the *Personal Attributes Questionnaire* (PAQ; Spence & Helmreich, 1978) and the *Sex Role Behavior Scale* (SRBS; Orlofsky, 1981) operationalize this notion by selecting items because they are more stereotypic of men or women, not because they differentiate men from women. Thus, when assessing people's reactions to gender role transgressions, it is important to adopt the same paradigm as researchers studying gender role socialization and use the appropriate stimuli.

By extending research exploring factors associated with why male gender role transgressions are perceived more harshly than female gender role transgressions, this study will contribute to the existing literature in four ways. First, it will offer further evidence supporting the SS and SO models. Second, it will directly examine the extent to which gender role transgressions influence PVD. Third, the study will assess perceptions of how men's and women's gender role transgressions vary as a function of whether the transgression is trait- or behavioral-based. Fourth, it will use trait and behavioral stimuli taken from current measures of gender role socialization. More specifically, the following hypotheses will be tested:

1. An adult male target described with feminine traits will be perceived to be lower in social status, more likely to be a homosexual, and more value-dissimilar than a female target described with masculine traits.
2. The male target described with feminine-typed behaviors will be perceived to be lower in social status, more likely to be a homosexual, and more value-dissimilar than a female target described with masculine-typed behaviors.

METHOD

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 59 undergraduate students recruited from a general course on developmental psychology at a North American college. There were 30 women and 29 men. The participants were mostly White. All research material was completed in small groups.

PROCEDURE

This study employed a person perception paradigm. Each participant rated two hypothetical target persons (TPs), one described using gender-typed personality traits (TP1) and another described using gender-typed behaviors (TP2). The trait-based descriptions for TP1 were taken from the agency (i.e., masculine-typed) and communion (i.e., feminine-typed) subscales of the PAQ (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Items from the PAQ were selected because they were equally desirable for men and women, but more stereotypically associated with men (agency scale) or women (communion scale).

The masculine-typed description read as follows: "I am independent, active, and competitive. I can make decisions easily, I stand up well under pressure, and I never give up without trying my hardest. I am very self-confident and I never feel inferior to others." The feminine-typed description was: "I am very kind, helpful, understanding, emotional, and gentle. I am very warm in my relations with others, I am very aware of the feelings of others, and I am able to devote myself completely to others."

The behavioral-based descriptions for TP2 were a series of dominant and submissive acts taken from McCreary and Rhodes' (2001) research on the gender-typed nature of these behaviors. Like the traits on the PAQ, these dominant or submissive behaviors were equally desirable for both genders, as evidenced by equivalent social desirability scores, but were more stereotypically associated with men (dominant behaviors) or women (submissive behaviors). The masculine-typed, dominant TP was described as follows: "I volunteer ideas that get group discussions going, I settle disputes among my friends and co-workers, and I challenge other people to discuss their opinions. I often refuse to change my mind, I am often unwilling to listen to others' points of view, and I have been known to embarrass people in front of a group. I like trying to argue or bluff my way past guards or doormen, I am often the one to make bold sexual advances with my partner; in fact, I never refuse to have sex with my partner." The TP with feminine-typed, submissive behaviors was presented as follows: "I tend not to enter into conversations until I am invited to speak, I don't start conversations at parties, and I tend not to defend myself when someone is verbally putting me down. I don't do things that anger my friends or parents, I often allow my parents and friends to talk me into doing things, and I do things at work because no one else will do them. I go out to places because others want to go, not because I am interested in being there. I use my car to take my friends places and don't ask for gas money. I often let my partner choose which movies we will see."

Past research has shown that men described in gender-typed ways are perceived to be higher in social status than gender-typed women, and that gender-typed men and women are more likely to be perceived as heterosexual (McCreary, 1994). Thus, the purpose of this study was not to compare people's perceptions of gender-typed and non-gender typed individuals, but to compare people's perceptions of male and female gender role transgressors. To that end, the TPs in this study were described in a gender-transgressed manner. Specifically, if the TP was a male, he was described as possessing communal personality traits and acting in submissive ways; if the TP was a female, she possessed agentic personality traits and acted in a dominant manner.

Male and female participants were randomly assigned to read the description of either two male or two female target persons. Trait-based descriptions always were presented first. An effort was made to balance the number of men and women in each condition ($N = 15$ women and $N = 15$ men, approximately, per condition). Participants were instructed to read each scenario and then, after each scenario, respond to the questions asking about what kind of person they believe this man or woman must be.

MEASURES

After reading each description, respondents answered several pencil and paper questions that assessed their perceptions of the two target persons' social status, homosexuality, and values. Participants also rated their own values.

Perceived Social Status (PSS). Each TP's social status was measured by the same sociometric-like variables employed by McCreary (1994). Participants were asked to rate four items that measure the extent to which they believe the two target persons were competent, important, highly regarded, and powerful (Feinman, 1981). These features were selected because they are plausible markers of social status (Conway, Pizzamiglio, & Mount, 1996; Weber, 1946).

Responses were rated along a 10-point Likert-scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 9 (very much). Scores were averaged, and higher scores are indicative of higher perceived social status. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients showed adequate levels of internal consistency (TP1 = .84, TP2 = .86).

Perceived Homosexuality (PH). Perceptions of the target's homosexuality were measured with three items based on those used by McCreary (1994). Participants were asked to rate the extent to which they thought it was important for a homosexual to have the personality traits or behaviors attributed to each of the TPs, the extent to which they felt the TP was a homosexual, and the likelihood that the TP is a homosexual. Responses to the first two items were rated along a 10-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (not at all) to 9 (very). The third item was rated using a scale between 0% and 100 %. Because different metrics were used to rate these items, responses to all three questions were transformed to z -scores and then averaged. Higher scores represent a greater perceived likelihood that the TP is a homosexual. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients showed adequate levels of internal consistency for this item grouping (TP1 = .77, TP2 = .79).

Perceived Value Dissimilarity (PVD). Perceived value dissimilarity was measured using the short version of Schwartz's Values Survey (Schwartz, 1992). This 22-item measure includes two items for each of the following 11 value types: self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, power, conformity, benevolence, tradition, spirituality, universalism, and security (see Haddock et al., 1993). Following the procedures outlined by Haddock et al. (1993), participants first rated the extent to which the values serve as a guiding principle in their own life. They then rated their perceptions of how important each value was in the TP's life. A nine-point scale was

used for these ratings, with a range from -1 (opposed to your/his/her values), through zero (not important), to a maximum value of 7 (of supreme importance). PVD scores were computed in two steps. First, value discrepancy scores were created for each of the 11 value types by taking the absolute difference between participants' own profile means and the TP profile means. Next, a total PVD score was computed by taking the overall average of the discrepancy scores across all 11-value types (Haddock et al., 1993). This procedure was performed separately for trait- and behavior-based TPs. Higher scores indicate higher degrees of discrepancy between the participant's own values and the TP's values. Cronbach alpha reliability coefficients showed good levels of internal consistency for the total PVD score (TP1 = .83, TP2 = .81).

RESULTS

To assess perceptions of the TPs' social status, sexual orientation, and value dissimilarity as a function of both the sex of the participant and the sex of the transgressor, a total of six 2 (male participant vs. female participant) X 2 (male transgressor vs. female transgressor) between-subjects ANOVAs were conducted using the PSS, PH, and PVD scores as dependent variables, for both the trait-based and behavior-based TP descriptions. The means and standard deviations for the ANOVAs are presented in Table 1.

PERCEIVED SOCIAL STATUS

For the target person described using personality traits, there was a significant main effect for sex of participant, $F(1, 55) = 5.52, p \leq .022$. Male participants perceived TP1 more negatively than did the female participants, regardless of the sex of the

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations, and Analysis of Variance Results for Perceived Social Status and Perceived Sexual Orientation

Dependent variables	Gender Role Traits (TP1)				<i>F</i>	Gender Role Behaviors (TP2)				<i>F</i>
	Female Transgressor		Male Transgressor			Female Transgressor		Male Transgressor		
	M	SD	M	SD		M	SD	M	SD	
Perceived social status	6.71	1.49	5.93	1.26	5.52*	4.79	1.55	3.00	1.64	18.04**
Perceived sexual orientation	-.15	.56	.23	.63	5.47*	.04	.57	.02	.66	.15, ns

* $p < .05$

** $p < .001$

target person (5.89 vs. 6.69). There also was a significant main effect for the sex of the gender role transgressor, $F(1, 55) = 4.55, p \leq .037$. The male transgressor was attributed significantly lower social status compared to the female transgressor (5.93 vs. 6.65) and, as such, was perceived more negatively. The Participant by Transgressor interaction term was not significant.

For the target person described in behavioral terms, the only significant effect was for the sex of the gender role transgressor, $F(1,55) = 18.04, p < .001$. Similar to perceptions of the trait-based target person, the male target described with submissive behaviors was perceived to be lower in social status than the female target described with dominant behaviors (3.04 vs. 4.85).

PERCEIVED SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The ANOVA for the trait-based TP did not reveal a significant main effect for the sex of the participant. There was, however, a significant effect for the sex of the transgressor, $F(1, 54) = 5.47, p \leq .023$. The male target described with feminine-typed traits was judged more likely to be homosexual than the female target described with masculine-typed traits (.23 vs. -.15). The interaction term was not significant. With regard to the ANOVA for the behaviorally based TP, there were no significant main effects or interactions.

PERCEIVED VALUE DISSIMILARITY

The ANOVA for TP1 revealed no significant main effects either for the sex of the participant or for the sex of the transgressor. There was, however, a significant interaction effect, $F(1, 53) = 4.26, p \leq .044$. The interaction was analyzed further by comparing male and female transgressors' PVD scores, separately for male and female participants. The results of these post hoc analyses, however, revealed no statistically significant differences.

For TP2, there was no significant main effect for sex of participants, but there was a significant main effect for the sex of transgressor $F(1, 52) = 5.26, p \leq .026$. The male transgressor was perceived to be more value-dissimilar than the female transgressor (29.65 vs. 23.50).

Last, because the study of PVD is new to the area of gender role transgressions, we sought to examine which value types were perceived to be different in the male and female gender role transgressors. To test this question, a series of independent *t*-tests were conducted. Given the multiple comparisons made, the Bonferonni technique was used to control for the increased probability of making a Type 1 error (.05/22). This resulted in a minimum alpha level of .002 for these analyses. The results of the comparisons are presented in Table 2. For the TPs described with gender role traits, participants perceived significantly greater value dissimilarity with the male gender role transgressor compared to the female gender role transgressor in the area of *self-direction*. The *benevolence* subscale, on the other hand, showed that participants perceived significantly greater value dissimilarity with the female transgressor than male transgressor. For the TP described using gender role behaviors, several significant differences in PVD scores emerged. Participants perceived male

gender role transgressors to be significantly more value dissimilar than female transgressors in the areas of *self-direction*, *stimulation*, *hedonism*, and *achievement*. Female transgressors, on the other hand, were perceived to be significantly more value dissimilar than the male transgressors only with regard to the *conformity* value type.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviation of the Eleven Perceived Value Dissimilarity Value Types

PVD Subscales	Gender Role Traits (TP1)					Gender Role Behaviors (TP2)				
	Female		Male		<i>t</i> -test	Female		Male		<i>t</i> -test
	Transgressor	SD	Transgressor	SD		Transgressor	SD	Transgressor	SD	
Self-direction	.70	.51	1.61	1.22	-3.79*	1.31	1.09	4.16	1.84	-7.26*
Stimulation	.83	.90	1.69	1.70	ns	1.48	1.33	3.63	1.57	-5.65*
Hedonism	1.09	1.04	1.27	1.06	ns	1.46	1.24	3.77	1.84	-5.66*
Achievement	.82	.70	1.31	1.53	ns	1.74	1.32	3.15	1.56	-3.72*
Power	1.74	1.22	1.39	1.28	ns	2.00	1.37	2.87	1.67	ns
Conformity	.94	.93	1.00	.83	ns	2.71	1.72	1.42	1.01	3.45*
Benevolence	1.56	1.24	.50	.71	3.90*	3.07	1.81	1.73	1.46	ns
Tradition	1.35	1.02	1.21	1.26	ns	1.83	1.26	2.00	1.81	ns
Spirituality	1.00	1.05	1.27	1.26	ns	2.13	1.63	2.63	1.38	ns
Universalism	1.22	1.22	.86	.93	ns	2.80	1.96	2.42	1.65	ns
Security	1.12	1.01	.97	1.32	ns	1.81	1.71	1.87	1.36	ns

Note: $N = 59$ ($n = 30$ for female, $n = 29$ for male); TP1 = Target Person 1; TP2 = Target Person 2; PSS = Perceived Social Status; PH = Perceived Homosexuality; PVD = Perceived Value Dissimilarity; all *t*-values significant ($p < .002$) unless stated otherwise (ns).

* $p < .002$.

DISCUSSION

Past research has shown that males are punished more often and more harshly than females for deviating from traditional gender role norms. To investigate why this might be so, we examined people's reactions to men's and women's gender role transgressions in three domains: perceptions of social status, sexual orientation, and value dissimilarity. Those three domains were chosen because past research has shown that men with lower perceived social status, gay men, and people whose values are thought to be discrepant from the perceiver's are typically rated more negatively. More specifically, we predicted that an adult male target described with feminine-typed traits or acting in feminine-typed ways would be perceived to be lower in social status, more likely to be a homosexual, and more value-dissimilar than a female target described with masculine-typed traits or acting in masculine-typed ways.

There was support for the SS model in that participants perceived the social status of male gender role transgressor less favorably than the female gender role transgressor regardless of whether it was a trait- or behavior-based transgression. Support for the SO model was evident in the finding that the male transgressor described with gender role traits was more likely to be judged as homosexual than the female transgressor described with gender role traits; behavioral transgressions did not have a significant effect on perceptions of homosexuality. Last, support for the PVD hypothesis came from the finding that participants perceived the male behavioral transgressor's values to be significantly more dissimilar to their own values than the female behavioral transgressor's values. However, there was no difference in the perceptions of value dissimilarity toward the trait-based transgressors.

Thus, it appears as though people respond more negatively to male gender role transgressors than to female gender role transgressors because they see them as lower in social status, more likely to be homosexual, and holding different values. However, the type of transgression was important in determining what type of attribution observers made. Specifically, trait-based transgressions differentially influenced people's perceptions of men's and women's social status and perceived homosexuality. Behavioral-based transgressions, on the other hand, differentially influenced perceptions of men's and women's social status and value dissimilarity. These findings lead us to ask several questions: Why does deviating from trait-based norms influence perceptions of homosexuality, but not value dissimilarity, while deviating from behavior-based norms influences perceptions of value dissimilarity but not homosexuality? Are personality traits perceived to be more stable and behaviors thought to be more situation-specific? Does this then mean that people perceive homosexuality to be dispositional while value dissimilarity is something that is context-dependent and under a greater degree of personal control? Future research needs to address issues such as these.

As previous research has not explored the association between gender role transgressions and the PVD model, the findings from this study provide an additional perspective from which to understand gender role transgressions. Two findings are worthy of note regarding the PVD model. First, when there was a significant effect for PVD, male transgressors were more negatively viewed than female transgressors. Second, behavior-based transgressions influenced PVD more consistently than trait-based transgressions. This was evident in both the ANOVAs and the *t*-tests exploring the individual value domains.

Schwartz (1994) proposed a classification of the 11 value types that emphasizes a dichotomy between an *individualistic value orientation* and a *collectivistic value orientation* that may help better understand how men and women are perceived when they depart from traditional gender norms. The individualistic orientation emphasizes an openness-to-change and self-enhancement and includes the self-direction, stimulation, hedonism, achievement, and power value types. The collectivistic orientation, on the other hand, includes the conformity, benevolence, and tradition value types. Schwartz (1994) suggested that the values of universalism and security serve as buffers or transition areas between individualistic and collectivistic values. Prior research on this classification has shown that in Western cultures, peo-

ple tend to value individualistic orientation, whereas in Eastern cultures the collectivistic values are emphasized (Hui & Triandis, 1986; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). The results of the present study illustrate that, overall, the male gender role transgressor was viewed as more value-dissimilar to the participants on individualistic values, whereas the female gender role transgressor was viewed as more value dissimilar to the participants on the collectivist values. Hence, one could argue that the male gender role is perceived to be more individualistic, whereas the female gender role is perceived to be more collectivistic. This supports the thinking about gender roles that emphasize the agentic and communal nature of male and female gender roles, respectively (e.g., Bakan, 1966). Thus, Schwartz's theory of the psychological structure of values and the value dissimilarity method developed by Haddock et al. (1993) have proven to be very rich conceptual approaches to the study of gender role transgressions.

Although our findings contribute to the understanding of differential reactions to men and women's gender role transgressions, the results must be interpreted with recognition of the study's limitations. One area of limitation pertains to our sample, which is relatively small and consists mostly of White, North American college students. Thus, the gender role transgressions perceived by this group may not be characteristic of young adults in general. The generalizability of our findings is also limited by a small sample size. While it allows us to examine our main hypotheses, a larger sample would have made it possible to further examine the issues raised in this study.

Our study is also limited by the use of self-report measures completed by young adults. The extent to which these perceptions reflect objective reactions to gender role transgressions is uncertain. Although we used previously tested scenarios (McCreary & Rhodes, 2001), further examination of content validity to document that the scenarios actually describe trait- and behavior-based transgressions is warranted.

In summary, these findings support the notion that men are punished more harshly than women for deviating from traditional gender role norms. This phenomenon, called *male gender role rigidity*, leads many boys and men to avoid developing or engaging in what society has prescribed to be feminine-typed gender role characteristics and stereotypically feminine behaviors (McCreary, 1994) and may be one of the reasons why men are more vulnerable than women to experiencing both physical and mental health problems (e.g., Courtenay, 2000; Verbrugge, 1985, 1989). With regard to physical health, men go to physicians much less frequently than women, in part because they feel it is a sign of weakness to be ill; when they do get there, they often do not know how to communicate their symptoms effectively (e.g., Courtenay, 2000). Other researchers have suggested that, for men, gender role rigidity might be a defense mechanism against experiencing anxiety associated with gender role violations (Mahalik, Cournoyer, DeFranc, Cherry, & Napolitano, 1998). Thus, unlike women who enjoy greater latitude when enacting feminine gender roles, men experience greater constraints in how they can enact masculine gender roles. As Pleck (1981, 1995) discusses at length, this can be a stressful experience affecting both the individuals and others.

Further research should be undertaken in order to better understand people's reactions to male gender role transgressions, male gender role rigidity, and how male gender role rigidity directly influences men's health and well-being. This body of research is urgently needed in order to address the socialization processes that continue to stifle men's capacity to embrace more flexible gender role traits and behaviors. Factors that may affect the likelihood that men will engage in gender role transgressions or people's reactions to transgressions, such as age, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, and political, ideological, or religious beliefs, should be studied. This will increase our understanding of the gender role socialization process. Such understanding could contribute to a shift in the way we socialize males in this society and contribute to less rigid definitions of masculinity that are both richer and healthier than current norms.

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