

MEN GENDER ROLE CONFLICT: A REVIEW

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Abstract

This paper was a review of the phenomenon of gender role conflict experienced by men and the problems that generally accompany it. As we know, the term “gender” is generally associated with gender injustice experienced by women. Nevertheless, men also experience gender inequality in their daily life leading to the emergence of conflicts among them which might increase the possibilities of various problems. Research on gender role conflict experienced by men has been done in Europe. Unfortunately, this kind of research dealing with gender conflict experienced by men was still limited. Taboo and patriarchal culture that strongly abide in Indonesia had caused this phenomenon was very rarely exposed and discussed. Men are expected to be a leader with their strong physical appearance, vigorous, and authoritative by the society. However, those expectations would indirectly lead to anxiety, fear, and even depression when they failed to fulfill it in the reality. This study was expected to increase public awareness that the gender issues were experienced by both women and men. Moreover, similarly to the impact of gender inequality on women, the impacts of gender inequality on men also potentially trigger numerous problems.

Keywords: gender role, conflict, men.

Presenting Author’s biography



Karina Meriem Beru Brahmana is a doctoral student of Psychology at Airlangga University, Surabaya - East Java, Indonesia. Before continuing her studies, she was a lecturer at the Faculty of Psychology, University of HKBP Nommensen, Medan, Indonesia, and has served as a Dean from 2008 until 2015. Her educational backgrounds were a bachelor degree in Psychology from Catholic University of Atma Jaya, Jakarta, Indonesia, and Master of Industrial and Organization Psychology at the University of Indonesia, Indonesia. In addition to serve as a lecturer, she also actively involves in providing training and seminars or assessor in several institutions.

Introduction

The gender issue, in fact, has been exposed in numbers of science. Psychology, sociology, anthropology, law, health, religion, economics, etc. extensively cover the topics related to this issue. Nevertheless, research about gender keeps increasing in number, or in other words, gender is an interesting topic frequently discussed and examined, particularly in Indonesia, where the majority of people have insufficient understanding on the issues. This lack of understanding induces imbalances in gender that ultimately leads to the occurrences of gender inequity.

Regarding with the gender issue, the first thought that comes to mind is frequently associated with women. It is very understandable since this issue has always been associated with women's struggle for equal rights in society over the years. However, the fact that men also involve and may endure similar gender conflict seems to be forgettable. Conflicts dealing with the expectation on men from the society generally bring consequences that are problematic for men. This study discussed the history of theory of gender role conflict in men and some related studies which had been carried out previously.

The History of Theories of Gender Role Conflict

Theory on gender role conflict in men was initiated in 1979 by the University of Kansas as it strived to determine a concept to explain why men were sexist, dysfunctional, undetermined, and unhappy over the role of masculinity as set up by the society for them to fulfill. In 1980, O'Neil investigated the background of this issue and commenced it by collecting and summarizing results of studies, which were only a few at the time. He followed up his investigation by having personal meeting and discussion with the authors who had carried out studies regarding with men's conflict on their gender roles, including Warren Farrell, Herb Goldberg, Joe Pleck, Puncky Heppner, Murry Scher, Tom Skovholt, and Bob Brannon. Furthermore, O'Neil continued it by conducting his own study and ultimately established a concept on why men experience violence, interpersonal rigid, sexist, homophobic, emotional, and unhappy with themselves (O'Neil, 2007).

In 1981, the theory of gender role conflict was introduced in which it brought specific issue of counseling for men at the time. For the first time in that moment, O'Neil published a theory on conflict of men gender roles in the *Journal of Counseling & Development* (Scher in O'Neil 2013), which stated that the limitation of gender roles in men would result negative psychological consequences for them. In his study, O'Neil argued that the forms of gender role conflict and strain were indicated from the fears possessed by men in showing off their feminine side (O'Neil, 1981b). It provided a model or concept that depicted the six patterns of gender role conflict in men as the results of their expected and limited gender roles.

As a matter of fact, the model was evidenced to be helpful for the counselors in establishing a concept about gender roles conflict in men (O'Neil 1981a, 1990, 2006, 2008, 2010). The main point of his study was that gender role conflict could trigger psychological dysfunction for women and men and subsequently, the empirical research was required to examine the fact of this assumption.

The Theory of Gender Role Conflict

According to O'Neil (2008), gender role conflict is a psychological state of a person as a result of gender role socialization on men who bring negative consequences for the person himself or others. Generally, gender role conflict occurs when gender roles are seen as rigid, limited, or as a violation of self or others (O'Neil 1981b), in which the final outcome of this conflict is a limitation of one's potential or potential limitations of others. Gender role conflict is multidimensional and complex. How gender roles are learned and internalized from childhood to adulthood are complex, distinctive, and individual. Overall, gender role conflict is the problem implied cognitive, emotional, unconscious, or behavior that caused by socialization of gender roles that have been learned in sexist and patriarchal society (Naully, 2002).

O'Neil (2013) established a theory of gender role conflict in men and published the results of his studies for the period of 30 years (1982-2012). More than 350 studies have been conducted using gender role conflict scale (GRCS) to measure gender role conflict in men (O'Neil, Helms, Gable, David & Wrightsman, 1986). Although men and women can experience gender role conflict, but the focus of the study on gender role conflict was mostly targeted on men.

O'Neil (2008) claimed that gender role conflict had a propensity to limit the capacity or the ability of men to perform their potential and also inhibit the potential others to do the enforcement of gender roles. The theory of gender role conflict explicated that rigid, restricted, and sexist attitudes toward gender roles had resulted negative consequences for men and the society. The research showed that a number of men who endured gender role conflict would eventually also enforced traditional gender roles and also punished and humiliated those who refused to practice the gender role expectations. People constantly suffering from punishment and feeling humiliated because of the gender role, which might be conflicting perceived from the gender role expectations, had a tendency to undergo emotional disorders, such as anxiety, lack of confidence, low self-esteem, and depression (O'Neil, 1981b).

The concept of gender role conflict is formed based on four domains of cognitive, affective experience, behavior, and unconscious experience (O'Neil *et al*, 1986). It revealed the way men perceived and felt in association with the concept of their gender role and its dynamics that occurred outside from their awareness in general as it affected the way they behaved, responded, and intrapersonal as well as interpersonal interactions.

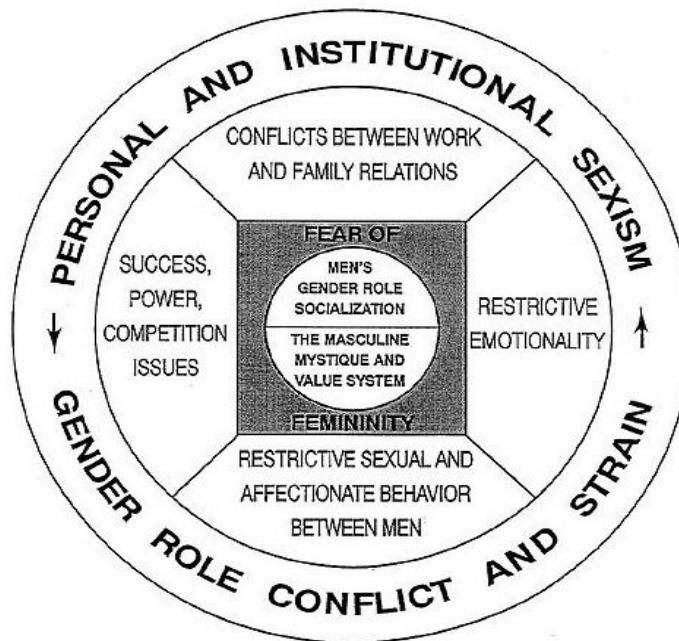
There were some situations in which a man could bear gender role conflict (O'Neil, 2008). First, in the transition period associated with gender role or when they had to face the tasks of development. Gender role conflict could also take place when there was an offense or irregularity of the masculinity norms. This conflict was also potential to augment if an individual failed to meet the norms of gender role. He might undergo internal conflicts as the consequence of the gap between the actual self-concept and the ideal self-concept based on stereotypes or dogma of masculinity. Abuse, humiliation, and limitation by or to someone else based on rules or deviations from the masculine norm role can also lead to gender role conflict. Finally, personal devaluation due to a failure to fulfill the norms of the masculine role can initiate a gender role conflict.

Self devaluation is a negative criticism to oneself or other people due to the deviation or violation regarding with the norms of gender role stereotypes or dogma about masculinity, resulting in the loss of power, status, and other positive attributes. Restriction occurs when one's behavior is controlled, the potential is limited, and the freedom is reduced. Such violation might involve torment on victims and may endanger or harm themselves as well as other people, and might cause various physical and psychological pains. The devaluation, restriction, and violation of the gender role have direct negative impacts on personal life in terms of health, career, interpersonal relationships, and family relationship. Gender role conflict is empirically associated with anxiety, communication problems, depression, health, homophobia (fear or hatred of homosexuals and homosexuality), intimacy problems, marital conflict, emotional disorders, problems in self-esteem, substance abuse, as well as violence against women (O'Neil, 2008).

The main principle of socialization of masculinity, gender roles and norms of understanding is due to the fear of the concept of femininity (O'Neil, 2008). Theoretically, it has been revealed that the fear for femininity is related to conflict experiences on gender roles (David & Brannon, 1976; O'Neil, 1981a, 1981b; O'Neil *et al.*, 1986). Reviews of studies on the understanding of masculinity (Levant & Richmond, 2007; O'Neil, 2010; O'Neil & Crapser, 2011) indicated that the limitation on way of thinking about the masculine norm is significantly perpetuated to men psychological problems and interpersonal conflicts. Two reviews found out that more than 70 psychological problems in men were with the understanding of masculinity (O'Neil, 2010, 2012).

The following figure explains the key concepts in gender role conflict paradigm presented by O'Neil. The central of the figure shows that socialization of gender role of men and dogma and norms

about masculinity are considered as a concept that related to the fear of femininity. Dogma and norms of masculinity has been set as a key value and standard. They also fiercely and negatively affect the reality lives of both boys and men.



Taken From: O'Neil, Good, & Holmes (1995) Fifteen Years of Theory & Research on Men's Gender Role Conflict: New paradigms for empirical research. In R. Levant & W. Pollack (Eds.) *A new psychology of men*. New York: Basic Books.

Figure: The Paradigm of Gender Role Conflict

Based on the concept propounded by Pleck (1981), the role of the socialization process as a whole was labeled as a form of tension and conflict over the sexual role. Subsequently, a year later, O'Neil replaced the term conflict or tension derived from sexual role into gender roles conflict, with an input from Unger who distinguished the definitions of gender and sex (O'Neil, 2002).

In the above figure, it can be observed that the fear of femininity has a main role to understand gender role conflict in men (O'Neil, 2012; O'Neil *et al.*, 1986). Fear of femininity is the negative or unpleasant thought and emotional state associated with the stereotype of feminine values, attitudes, and behaviors. This fear is initiated from one's early childhood when the gender role identity is formed by parents, peers, and social circumstances. Theoretically, it is also associated with four patterns of gender role conflict which will be discussed below.

Research by O'Neil *et al.* (1986) found out that there are four patterns that can measure the condition of gender role conflict experienced by men: (1) Restricted Emotionality (RE), which is a pattern that describes the fear and limitations of men to express emotions as well as the difficulty to know and use words as a form of expression of feelings; (2) Restrictive Affectionate Behavior Between Men (RABBM) is defined as the limitations of a way to express feelings and thoughts with others as well as difficulties to contact with other men physically; (3) Success/Power/Competition (SPC) which is a reflection of personal attitudes about the role in relation to competition and power to achieve success; (4) Conflict Between Work and Family Relations (CBWFR) is the difficulty in balancing commitment at work or at school with family and friends, resulting in little spare time or relaxation that increases the possibility of health issues, stress, and overwork. These four patterns established and created by O'Neil *et al.* are actually a useful tool to measure gender role conflict (Gender Role Conflict Scale) that is able to quantify or measure the role conflict experienced by men.

Conclusion

As has been discussed earlier, it can be seen that the gender role conflict experienced by men is an important subject to be incessantly examined and studied, particularly in Indonesia where the patriarchal culture has been generally practiced in many tribes and regions. The recognition of gender role conflict and strain in men, in general, is expected to minimize the extended effects of the issue.

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