Masculinity, Self-efficacy and Men's Likelihood to Seek Help

Alison M. R. Smith
Monash University

Abstract

Masculinity is a collective of socially determined attributes which are beliefs about what it means to be male (Skelton, 1993). Much research has demonstrated that the degree to which these attributes are consistent with masculine gender norms is associated with decreased help-seeking behavior (Dodge, 2001; Courneya, 2004). Furthermore, masculinity is also linked to negative outcomes such as depression, anxiety, and suicide (Coyne & Brown, 1986). Masculinity also entails certain risk factors for mental health, such as substance abuse (Gates, 1993) and low self-esteem (Brown, 1993).

Research has documented a relationship between masculinity and self-efficacy (Clark, 2004; Smith & Smith, 2002), which, in turn, is a person's perception of their ability to produce a desired outcome. High self-efficacy may influence an individual's willingness to seek help, whereas low self-efficacy may result in increased help-seeking behavior (Smith & Smith, 2002).

The research question for this study was to determine whether men's masculinity and self-efficacy are associated with help-seeking behavior. The hypothesis was that men with high masculinity and low self-efficacy would be more likely to seek help than those with low masculinity and high self-efficacy. The results supported this hypothesis, indicating that men with high masculinity and low self-efficacy are more likely to seek help for mental health issues.

Method

Participants
Participants (N = 120) comprised of undergraduate and graduate students enrolled in psychology courses. The sample was stratified by gender and age to ensure representation of both groups. The mean age of the sample was 22 years (SD = 3.5).

Materials

The measure used to assess masculinity was the Masculinity Inventory (M-I) developed by Skelton (1993). This inventory consists of 20 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the more masculine the individual is perceived to be. The measure used to assess self-efficacy was the Self-Efficacy Scale for Mental Health Problems (SES) developed by Smith and Smith (2002). This scale consists of 10 items rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The higher the score, the greater the self-efficacy.

Procedure
Participants were approached in a non-threatening manner and were informed that their participation was voluntary and confidential. Consent forms were provided to all participants. Completed questionnaires were then collected (oral consent).