Global perspectives on manhood and masculinity

Michael Sherr & Christson Adedoyin

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INTRODUCTION

Global perspectives on manhood and masculinity

Michael Sherr\textsuperscript{a} and Christson Adedoyin\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}Social Work Department, Cedarville University, Cedarville, Ohio, USA; \textsuperscript{b}Social Work Department, Samford University, Birmingham, Alabama, USA

ABSTRACT

The special issue includes several articles that explore the essence of manhood and masculinity. While the articles make significant contributions on their own, readers will benefit from drawing observations from the group of manuscripts. A primary theme emerging from the articles is how cultures, nationalities, religious beliefs, and individual variability make it nearly impossible to define or measure the construct with any semblance of validity. Given the difficulty of adequately measuring the construct, findings from research examining studies to do with manhood and masculinity are likely limited to the specific contexts where data was collected. While studies may produce interesting findings worthy of publication, serious caution is reasonable in any attempts to generalize findings, or imply expertise and understanding of manhood and masculinity beyond the bounds of a sample used in a particular study. Treading carefully with humility is probably wise for all health and human service professionals seeking the best available evidence for practice decisions involving gender. Therefore, a critical lens is necessary for discerning the credibility of the recent practice guidelines with boys and men published by the American Psychological Association (APA). At best, the guidelines will encourage further inquiry-driven thought about manhood and masculinity. At worst, they add to the fading credibility of the APA to inform practice.

Editing an international and interdisciplinary journal reinforces common elements of credible research. After reading hundreds of manuscripts each year, it is clear to us that reviewers expect the use of sound research methods regardless of country, or field of study. An element often commented on by reviewers is the need for authors to conceptualize and operationalize variables with clarity. A related element is clear descriptions of the contexts in which they define variables. It is important, for example, for readers to know the specific contextual influences of how variables are understood in a study in Indonesia as opposed to South Africa. Given the importance of defining variables with clarity, the special issue emerged from a desire to examine the construct of manhood and masculinity across cultures, fields, and perspectives.

The special issue includes several articles from around the world. The articles use various ways to examine the essence of manhood and masculinity from a variety of context and research designs. One article considers an in-depth look into the influences of ancient and modern literature on the construct of masculinity in Turkey. Another examines how specifically defined characteristics of manhood influences dietary habits in...
Australia. Emotions in sporting news in Malaysia are explored as part of understanding masculinity in that country. The next article describes the influence of religious worldview in a Christian home in the United States as yet another way to understand the construct of manhood. The last article reports the findings of a cross-cultural comparison of gender roles in the UK and Pakistan. The last section of the special issue includes two Point-of-View articles examining the continued influence of Freud in psychology. Freud’s influence on understanding gender, whether or not his work was based on viable evidence, is undeniable.

While the articles make significant contributions on their own, readers will benefit from drawing observations from the group of manuscripts. A primary theme emerging from the articles is how cultures, nationalities, religious beliefs, and individual variability make it nearly impossible to define, or measure the construct of manhood with any semblance of validity. Given the difficulty of adequately measuring the construct, findings from research examining anything to do with manhood and masculinity are likely limited to the specific contexts where data was collected. While studies may produce interesting findings worthy of publication, serious caution is reasonable in any attempts to generalize findings or imply expertise and understanding of manhood and masculinity beyond the bounds of a sample used in a particular study. Treading carefully with humility is probably wise for all health and human service professionals seeking the best available evidence for practice decisions involving gender.

Skepticism seems warranted when considering the American Psychological Association (APA) published guidelines for practice with boys and men (American Psychological Association, 2018). Given the methodological challenges of defining manhood, it raises serious questions about the validity of the science used to support the guidelines. In conclusion, considering the positive results bias and reproducibility crisis discovered in psychology journals, and the American Statistical Association’s concern with the misuse of the p-value in psychological research, a critical lens is necessary for discerning the credibility of the guidelines to inform practice (Baker, 2016; Dalmeet, 2017; Kmetz, 2019; Wasserstein & Lazar, 2016; Weir, 2015).

References