Counseling and Mental Health Stigma Among College Students:

An Examination of Gender

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Abstract

Male perceptions of masculinity are commonly studied in the psychological world as inhibitors to seeking mental health help or counseling. This research proposal addresses the roles of gender-role conflict and self-stigma of help-seeking in how they predict the male tendency to seek help at lower rates than females. The sample being analyzed in this study will consist of male and female students in the psychology department at Liberty University. Participants will complete the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOH), the Gender-Role Conflict Scale I (GRCS-I), and the Attitude Toward Seeking Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS). Results will explore which factor is the strongest predictor of negative help-seeking attitudes and how these results differ between males and females. Further, the results indicate the directions for future improvements in health care to improve mental health help-seeking outcomes, such as increasing mental health literacy, encouraging help-seeking from young ages, and making mental health resources more accessible across demographics.

Key Words: masculinity, counseling, self-stigma, help-seeking, gender-role conflict

Counseling and Mental Health Stigma Among Male College Students:

An Examination of Gender

The stigma surrounding mental health and seeking counseling have varied throughout cultures, religions, and people groups throughout history. One potential moderator implicated in one's likelihood to seek counseling and mental health help is gender. Most studies suggest that women are overall more likely to use and seek out mental health services (Vogel et al., 2007). Researchers are working to determine the current predictors of mental health help-seeking use. The current study aims to explore how societal beliefs (i.e., gender-role conflict and stigma) toward help-seeking behavior predicts males' and females' willingness to seek help, as well as how those associations might differ across males and females (Vogel, 2011).

Theory of Help Seeking and Gender

Many studies have shown that women are significantly more likely than men to seek care, but when certain factors are controlled for (i.e., morbidity, socio-economic variables) that men could be up to 20% more likely than women to use mental health services (Albizu-Garcia et al., 2001). Further, a common idea in society is that expressing emotions, caring for one's health, and asking for help are forms of femininity, and men are expected to control their emotions and be self-sufficient in most, if not all areas of their lives (Pattyn et al., 2015). Most of the research done on male help-seeking attitudes and college age men have analyzed the impact of male socialization on therapeutic processes and have determined that as one of the leading causes of male stigmas against counseling (Good & Wood, 1995). Another important factor is comparing the characteristics of the ideal counseling client and the characteristics of the typical socially acceptable male, as they are direct opposites. Gender role socialization, gender role conflict, and

masculinity are the schemas being evaluated as mediators of willingness to seek help and counseling in the context of male college students.

The primary theoretical lens at which gender differences in help seeking can be seen is through the psychosocial processes which form and govern help seeking. Addis and Mahalik (2003) specifically focus on the theories of masculinity ideology and masculine gender role conflict. Masculinity ideology consists of the belief systems about what it means to be male and creates a guideline for measuring the degree to which individuals internalize cultural norms of masculinity as well as the cultural values of the male gender role. This theory is broad and applies in different ways according to the many facets of the individual, such as their culture, socioeconomic class, or upbringing. The concept of masculine gender role conflict is similar to masculine ideologies but focuses more on the negative impact that masculinity ideologies, like gender-role conflict, have on men's well-being. Male gender role conflict is primarily the theory of the consequences of internalized norms and expectations, and for the purposes of this research, their mental health. Conflict is the specific consequence of the internalized norms and expectations associated with male gender role conflict, and this can present as emotional instability, inability to rely on others, and an inability to be comfortable as oneself if it conflicts with the typical masculine roles which can lead to other physical and mental health issues (Addis and Mahalik, 2003).

More recently, Debate and colleagues (2022) also sought to address the task of getting male college students to seek help. The focus of this study was mental health literacy and help-seeking behaviors as predicters of coping skills for the various stressors of college life (i.e., anxiety, depression, stress), and they emphasized the specific stressors and risks associated with emerging adulthood. The data presented by Debate et al. revealed that only 36% of male college

students report ever receiving mental health services, while about 54% of female college students reported receiving mental health services; not only this, but their researched showed that there was little to no difference in the percentage of male and female college students who reported experiencing various depressive, anxious, or suicidal ideations (2022). According to their research, also, male college students are more likely to turn to unhealthy coping mechanisms in place of seeking help (Debate et al., 2022). Debate and colleagues' study has a focus on mental health literacy as the primary contributing factor to male college students seeking help or not.

Male Counseling and Help-Seeking Stigma

Help Seeking

Research by Addis and Mahalik (2003) suggest that there are innate sex differences in seeking help. Across all ages, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses, men statistically seek help less than women for both mental and physical help issues, which is disproportionate to their statistical rates of death and other health issues. Further, many studies have confirmed these data and repeatedly shown that across a wide variety of issues from substance abuse to psychosocial issues to even primary care visits, men have higher rates of mental health issues and lower rates of seeking and receiving help. Addis and Mahalik further put help seeking into perspective as a process and a relationship between help seekers and help providers. The process of forming a relationship between help seekers and help providers is one that can be predicted according to the costs and benefits of seeking help from both the intra-personal and inter-personal perspectives. The help-seeking processes are also connected to social psychological processes that assist in forming norms which Addis and Mahalik identify as: perceptions of the normativeness of problems, the perceived ego centrality of problems, characteristics of potential

helpers, characteristics of the social groups to which individual men belong, and perceived loss of control.

Another study by Vogel and colleagues (2006) explored exclusively self-stigma as it is associated with seeking psychological help. Vogel and colleagues' study was designed in order to develop the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help scale (SSOSH), and he applied the scale across two separate studies to measure the validity of the measure. The sample for the study consisted of 583 college students of various demographics. Across the two studies, results were found to be consistent and appropriate in addressing the items of interest, which were: how is self-stigma associated with seeking psychological help, how is self-stigma related to self-esteem, and how can help-seeking behaviors be predicted with the variables of self-stigma and self-esteem. Vogel and colleagues (2007) also furthered this research a year later in his study in which he further narrowed the focus on perceptions of public stigma in combination with self-stigma, which further built up his SSOSH scale. Vogel and his team's work helped shape the literature on the significance of the mediation of the variables of self-stigma and perceived public stigma's impact on help-seeking behaviors in males and transformed the works on help-seeking in general with his SSOSH scale.

Masculine Role Socialization

Addis and Mahalik (2003) conducted a deep dive into the consequences and ideologies involved in male gender-role conflict as a part of the greater masculine ideology theory. The researchers cited Pleck's application of the gender-role strain paradigm which frames masculine gender roles as social constructs formed from stereotypes that have consequences that go far beyond men themselves and into their families, which also leads into gender-role conflict and gender-role stress. This is all ultimately connected to the idea of help seeking and provides a

framework for predicting help seeking and its interrelatedness with gender-role conflict. The

Masculine Role Socialization Paradigm is focusing primarily on variability among men by

looking at the varying degrees and types of gender-role conflict and labeling them; further, this

paradigm seeks to identify the appropriate psychosocial treatments to reduce the impact of these

conflicts in society (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Addis and Mahalik share how the paradigm can be

more specifically understood as the process through which children and adults are able to learn

gendered attitudes through cultural norms, but specifically for males and how this process is a

product of masculine gender role socialization. One of the central ideas of the masculine gender-

role socialization paradigm is that these gendered attitudes directly result in a skewed view of the

tasks that are required to seek professional mental health help (i.e., asking for help, being

emotionally vulnerable) as they are in direct conflict with the societal messages that men receive

about the appropriate behaviors according to their gender (i.e., self-reliance, toughness, and

emotional control).

Help Seeking Attitudes and Consequences

Research suggests that not only do men seek help at disproportionately lower rates than

women, but also that the low levels of help-seeking behaviors lend to the aggravation and of

various depressive symptoms and other mental and emotional problems (Hammer & Vogel,

2013). Hammer and Vogel created a help-seeking model in order to evaluate the most common

mediators in help-seeking and self-stigma. After sampling a collection of men from diverse

backgrounds and ages, the results of Hammer and Vogel's study revealed that self-stigma plays a

significant role for male college students, and men in many other communities, in their formation

of help-seeking attitudes, and that self-stigma must be broken down before one can be effectively

treated and receive help. The study on help-seeking led to the development of the Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Model that will be used in this study (SSOSH, Vogel et al., 2011).

Wahto and Swift (2016) also extensively researched gender-role conflict in relationship with attitudes towards help-seeking in men. Wahto and Swift evaluated 165 male psychology students at a large university on their level of gender-role conflict and their attitudes toward seeking mental health services. The participants' responses were taken on one of eight different vignettes via an online format. The results showed that gender-role conflict in combination with self-stigma and social-stigma are significant predictors of help-seeking attitudes (p<.001) (Wahto & Swift). The main finding from Wahto and Swift's study was that gender-role conflict is most useful as a predictor of help-seeking attitudes in male college students when accompanied with self-stigma and social stigma.

Albizu-Garcia and colleagues (2001) conducted a study evaluating predictors of seeking help via mental health services and how they differ according to gender. Their study consisted of data from 3,221 adult respondents in socioeconomically disadvantaged areas of Puerto Rico, and the sample was collected via two stages of a cluster sample. The study followed a longitudinal design in which they collected data over a two-year period and used a framework based on The Help-Seeking Decision Making Model. The outcome variable was gender differences in individual use of mental health services, and the predictor variables were need for health care, predisposing, enabling, and restricting factors. The results consist of responses from two waves of surveys across a two-year time period, and there were limited differences between men and women in their sample in terms of likelihood of seeking health services once all sources of formal care are considered. Albizu-Garcia and colleagues, though, find that gender was a significant predictor of indications of need ($p < 0.10$) and enabling ($p < 0.10$), which were two of

the main predictor variables assessed. This study's results control for an extensive number of

variables which significantly set them apart from other studies on gender and help-seeking.

Another study analyzing perceptions and attitudes towards mental health care was

conducted by Ojeda and Bergstresser (2008) in which they assessed gender, race-ethnicity, and

psychosocial barriers to mental health care and decision-making in mental health care. The

researchers assessed participants via behavioral models of care-seeking to investigate how

gender and race-identity act as psychosocial barriers to individuals seeking care. The population

of interest of this study includes people who reported their needs for mental health care were

unmet. According to the data, race and ethnicity are correlates of attitudes, perceptions, and

behaviors related to seeking mental health care (Alvidrez, 1999, Ojeda & Bergstresser, 2008).

The study data were pulled from the 2002 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH)

with a total number of 2,680 respondents who reported having unmet mental health needs. The

key predictor variables are gender, race-ethnicity, and a combined variable of the two. The

outcome variable was an operationalized question assessing the unmet needs in which

respondents indicated which need was not met specifically, and the psychosocial barriers, which

consisted of stigma avoidance, negative attitudes towards treatment, and mistrust or fear of the

system (Ojeda & Bergstresser, 2008). The results showed that 47.4 percent of adults who

reported having unmet needs also met the criteria for mental illness and only 29 percent met

mental illness criteria and obtained mental health treatment. Further, more men than women

reported experiencing all three psychosocial barriers. Though the study provided insight to the

relationship between gender, race-ethnicity, and seeking help, there is still further insight needed

in the area of gender combined with race-ethnicity.

Shannon and colleagues (2022) conducted a study focusing on specifically African American male college students with an aim to fill the gap in the literature by focusing on a specific race-ethnicity and the college-age population. This study introduces a different theory of help-seeking behavior called theory of planned behavior (TPB) (Azjen, 1991, Shannon et al., 2022). TPB is a framework especially useful in evaluating racial minorities and their mental-health help-seeking behaviors. The theory focuses on three main frames, which are: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control which are all used to predict a target behavior. The sample of participants consisted of 116 respondents who were assessed on help-seeking intentions, public stigma, self-stigma, mental health literacy (MHL), and self-construal. Their results differed from previous research in the area of MHL, as MHL was not statistically significant throughout the models, and they posited that this could be due to cultural mistrust, or other culture-specific differences that were not accounted for in previous studies. Public stigma was found to be a positive predictor of help-seeking, and self-construal was also insignificant in relation to help-seeking intentions. The results of Shannon and colleagues' (2022) study were unique compared to much of the previous literature, but also provide evidence for the differences that culture and ethnicity can pose in predicting help-seeking behaviors and mental health stigmas.

Internalized Stigma

Some authors, like Lannin and colleagues (2014), have a unique focus on internalized stigma as a predictor for both self-esteem and help-seeking behaviors. Lannin and colleagues introduced a new model that can be used to predict self-esteem and intentions to seek counseling: The Internalized Stigma Model. This model hypothesizes that stigma towards mental illness and stigmas towards seeking psychological help are direct predictors of low self-esteem and lessened

intentions to seek counseling. The Internalized Stigma Model borrows from Vogel and

colleagues' work (2006), as well as the Modified Labeling Theory (Link et al., 1989, Lannin et

al., 2014) and Social-Cognitive Models of Stigma (Corrigan, 2004, Lannin et al., 2014). The

theoretical framework of the Internalized Stigma Model aligns with previous research and

theoretical frameworks, but also combines the four main categories of stigmas (i.e., public

stigma of mental illness vs. self-stigma of mental illness, the public stigma of seeking

psychological help vs. the self-stigma of seeking psychological help) in one comprehensive

model which addresses all of the facets of stigma as well as their unique effects on specific

outcome variables, which for this study are self-esteem and intentions to seek counseling. This

particular study applied The Internalized Stigma Model using a sample of 448 undergraduate

students who were tasked with completing an online survey. The survey consisted of items

assessing perceived public stigma of mental illness, perceived public stigma of seeking

psychological help, self-stigma of seeking psychological help, self-stigma of mental illness,

intentions to seek counseling, self-esteem, and psychological distress. The results showed that

the Internalized Stigma Model was correct in predicting that public stigma of mental illness and

public stigma of seeking psychological help both predict decreased self-esteem. The Internalized

Stigma Model was also correct in predicting that public stigma of mental illness and public

stigma of seeking psychological help predict decreased intentions to seek counseling. Further,

the gender differences observed showed that the latent factor loadings were not significantly

different between men and women. For women specifically, they showed slight differences from

the overall results, with self-stigma of mental illness not being a significant predictor of self-

esteem, and the opposite was true for men, where self-stigma of seeking psychological help was

not significant in predicting intentions for seeking counseling. Overall, the model by Lannin and

colleagues was successful in predicting their hypothesis and provides insight into which stigmas are most directly affecting self-esteem and intentions to seek counseling.

Surapaneni and colleagues (2022) also provided a perspective on internal and external stigma in which they evaluated the relationship between parental stigma and self-stigma with predicting intentions to seek counseling among European American, Asian American, and Asian international students. The authors predicted that self-stigma would negatively predict intentions to seek counseling. With a total sample of around 783 undergraduate and graduate international students, respondents were tasked with responding to items on a survey assessing prior counseling, public stigma, self-stigma, parental stigma, intentions to seek counseling, and translation of measures from their various cultures. This study contributed greatly to the literature on help-seeking through their comparisons of specific cultures. The results showed that there are different predictors of help seeking, such as parental stigma, that also interact with gender and self-stigma. The data supported the authors' hypothesis that self-stigma negatively predicted intentions to seek counseling. Surapaneni and colleagues further posited these questions for future research: how can one's ethnicity and culture of origin impact how stigma is felt, and how stigma impacts psychological help seeking.

College Students: Seeking Counseling, Attitudes, and Stigma

There are significant statistics regarding the health crisis in males in college, with recent statistics (a survey conducted in 2020) reporting that in the last 12 months most men on college campuses had experienced feelings of hopelessness, loneliness, being overwhelmed, having immense sadness, decreased functioning due to sadness, and some even considered suicide; the more alarming part is that only 11% reported seeking any kind of help or treatment for their depressive symptoms (Cole & Ingram, 2020).

Further, Cole and Ingram (2020) conducted a study focusing on help for male college students with depression by assessing self-stigma, gender-role conflict, and help-seeking. This study takes the stance of considering self-stigma and gender-role conflict as direct barriers to help-seeking behaviors. The also identified specific types of help-seeking, such as mental health help-seeking and even seeking help for basic emotional and physical needs. Researchers Cole and Ingram sampled 313 college students at a Midwestern university from an undergraduate psychology research pool, and participants were assessed on measures of self-stigma, help-seeking, gender-role conflict, potential responses to depressive symptoms, and a depression scale. The study results found no outliers and had an overall normal distribution after analysis. Model 1 of the results showed self-stigma and gender-role conflict had a moderate positive relationship; gender-role conflict is negative associated with support utilization and positive associated with avoidant behaviors; self-stigma had similar results as gender-role conflict, as it negatively predicted profession self-help seeking and positive predicted avoidance. Further, results showed that depressive symptoms as a whole are positively correlated with experiencing greater self-stigma and gender-role conflict. This study provided perspective on mental health issues, specifically depression, and how it predicted the variables of help-seeking, self-stigma, and gender-role conflict, as well as the reverse in male participants. The authors Cole and Ingram also cited helpful implications like the idea of normalizing depression and increasing psychoeducational materials in order to reduce stigmatizing ideals and increase likelihood to seek resources and help for men and women alike from a younger age.

Bird and colleagues (2020) conducted a survey of college students primarily assessing their self-stigma and attitudes towards help-seeking, as well as the relationship between stigma and attitudes. This study also took a unique perspective in assessing online vs. face-to-face

counseling in their considerations of seeking mental health services. The sample consisted of 538

college students who were assessed via an online questionnaire and survey using measures of

counseling attitudes, self-stigma, public stigma, and counseling intentions. In the results males

showed lower value and higher self-stigma than females with both online and face-to-face

counseling, and the authors connected this to gender-role conflict. Further, having previous

counseling experience resulted in having higher intentions for seeking both forms of counseling.

The results of the study were overall consistent with most other research, but also added the

aspect of online vs. face-to-face counseling.

Holland (2016) focused primarily on the stigmatic views specific to college students but

controlled for the variables of stress and mental health in order to provide a more realistic view

of the average college student's perspective of mental health counseling. The controlled

variables of this study make it unique to others as it controls for common variables that make up

college students to focus primarily on help-seeking stigma. The subjects of the study were a

sample of college students from a university that is roughly half male and half female. The

dependent variable that was assessed was attitudes towards using counseling services, and the

independent variables were: stigma, perceived stress, academic stress and academic self-efficacy,

depression, coping, self-esteem, and social support. The variables gender, race, and international

status were also evaluated. The results showed that female's stigmatic views were lower than

males, younger students (25 years and younger) had higher stigmatic views than older students,

and Caucasians had higher stigmatic views than non-Caucasians. These stigmatic views were

than correlated with their various stressors or depressive symptoms to predict their use of mental

health services, and the results showed that the higher the severity of the students' depression,

the higher the likelihood of seeking services. Other predictors of seeking mental health

counseling services were gender, in which about 57% of females and 43% of males would use counseling services for their various stressors. Overall, the results of Holland's study were consistent with most of the previous literature in showing that females are more likely to use counseling services, but also found that despite the significant difference between genders, the strength of the relationship is low.

Wu and colleagues (2017) conducted a similar study implementing a person-centered approach to assess stigmas of mental health and counseling services in a sample of college students. This study focused primarily on demographic factors of college students that influence stigma and identified the specific areas of public stigma. The sample consisted of over 8,000 undergraduate college students from 11 colleges, and participants were assessed on their self-stigma, perceptions of public stigma, need for mental health services, and various mental health symptoms. The results showed that about 42% of the sample reported low self-stigma and low public stigma, and also reported higher mental health service use. Another 40% of the sample fell into the average self-stigma and high public stigma category, and they reported being accepting of seeking mental health services, but perceived society as much less accepting, and reported higher perceived need than other groups. Overall, the results of the study presented similar findings to other studies in this discipline, as they showed that stigma is directly related to help seeking and using mental health services among college students, and that public stigma has a strong negative correlation with seeking mental health services.

Mental Health Literacy

Another predictor of help-seeking behaviors is mental health literacy. Debate and colleagues (2022) conducted a qualitative assessment of mental health literacy in male undergraduate college students in order to better understand their help-seeking behaviors. The

working definition of mental health literacy for the purpose of the study includes the

participants' perceptions of mental health like their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, susceptibility,

and severity; it also includes their perceptions of mental health help-seeking behaviors for

themselves, friends, and others. The study revealed three general themes regarding male college

students' mental health literacy, which are: knowledge of signs and symptoms, recommended

intra-personal and interpersonal help-seeking, and barriers to help-seeking behaviors. The

qualitative assessment results showed that many male college students experienced typical

symptoms of anxiety depression and stress (i.e., headaches, digestive issues, rapid heart rate,

inability to sleep, eating irregularities, and irritability) but equated these to a normal college

experience, and reported not experiencing anxiety, depression, or stress. Further, the male

respondents indicated being more likely to choose to do nothing for themselves upon facing

symptoms of depression or anxiety but would refer a friend experiencing the same or similar

issues to services for help. The males indicated only seeing seeking professional care as

appropriate or likely for themselves when in a crisis. There is a triadic relationship presented in

the results of this study between male college students, help-seeking behaviors, and environment

that all play together to contribute to help-seeking and mental health; in other words, having a

healthy environment of people encouraging help-seeking behaviors, and a high mental health

literacy and awareness will increase the likelihood of the help-seeking behaviors occurring; but

the reverse is also true, that having a support system who expresses mental health stigma, is not

fluent in mental health literacy, and discourages seeking help will decrease the likelihood of

male college students seeking help.

Rafal and colleagues (2018) also assessed mental health literacy (MHL) along with help-

seeking in male college students. Their research was similar to the research mentioned above in

the study by Debate and colleagues (2022), as they found that higher MHL leads to more

positive attitudes towards seeking professional help and a higher likelihood of seeking help as

well; further they report that men report poorer attitudes towards seeking information about

mental health services, which is poor MHL. MHL was the primary variable assessed along with

self-stigma and intentions to seek help. The total sample consisted of 1,242 respondents, and

their results showed that undergraduate men had the lowest mean scores of mental health

knowledge, mental health attitudes, normative beliefs, and impact of help-seeking on self-

confidence, which is consistent with previous measures, such as Vogel and colleagues' (2006)

SSOSH measure and studies.

<div align="center">**Male Gender-Role Conflict**</div>

Gender Role Theory

Gender role theory is a theory that builds upon the gender role affiliation and how it is

formed via biological, psychological, and social processes (Davidson-Katz, 1991). The main

conversation of gender role theorists has been the relationship between masculinity and

femininity, and if they are truly as oppositional as society deems them to be. Further, many early

theorists believed that the more you had of masculinity, the less you had of femininity, and vice

versa. There have been various theories under the umbrella of gender role theory, such as

theories of androgyny, which address the relationship between good psychological health and

gender roles. Using the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), Bem had the perspective that being

able to perform both masculine and feminine behaviors is better than only performing highly in

one or the other and used her inventory to create this stigma that being androgynous implied

better health. The Personal Attributes Questionnaire was later developed building onto the ideas

from Bem's theories of androgyny creating four gender roles, including masculine (high

masculinity, low on femininity), feminine (high on femininity, low on masculinity), androgynous (high on both scales), and undifferentiated (low on both scales); this development gave way to the main effects theory, which focuses on increasing inclusion for those who fail to fall into the androgynous category, as well as to focus on addressing the primary issue of self-esteem (Taylor & Hall, 1982, Davidson-Katz, 1991).

Gender-Role Conflict

Research has shown that male college students seek counseling roughly half as often as female college students (Good & Wood, 1995). Because of this research, Good & Wood investigated these statistics themselves and conducted a study on a sample of almost 400 male students enrolled in psychology classes at a public university in the Midwest in order to investigate their ratings on a variety of scales measuring gender-role conflict, depression, and attitudes toward seeking professional counseling services. The results showed that male gender role conflict has a strong relationship with male attitudes toward seeking help and counseling. The study by Good and Wood also showed that conflict related to gender roles for males are more complex and multidimensional than originally thought, and that gender-role conflicts cause a restriction of male friendships, emotional expression, and emphasizes the aversion to traditionally feminine feelings or urges that would potentially decrease the tendency for depression and increase the likelihood for male help-seeking.

Researchers Vogel and Pederson (2007) also conducted a study specifically looking at the relationship between male gender-role conflict and willingness to seek help and counseling for male college students. Vogel and Pederson collected data on a sample of 575 male students in undergraduate psychology courses at a university. The researchers used O'Neil and colleagues' Gender Role Conflict Scale-I (1986, as cited in Vogel & Pederson, 2007) as well as other

measures of variables like self-stigma and attitudes toward seeking counseling. The results of the study showed that gender role conflict is mediated by self-stigma and attitudes towards seeking counseling, and there was a direct and significant effect of gender-role conflict on willingness to seek counseling.

Risks and Benefits of Stigma and Gender-Role Conflict

Wester and colleagues (2010) took a unique perspective on the effects of gender-role conflict and stigma within males in the police force. Though this people group is specific, the data and mediation model are applicable to men in general, and this is a specific occupation that tends to be higher in risk, stress, and many other factors that would constitute use of mental health services or even increase the risk of mental health struggles. The study sampled 178 male law enforcement officers on the effects of stigmatic views in their occupations, as well as the exacerbated effects of gender-role conflict as males in law enforcement. The measures were assessed via insider law enforcement personnel in order to reduce suspicions of participants. Participants were assessed using a Gender Role Conflict Scale, outcome expectations, public stigma, and self-stigma measures. The results of the study addressed the expectations for outcomes in psychotherapy. The authors describe the threats faced by male law enforcement officers as a high risk for psychological distress from their line of work, as well as higher rates of stigma based on both their gender-role and the pressures of their extensive demands in their occupation. The role of the police officer further exacerbates the issues of male gender-role conflict, as many of the characteristics that make a successful police officer go against the practices of being emotional and self-aware beings, and much less people who seek help in their struggles. This inclusion of occupation introduces a new risk factor in a male-dominated field that even occupations should be considered in evaluations of gender-role conflict and help-

seeking behaviors. The results specifically showed the significance of anticipated risk in influencing likelihood to seek help, and that anticipated risk is significantly important to male figures such as law enforcement.

Masculinity and Help Seeking

Vogel and colleagues (2011), who is prevalent among research in the area of gender-role conflict, masculinity, and help-seeking, conducted a study combining the concepts of masculine norms and help-seeking behaviors. By examining differences across race-ethnicity and sexual orientation, Vogel and his team were able to provide insight into masculine ideals across people groups. This particular study assessed a sample of 4,773 men on their conformity to dominant masculine gender-role norms, self-stigma, attitudes towards counseling, and depression. Vogel sought to thoroughly examine the gap in the literature by addressing the racial/ethnic disparities in using mental health services and gaining a greater understanding of masculine norms across cultures. Analysis of the results showed that the relationships between masculine norms and attitudes is mediated primarily by self-stigma. Not only did Vogel and his colleagues' research support their hypotheses, but it showed that prevalent help-seeking mediation models are relevant across cultures and ethnicities, but they may still need to be developed using samples across cultures to ensure relevance.

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Current Study

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Previous literature has explored help-seeking behaviors and stigmas against mental health at various colleges and have found that self-stigma towards help-seeking is a strong predictor of seeking mental health help (Vogel, 2003). The current study intends to explore the prevalence of help-seeking behaviors and gender-role conflict in male and female college students at Liberty University in replicating previous research on the same topics. Through assessing the variables

of help-seeking behaviors, gender-role conflict, and mental health stigma, the current study's purpose is to draw correlations between the variables of interest and gender, as well as how they impact one's likelihood to seek mental health counseling. The research questions are as follows: (1) does self-stigma of seeking help negatively predict likelihood of seeking mental health help, (2) does gender-role conflict negatively predict likelihood of seeking mental health help, and (3) does the link between self-stigma and likelihood to seek help vary by gender.

Proposed Methodology

Participants

Participants will consist of a purposive sample of undergraduate males and females at Liberty University in the psychology program. Inclusion criteria includes: (a) must be at least 18 years old, and (b) must be currently enrolled in the undergraduate psychology degree program. Data will be collected throughout the duration of the same semester. Recruitment will continue until there are a minimum of 50 eligible male participants and 50 eligible female participants.

Recruitment

The parameters of the study will be processed and approved by the IRB before recruitment begins. Participants will be recruited via in-class recruitment where the study will be presented upon professors' approval and eligible students will be given the opportunity to scan a QR code and take the assessment. The study will also be posted on the Liberty University Psychology Activities page to increase exposure. Students will first view an informed consent document before agreeing to participate in the research. Participants will complete an anonymous online survey measuring basic demographic data, self-stigma toward towards help-seeking behavior, gender-role conflict, and likelihood to seek help.

Measures

Self-Stigma of Help-Seeking Behaviors

Self-stigma will be assessed using Vogel's Self-Stigma of Seeking Help Scale (SSOSH, 2006). The SSOSH scale assesses perceptions of seeking help internally and externally. There are 10 Likert-type questions in which participants rate how much they agree or disagree with the statement (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). An example of two items on the scale are: "I would feel inadequate if I went to a therapist for psychological help" and "My self-confidence would NOT be threatened if I sought professional help;" the respondents would then respond with the degree to which they agree or disagree with the statements. For this measure the scores are summed together and can range from 10 to 50, with higher scores indicating a high concern that seeking professional mental health help would negatively affect one's reputation. The study was replicated 2 months apart and found that the correlation between the Time 1 scores and the Time 2 scores was .72, which indicates good test-retest reliability of the SSOSH measure.

Gender-Role Conflict

O'Neil and colleagues' Gender-Role Conflict Scale I (GRCS-I, 1986). The GRCS-I evaluates 4 main factors that contribute to gender-role conflict: (1) success, power, and competition; (2) restrictive emotionality; (3) restrictive affectionate behavior between men; and (4) conflicts between work and family relations. This scale includes 37 Likert-type questions in which the participants rate how much they agree or disagree with the statement (1 = strongly disagree, 6 = strongly agree). Two items on this scale are: "moving up the career ladder is important to me" and "I have difficulty telling others I care about them" (GRCS-I, O'Neil et al., 1986). For this measure the scores are summed together, and total scores can range from 37 to

222 with higher scores on this measure indicating the presence of gender-role conflict as well as fear of femininity. The Cronbach's alpha for this scale ranges from 0.75 to 0.85.

Likelihood to Seek Help

Likelihood to seek help will be assessed via the Attitudes Toward Professional Psychological Help Scale (ATSPPHS) (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012). The ATSPPHS consists of 29 Likert-type questions in which the participants rate how much they agree with the statement (0 = disagree, 3 = agree). Some examples of items on this scale are: "If I believed I was having a mental breakdown, my first thought would be to get professional attention" and "Talking about problems with a psychologist seems to me as a poor way to get rid of emotional problems." For this measure the scores are summed together, and the total score can range from 0 to 87 with higher scores indicating more positive attitudes toward seeking professional help. The test-retest reliability is 0.895 for this scale.

Anticipated Results

Gender-Role Conflict

According to previous literature, we anticipate that gender-role conflict as a predictor variable will have a negative correlation with help-seeking behaviors and intentions. It is anticipated that gender-role conflict will have a weaker relationship with help-seeking than self-stigma and public stigma. Finally, we anticipate males having stronger reported evidence of gender-role conflict than females in this sample.

Self-Stigma and Mental Health Stigma

According to previous literature, we anticipate that self-stigma and mental health stigma will have a negative correlation with help-seeking behaviors and intentions. It is anticipated that self-stigma and mental health stigma will have a stronger, negative correlation with help-seeking

behaviors than gender-role conflict due to prevalence and significance of internalized stigma in the literature. Finally, we anticipate females having lower reported self-stigma and mental health stigma than males in this sample.

Help-Seeking

Help-seeking is the outcome variable of the study, as the variables of gender-role conflict, self-stigma, and mental health stigma are used to predict help-seeking behaviors in male undergraduate college students. Based on previous literature, we expect that help-seeking will be negatively correlated with the independent variables, and that in order to increase help-seeking behaviors in male undergraduate college students, gender-role conflict, self-stigma, and mental health stigma will have to decrease. Finally, we anticipate that Caucasian males will have the lowest rates of help-seeking behaviors and mental health service use in this sample; along with this, we anticipate that the link between self-stigma and likelihood to seek help will be stronger among males.

<div align="center">

Discussion

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The results of the study will likely show that, consistent with previous literature, help-seeking behaviors are significantly correlated with gender-role conflict and self-stigma within the general undergraduate college student population, and more specifically the male undergraduate college student population (Good & Wood, 1995). It will be expected that the male college students will have higher rates of self-stigma towards help-seeking and higher rates of gender-role conflict (Vogel et al., 2006). With the college population showing increasing issues with mental health-related symptoms, and a lack of support in seeking professional mental health services (Shannon et al., 2022), there is an apparent need for new interventions to shape the way society views mental health.

Limitations

As the study is being conducted at an undergraduate level there are various limitations to the study. First, the assessment method is self-report, leaving room for inaccurate responses from participants. Next, the sample is limited to a smaller demographic of students, as the sample is exclusively from undergraduate psychology majors at Liberty University. Finally, the study will not have replication to reinforce validity of results. All these factors, once improved upon, would greatly increase the validity of the presented study.

Future Directions

There are many barriers to help-seeking and reducing mental health stigma in the population of college students across gender. Research suggests that there is a significant need to combat stigma of mental health in health care, and along with this, there is a need for better programming and interventions in the various health care fields to be able to provide proper care when mental health issues occur, and this may reduce stigma significantly (Ungar et al., 2016). With incorporation of the research supporting the impact of variables such as self-stigma, gender-role conflict, and stigma towards mental health, there can be improvements in the health care field that would make a difference in the prevalence of these stigmatic views. Further, the prevalence of male gender-role conflict needs to be addressed in new ways in order to reduce the views of seeking help being feminine and weak, and for mental health services to be used universally according to need as they were intended to be.

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