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Journal of Behavior Therapy  
and Experimental Psychiatry 34 (2003) 251–267

JOURNAL OF  
behavior  
therapy and  
experimental  
psychiatry

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# Masculine Gender Role Stress: a potential predictor of phobic and obsessive–compulsive behaviour

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Received 15 March 2002; received in revised form 20 May 2003; accepted 24 October 2003

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## Abstract

Eisler and Blalock (Clin. Psychol. Rev. 11 (1991) 45) developed a cognitively mediated notion of Masculine Gender Role Stress (MGRS) which assumes that rigid commitment to masculine schemata for appraisal and coping with life's problems may both produce stress and result in dysfunctional coping patterns in men. Previous findings obtained in a non-clinical sample pointed to the ability of the MGRS General scale to predict different forms of irrational fears. Using a predominantly psychologically distressed sample, the present study replicated this finding. In addition, different subordinate concepts of MGRS (Physical inadequacy, Emotional inexpressiveness, Subordination to women, Intellectual inferiority, and Performance failure) predicted Agoraphobic fears, Blood-Injury fears, Social fears, and Obsessional checking and washing compulsions distinctively. Intellectual inferiority was the strongest predictor of Social fears. Most MGRS measures emerged as better predictors of Checking than of Washing rituals. There were no sex differences in the predictive capabilities of any of the MGRS measures on any of the criterion measures. A hypothetical explanation is given for the observation of MGRS being more strongly predictive of Checking than of

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Washing rituals using the concept of “inflated responsibility”. Implications for assessment, treatment and further studies are briefly pinpointed.

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*Keywords:* Gender role stress; Masculine Gender Role Stress (MGRS) scale; Phobic avoidance; Obsessive-compulsive behaviour; Prediction

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## 1. Introduction

The notion that differential gender role socialization of men and women might predispose each sex to different kinds of mental health problems may be viewed as an application of sociocultural and psychosocial models to the aetiology of behaviour disorders (Eisler & Blalock, 1991). Central to this viewpoint are the concepts of gender (i.e., social conceptions of what it is to be masculine or feminine), gender identity, and the acquisition of gender role. Basing their conception of gender role socialization in relation to mental health functioning on a biopsychosocial view of masculinity, Eisler and Blalock (1991; see also Eisler & Skidmore, 1987; Eisler, 1990) introduced a cognitively mediated theory of Masculine Gender Role Stress (MGRS).

Basically, Eisler's (1990) conceptualization of MGRS entails that there are significant gender differences in the specific situations that men and women appraise as stressful. The social contingencies rewarding masculine attitudes and behaviour, while punishing non-masculine (feminine) attitudes and behaviour, result in the development of masculine gender role schemata in all men. Such masculine schemata are used by men to appraise potential threats in the environment and to guide their coping responses. However, there are individual differences in the degree to which men become committed to such schemata as a basis for organizing their behavioural displays: strong commitment to masculine gender role cognitive schemata is hypothesized to restrict the types of coping strategies available to men in particular situations. Put somewhat differently, Eisler and Blalock (1991) believe that MGRS may result from excessive reliance on culturally approved masculine schemata that hamper the individual man in his objective appraisal of threatening situations and permit him a limited range of sex-linked approved coping strategies to deal with stress. This, in turn, may predispose men to behaviour patterns that are unhealthy or dysfunctional. Thus, the concept of MGRS is based on the paradigm that gender-related differences in the way men appraise environmental, behavioural, and perceptual events are directly related to their experience of stress, which may increase vulnerability to physical and psychological disorders (e.g., Selye, 1976; Goldberger & Breznitz, 1982). In actual fact, Eisler and Blalock (1991) hypothesized that in dealing with stressful situations, the dysfunctional coping behaviour that could result are those involving the inhibition of emotional expressiveness, reliance on aggression, power, and control, and obsession with achievement and success.

In order to explore some of the relationships between MGRS and dysfunctional behaviour patterns in men, Eisler and Skidmore (1987) and Eisler, Skidmore, and Ward (1988) developed the MGRS scale (see below). Among other things, Eisler and

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