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Relationships Between Thought Control Styles and Depressive Attitudes in High Conformers to Traditional Masculine Norms

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Abstract

Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is characterized by certain attitudes that may intersect with traditional masculine gender role norms. Attitudes such as self-dislike and self-criticism may play a significant role in men's behaviors, including the gendered ways that men cope with self-criticism and/or self-dislike. To date, no research provides insight into specific attitudes and certain coping styles in men that conform more strongly to traditional masculine gender norms. The goal of the study was to analyze relationships between depressive attitudes (self-criticism and self-dislike) and coping in groups reporting high, moderate, and low conformity to masculine norms. It was hypothesized that self-critical attitudes would be negatively associated with coping via social conformity, and self-dislike would be positively associated with coping using thought suppression and distraction in men reporting high conformity to masculine norms. 758 men were recruited online who reported a stressful life event within the previous three months. The results indicated a weak, negative correlation between self-criticism and distraction. Therefore, self-criticism may be especially difficult for men to manage, but distraction may be employed by men to reduce their associated distress.

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Andrew Lahren, Matthew C. Genuchi, Ph.D.

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the relationships between depressive attitudes and thought control styles by level of masculine conformity. Correlational analyses showed that high conforming men scoring high in self-criticism had a weak, negative correlation with distraction.

Introduction

- Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) is a pervasive mental illness that has a lifetime prevalence of 20.6% in the United States (Hasin et al., 2018)
 - Characterized by certain attitudes which may intersect with men’s conformity to masculine gender role norms
- In particular, self-dislike and self-criticism may play a role in the perpetual struggle for men to out seek help.
 - Men experiencing self-dislike and self-criticism may be less likely to confide in others due to a perceived inadequacy by failing to meet masculine expectations (Booth et al., 2019)
- Research is limited on how specific depressive attitudes and associated copying styles affect men that strongly conform to traditional masculine gender norms

Intention and Hypothesis

- The goal of the study was to analyze relationships between depressive attitudes (self-criticism and self-dislike) as well as coping in a group of men reporting high conformity to masculine norms
- It was hypothesized that self-critical attitudes would be negatively associated with coping via social conformity, and self-dislike would be positively associated with coping using thought suppression and distraction in men reporting high conformity to masculine norms.

Methods

Participants

- 758 mean with a mean age of 37.78 ($SD= 14.05$)
- Currently living in the United States
- Reported a stressful life event in previous three months

Measures

- *Beck Depression Inventory–II* (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996)
- *Thought Control Questionnaire* (TCQ; Wells & Davies, 1994)
- *Male Role Norms Inventory–Short Form* (MRNI-SF; Leavnt, Hall, & Rankin, 2013)

Procedure

- Data was collected through an anonymous online survey and participants received \$10 for participation.

Results

Participants were placed into three groups based on strength of conformity to traditional masculine gender role norms (high, moderate, and low), and the hypotheses focused on the high conformity group (greater than 1SD from the mean). Within the high conforming group, self-criticism and distraction were weakly correlated ($r(173) = .177, p = .019$).

Discussion

- Overall, the results do not support the hypothesis. The only significant correlation was a weak, negative correlation between self-criticism and distraction.
- This suggests that certain depressive attitudes may not predispose highly conforming men to problematic patterns of coping in a predictable manner.
- However, self-criticism may be a particularly difficult attitude to cope with, and the deployment of distraction may be needed to alleviate the associated distress. This is consistent with past research stating men are more likely to distract during depressive episodes (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991).
- Seeking help may also be difficult due to feelings of inadequacy causing compounding effects with self-criticism.
- In the future, expanding this field of research may provide further insight as to whether these results are limited to this sample of men or generalizable beyond this sample of men.

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