

**Assessing Gender Role Construction in Men & Women of Color:
Scale Development and Evaluation**

Submitted for consideration for the NJPA Foundation Scholarship for Research on Diversity Issues

NJPAGS Student Affiliate

Gender is something that everyone “does” every moment without thought. Recent news of Caitlyn Jenner reflects that “it is such a familiar part of daily life that it usually takes a deliberate disruption of how women and men are supposed to act to pay attention to how it is produced” (Lorber, 1994, p. 54). Like race, gender is a construct created by society. The second children are born, they are automatically identified as either male or female and are then clothed and named in ways that reinforce their sex category. Traditionally, research has viewed gender as binary, not taking into account that gender roles sometimes change. Today, men are stay-at-home dads and women are breadwinners of families. Although many traditional social groups are strict about maintaining gender differences, in other social groups, they seem to be blurring (Lorber, 1994).

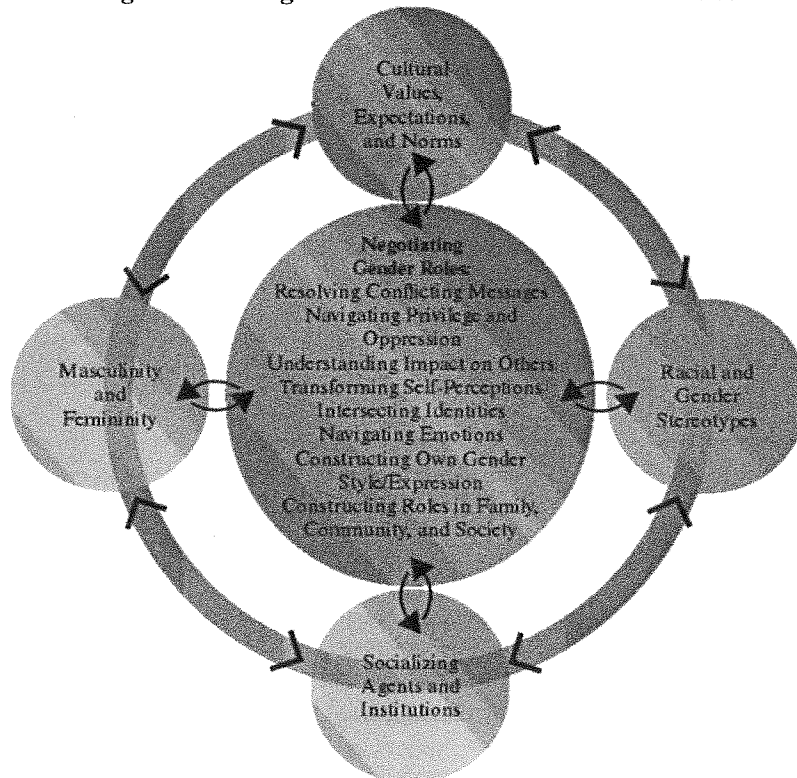
Gender can be defined as the “socially constructed attributions and expectations assigned to individuals on the basis of their biological sex” (as cited in Suzuki & Ahluwalia, 2003, p. 120). More recently, research (e.g., Miville, 2013) has shown that our understanding of gender is changing, taking a more intersectional view that accounts for various sociocultural identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, social class). While men and women may unconsciously behave in ways prescribed to them because of their biological sex, scholars today believe that social and cultural factors have much more to do with the beliefs, behaviors, and norms men and women display than their biological sex alone (Miville, 2013). In this way, sex and gender are two distinct entities, where sex is linked to biology (i.e., one is traditionally born as male or female) and gender is the expectation of traits and behaviors society has created based on sex. Thus, when we speak of gender roles, we are referring to the behaviors that men and women enact congruent to society’s constructed ideals of masculinity or femininity (Mahalik, Cournoyer, DeFranc, Cherry, & Napolitano, 1998). And so the process by which an individual “constructs” his or her gender roles is complex and based on factors such as his/her sex, the society he/she lives in, and any other social groups to which that individual belongs. In other words, the socially constructed ideals of masculinity and femininity and the process by which individuals construct their gender roles “vary from culture to culture and the roles that women and men play in their families, communities, and the larger society are diverse, constantly evolving, and at times in conflict with each other” (Miville, 2013, pp. xi-xii).

None of the psychological theories that explain how individuals develop their sense of self (e.g., Jung; Winnicott) and the highly-cited instruments used to measure gender roles (e.g., BSRI, PAQ) have been validated across diverse groups, and some reflect race- and sex-based stereotypes that are not common to all cultures (Miville, 2013). Despite many of these theories and interventions claiming “universal applicability,” their use with multicultural populations show that they ignore the experiences and challenges people of color face when attempting to construct their gender roles. Presently, little is known about multicultural gender role construction; however, research (Miville et al., 2013) provides evidence that individuals from racial-ethnic minority groups, where an unquestioned adaptation of these roles exists, particularly if they are power-based social constructions, may find themselves struggling psychologically (e.g., anxiety, depression) and/or physically “because of the negative bifurcations that can result not just between men and women but also *within* individuals regarding their own intrinsic interests, values, and activities”(p. 6). This process may become even more compounded when attempting to negotiate their gender role norms with those of the dominant culture where they preside. Based on over 60 interviews conducted with racially and ethnically diverse men and women, Miville et al. (2013) created a theoretical model (see **Figure 1**), which crystallizes processes men and women of color engage in as they continuously create their gender roles. This model can be summarized by the following processes: (a) resolving conflicts between multiple sociocultural identities; (b) navigating privilege and oppression; (c) understanding one’s impact on others of the same or opposite gender; (d) transforming self-perceptions about gender; (e) intersecting identities; (f) navigating emotions; (g) constructing one’s own gender styles/expressions; and (h) constructing one’s gender roles in family, community, and society.

As these interviews have paved a foundation for understanding multicultural gender roles, I wish to now create a psychometric scale that captures the presence (or absence) of the aforementioned processes in individuals from racial-ethnic minority backgrounds (e.g, African Americans, Asian Americans, Latino/a Americans). The items I will ask participants to endorse will undergo an expert review by a group of judges from the field of counseling psychology, who will collectively determine the relevance of each these items to the processes identified in the model (see **Figure 1**). These items will be reviewed by a group of participants and undergo an exploratory factor analysis to further narrow the number of items into a succinct, reliable item pool. This data will be collected via online surveys and participants will be offered an incentive so as to gather a diverse sample of men and women of color, who historically have been a challenging population to recruit for psychological research.

Ultimately, it is hoped that this scale can be used by mental health professionals and educators to accurately assess the processes people from diverse backgrounds engage in during the construction of their gender roles. Identifying these processes may aid mental health professionals in better conceptualizing cases with clients of color and be used to guide or inform treatments or interventions for these clients when issues related to gender roles emerge (e.g., a Latina mother wishing to pursue a career despite pressures from her family and culture to stay home and care for her children). Educators might use this scale to understand challenges that might impede academic performance in students of color (e.g., a young African American male not choosing to apply to college because of negative stereotypes that black males perform poorly academically). Findings from this study would increase the understanding of gender role construction among racial-ethnic groups as well as lay the foundation for developing interventions to mitigate experiences related to gender role development that might result when one's gender roles conflict with the roles defined by their culture or the dominant society in which they reside. In the future, it is our hope to expand this model to include other underrepresented populations such as Indigenous/Native American and Arab/Middle Eastern individuals, individuals who may not identify as male or female, and individuals with mixed racial-ethnic heritage.

Figure 1: Emergent Multicultural Gender Role Model



References

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