

# New Directions in Gender Role Conflict Research

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Gender role conflict (GRC) is defined as a psychological state in which the socialized male gender role has negative consequences for the person and others (O’Neil 2008a). GRC occurs when rigid, sexist, or limiting gender roles result in restriction, devaluation, or violation of self and/or others (O’Neil 1981b). With approximately 240 studies conducted to date, associations between GRC and various indicants of psychological health have been documented.

James O’Neil (2008a), the author of GRC theory, published a 25-year literature review of GRC research (1982–2007) which provides a detailed examination of (a) the theoretical models underpinning the theory, (b) the psychometric properties of the Gender Role Conflict Scale (GRCS), (c) principal findings of GRC research, (d) criticisms directed at GRC theory and the GRCS, and (e) future research avenues for GRC theory.

The GRCS has been regarded as the “most well-known instrument within the traditional counseling literature” that focuses on masculinity (Betz and Fitzgerald 1993, p. 360) and has made an important contribution to men’s health research. For example, 11 out of 13 studies reviewed by O’Neil (2008a) documented a negative correlation between GRC and self-esteem, 12 out of 15 studies reported a positive correlation between GRC and anxiety, and 24 out of 27 studies found positive correlations between GRC and depression.

The rationale for GRC theory was devised and documented in a number of theoretical papers (O’Neil 1981a, b, 1982). These papers describe a model that conceptualizes GRC as an “interaction of environmental and biological factors that promote certain masculine values (masculine mystique<sup>1</sup>) and the fear of femininity” (O’Neil 2008a, p. 361). As the concepts of masculine ideology (and, more narrowly,

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hegemonic masculinity) as well as gender role strain are paramount in understanding GRC, each of these terms will be outlined briefly.

*Masculine ideology* refers to an individual's adoption of cultural beliefs about masculinity and the masculine gender role (Good et al. 1994). Within Western culture, masculine gender socialization emphasizes characteristics such as stoicism, independence, physical toughness, dominance, restrictive emotional expression, competition, and antifemininity (Brannon and Juni 1984; Connell 2005; Levant et al. 2007; Levant 2011; Mahalik et al. 2003).

*Hegemonic masculinity* denotes the dominant masculine expression within a given culture at a particular point in time (Connell 2005) and embodies the “currently most honoured way of being a man” (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). Hegemonic masculinity is an atheoretical concept and does not particularize *how* endorsement of a specific form of masculine ideology increases the likelihood of health risks, both physical and psychological. In contrast to normative models (e.g., masculine ideology), gender role conflict/stress models focus on the degree of perceived conflict between one's internalized or learned gender roles and one's environment (O'Neil et al. 1995).

*Gender role strain paradigm* (GRSP, Pleck 1995) is a social psychological concept which presents ten propositions relating to gender role norms. For example, “Gender roles are operationally defined by gender role stereotypes and norms,” “Violating gender role norms leads to negative psychological consequences,” and “Violating gender role norms has more severe consequences for males than females.” Implicit in these propositions are three broader ideas about how cultural standards for masculinity, as implemented in gender socialization, have potentially negative consequences for individual males (Pleck 1995). These are gender role discrepancy, gender role trauma, and gender role dysfunction.

*Gender role discrepancy* posits that individuals attempt to conform—to varying degrees—to stereotypic masculine standards and that nonconformance to these prescribed standards can result in negative internalized self-judgments and negative social feedback from others affecting self-esteem and psychological well-being<sup>2</sup> (Pleck 1995). *Gender role trauma* contends that aspects of male gender role socialization, in particular, the experience of traditional masculine ideology, can be inherently traumatic for males (Levant 2011). For example, by virtue of being socialized in a heterosexist society, gay men may experience normative trauma (Harrison 1995 as cited in Levant 2011). The third category, *gender role dysfunction* proposes that socially desirable and acceptable characteristics associated with the male role (e.g., avoidance of femininity, homophobia, and aggression) can have negative consequences for either the males themselves or others because many of these characteristics are inherently negative. O'Neil (2008a) deemed this subtype as having the most theoretical relevance to GRC because it “implies negative outcomes from endorsing restrictive gender role norms” (p. 366).

There are numerous situational contexts in which GRC occurs. Men are proposed to have greater GRC when they experience one or more of several trajectories. First, they may have a gender role transition or face difficult developmental tasks over the life span. Second, they may deviate from or violate gender role norms

of masculinity ideology. Third, they may try to meet or fail to meet gender role norms of masculinity ideology. Fourth, they may note discrepancies between their real self-concepts and their ideal self-concepts, based on gender role stereotypes and masculinity ideology. Fifth, men may personally devalue, restrict, and/or violate themselves for failing to meet masculinity ideology norms. Sixth, they may experience personal devaluations, restrictions, and/or violations from others for conforming to or deviating from masculinity ideology. Seventh, and finally, men may personally devalue, restrict, and/or violate others because of their deviation from or conformity to masculinity ideology norms (O'Neil 2008a). These seven trajectories were, subsequently, refined into four categories: (a) GRC caused by gender role transitions, (b) GRC experienced intrapersonally (i.e., within the man), (c) GRC expressed *toward* others, and (d) GRC experienced *from* others (O'Neil 1990).

Regardless of the category, gender role conflict is characterized by devaluation, restriction, and violation. O'Neil (2008a) contends that gender role devaluations represent negative assessments of the self (or others) when conforming to, or deviating from, the attributes characteristic of traditional or hegemonic masculinity. Gender role restrictions constitute constraining oneself (or others) to stereotypic norms of masculinity ideology. Gender role violations occur when people harm themselves or others (or are harmed by others) when deviating from or conforming to gender role norms of masculinity ideology (O'Neil 2008a). Boys and men vary in the degree to which they endorse aspects of prescribed masculinity resulting in multifaceted strain and conflict (O'Neil et al. 1986). That is, "men who describe themselves differentially in terms of gender role characteristics may show differential aspects of gender role conflict" (O'Neil et al. 1986, p. 339). The experience of GRC is dependent on cultural-, age-, and cohort-specific definitions of masculine ideologies and gender role stereotypes (Kahn 2009).

GRC was theorized as having six elements that relate to gender role socialization and fear of femininity (O'Neil 1981b): (a) Restrictive Emotionality; (b) Restrictive Sexual and Affectionate Behavior; (c) Homophobia; (d) Socialized Control, Power, and Competition Issues; (e) Obsession with Achievement and Success; and (f) Health-Care Problems. Each of these elements will be outlined briefly.

Restricted Emotionality (RE) is defined as having difficulty expressing one's own feelings or denying others their right to emotional expression (O'Neil 1981b). RE implies that men will have difficulty giving up emotional control and being vulnerable to themselves, others, and new experiences. These deficits imply that some men will have difficulty in self-disclosure, recognizing feelings, and processing the complexities of interpersonal life.

Restrictive Sexual and Affectionate Behavior refers to having limited ways of expressing one's sexuality and affection toward others (O'Neil 1981b). For men, this is caused by their inability to express their "feminine" sides and also by rigidly adhering to masculine gender role norms and stereotypes (O'Neil 1981b).

Homophobia denotes a fear of gay men or an irrational concern that one may appear to be gay. Homophobia may prevent emotional intimacy between heterosexual men and may be a significant barrier to male self-disclosure and companionship (O'Neil 1981b).

Socialized Control, Power, and Competition Issues relate to men's socialized tendencies to dominate, control, and subordinate others (both men and women) in order to maintain their power and masculine role in relationships. The cost of being powerful, dominant, controlling, and competitive is usually high for men in interpersonal relationships, as it may lead to a loss of self-awareness, honesty, spontaneity, and emotional freedom because of the constant need to monitor and control a relationship (Nicholas 1975 as cited in O'Neil 1981b).

Obsession with Achievement and Success refers to men's preoccupation with work and reliance on their occupation to substantiate their sense of themselves as men (O'Neil 1981b). The primary means of becoming a success is through competing with others, using power and control, and demonstrating competence which is sometimes accompanied by obsessive fears of failure, workaholic behavior, and increased stress, which can produce emotional and physical problems for men (O'Neil 1981b).

These six elements blend to adversely "affect" men's physical and psychological well-being. Gender role stereotypes project men as tireless, invincible workers with superhuman limits; thus, many men have been socialized to ignore the physical symptoms that lead to acute illness or chronic health problems (O'Neil 1981a).

O'Neil et al. (1986) generated a total of 85 items to measure these six elements: Restrictive Emotionality ( $N=15$ ); Health-Care Problems ( $N=14$ ); Obsession with Achievement and Success ( $N=16$ ); Restrictive Affectionate Behavior Between Men ( $N=17$ ); Control, Power, and Competition ( $N=14$ ); and Homophobia ( $N=7$ ). Three content experts reviewed the items, ensuring they referred specifically to gender-based rather than non-gender-based conflicts (O'Neil 1981a). A six-point Likert scale was employed, with response options ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree. Items were then administered to 527 introductory psychology undergraduate students (mean age = 19.8 years). A principal component analysis was conducted which resulted in a 37-item measure. The initial testing of the six theoretical elements of GRC previously mentioned produced four empirically derived subscales: Success, Power, and Competition (SPC); Restrictive Emotionality (RE); Restrictive Affectionate Behavior between Men (RABBM); and Conflict between Work and Family (CBWFR).

To assess the convergent validity of the GRCS, the measure has been correlated with many masculinity measures: Male Role Norms Scale (MRNS; Thompson and Pleck 1986), the Male Role Norm Inventory (MRNI; Levant et al. 1992 as cited in Levant 2011), and the Masculine Gender Role Stress Scale (MGRS; Eisler and Skidmore 1987). The convergent validity of each subscale has been demonstrated. For example, the RABBM correlated significantly with the "Rejection of Homosexuals" subscale of the MRNI (Berger et al. 2005), the RE was significantly related to "Emotional Inexpressiveness" (Fischer and Good 1997), the CBWFR correlated significantly with "Marital Satisfaction" (Campbell and Snow 1992), and the SPC was significantly associated with "Performance Failure" (Fischer and Good 1997).

To investigate the dimensionality of the GRCS, a number of confirmatory factor analyses (CFAs) have been conducted. Good et al. (1995) supported a four-factor

solution after running CFAs on a sample of 401 and 535 participants. However, Rogers et al. (1997) questioned the suitability of Good et al.'s conclusions as the latter did not employ conventional criteria for acceptable model fit (i.e., Tucker-Lewis fit index=.83 for samples 2 and 3, respectively; RMSEA=.54 and .59 for samples 2 and 3, respectively; and AGFI=.83 and .80 for samples 2 and 3, respectively). Rogers et al. found similar results (i.e., a four-factor model was obtained); however, model fit statistics, again, fell short of advised guidelines (i.e., Tucker-Lewis fit index > .9; RMSEA < .50; AGFI > .90). Moradi et al. (2000) argue that the item/factor ratio of the GRCS was higher than recommended and, as a result, suggested that parceling of items within each factor should be carried out *prior* to running a CFA. A four-factor solution with better fit to the data was observed when rational (i.e., combining items within the same factor on the basis of similar content) and random (i.e., combining items within the same factor at random) parcel-level models were tested. However, Bandalos (2002) and Norwalk et al. (2011) argue that the use of item parceling may give inflated results because item parceling often increases the reliability scores and masks error. When parceling procedures were not applied, Moradi and associates observed results similar to those reported by Good et al. and Rogers et al. These researchers concluded that the similar dimensionality observed across all three studies provides support for the structural validity of the GRCS.

Norwalk et al. (2011) conducted a CFA on the GRCS with two independent samples (European American men,  $N=483$ ; African American men,  $N=214$ ). They used an alternative models approach to determine how many factors best fit the data, with results indicating that, in comparison to the other models tested, a four-factor solution offered better fit. Factorial invariance across the two samples revealed the models were the same, suggesting that GRCS' dimensionality was the same across both samples. However, similar to past research, the authors reported that most fit indexes failed to meet recommended cutoff values (Good et al. 1995; Rogers et al. 1997; Moradi et al. 2000).

Three modified versions of the GRCS exist: (a) a short-form measure and (b) an adolescent measure and its Korean counterpart. Each measure will be discussed briefly.

*Short-Form Version.* Wester et al. (2012) developed a short-form version of the GRCS (GRCS-SF). An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the GRCS items (37 items) using a random sample of participants ( $N=399$ ) from previously published studies (Total  $N=1,415$ ; Wester et al. 2006a, b; Wester et al. 2005; Wester et al. 2007). A four-factor model was forced and items with the highest loadings on each factor were retained (4 items per factor, 16 items in total). The reliability coefficients of the factors were RE=.77, RABBM=.78, SPC=.80, and CBWFR=.77. A confirmatory factor analysis then was conducted on the 16 items using the remaining sample of 1,031. The four-factor model was supported with acceptable scores on a number of fit indexes (e.g., CFI=.96; TLI=.96; RMSEA=.057) and was superior to a one-factor model. Using a separate sample of 495 college students, the researchers examined the correlations between the

GRCS and the GRCS-SF. They found the two measures to be significantly related and the corresponding subscales of each measure to be substantially correlated (range = .90–.96). Unfortunately, the authors appear to have computed these correlations between the short and long forms using the *same* sample. As noted by Smith et al. (2000), this is a common “methodological sin” (p. 105) because it invariably inflates the resultant correlation coefficients (i.e., the items in the short form are being counted twice).

An adolescent version of the GRCS also was developed (GRCS-A; Blazina et al. 2005). A sample of 464 male students (aged 13–18;  $M = 16.2$  years) completed measures of masculinity (Male Role Attitude Scale; MRAS; Thompson and Pleck 1986), psychological distress (Conners-Wells’ Adolescent Self-Report Scale; CASS, Conners and Wells 1997), the GRCS (adult), and the adapted measure (GRCS-A). The latter consisted of original GRCS (adult) items and an unspecified number of altered items. Item content was adjusted to ensure they were “developmentally appropriate” for an adolescent population (e.g., “When I am sexually involved with others, I do not express my strong feelings” was modified to “When I am personally involved with others, I do not express my strong feelings”). An exploratory factor analysis was conducted on the items, resulting in 29 retained items and a four-factor solution that accounted for 40.9 % of the total variance. The observed four-factor solution consisted of factors equivalent to those reported for the GRCS, three of which were renamed to capture what the cluster of items represented (i.e., the CBWFR subscale was named “Conflict Between Work, School, and Family” [CBWSF]; “Success, Power, and Competition” was renamed “Need for Success and Achievement” [NSA]; and the RABBM was named “Restricted Affection Between Men” [RAM]). Scale score reliability coefficients ranged from .70 to .82 and test-retest reliability scores were .60 for CBWSF, .95 for NSA, .83 for RAM, and .87 for RE. The GRCS-A correlated strongly with the GRCS ( $r = .88$ ) and modestly with the MRAS ( $r = .37$ ). However, the former correlation may be inflated given the “methodological sin” (Smith et al. 2000) alluded to earlier (i.e., some of the same items were being measured in the short and long forms). Finally, Blazina et al. (2007) observed significant correlations between the GRCS-A and the Adolescent Masculine Ideology in Relationships Scale (AMIRS; Chu et al. 2005;  $r = .45$ ).

The GRCS-A has been adapted for use in other cultural contexts such as Korea (K-GRCS-A; Kim et al. 2009). Kim et al. translated the 29-item GRCS-A to Korean, with items back translated to English by a bilingual translator. A third translator verified the translation and back translation and one of the items (i.e., “It’s hard for me to express my emotional needs to others”) was identified as having a potentially different connotation from the original item. Cronbach alpha coefficients for the four subscales ranged from .67 to .80, and scores on the K-GRCS-A correlated positively with measures of depression ( $r = .29$ ) and anxiety ( $r = .48$ ) and negatively with self-esteem ( $r = -.29$ ). Further research using the K-GRCS-A found that self-esteem mediated the relationship between gender role conflict and depression; that is, individuals experiencing greater levels of conflict evidenced lower levels of self-esteem which, in turn, was associated with greater levels of depression (Choi et al. 2010).

## **Critiquing the Psychometric Properties of the GRCS**

Numerous criticisms have been directed against the development and validation of the GRCS. In this review, critiques of the GRCS will be presented and extended to the GRCS-SF, GRCS-A, and the K-GRCS-A. Critiques specific to the GRCS-A then will be discussed.

### ***Do the GRCS Items Reflect Conflict as Defined by the GRC Theory?***

In the development of the GRCS items, 85 items were generated, distributed, and factor analyzed (O'Neil et al. 1986). GRC has been operationally defined by devaluation, restriction, and violation; however, in O'Neil et al.'s (1986) study, no systematic approach appears to have been taken to generate items to incorporate these elements of GRC. Consequently, some researchers have observed that items on the GRCS do not reflect conflict as it ordinarily understood, that is, conflict being a "result of two competing response tendencies" (Betz and Fitzgerald 1993, p. 360). Indeed, in his review article, the developer of the measure concedes that some of the items on the GRCS could be rewritten to assess conflict more directly (O'Neil 2008a).

### ***Does the GRCS Cover the Breadth of the GRC Theory?***

O'Neil et al. (1986) did not specify what situational contexts were included in the initial item pool and a number of conceptual problems exist due to not providing criteria for their inclusion. First, it cannot be ascertained whether the 48 items excluded from the original item pool were related to a particular situational context (i.e., were most of the items related to the conflict associated with either conformity or endorsement of masculine norms?) Or did the items reflect conflict due to deviation from or nonconformity to masculine norms? What are the reasons for so few items reflecting deviation from/failure to meet (1 item) masculine norms on the GRCS? Were items included to reflect alternative situational contexts (i.e., GRC toward others or nonconformity) eliminated because they were unrelated to the endorsement of traditional masculine standards (gender role dysfunction)?

Theoretically, masculine ideology is a cofactor of both GRC and the GRSP and masculine ideology measures have been used to validate the GRCS, evidencing positive correlations throughout the literature. However, given that GRC theory measures different situational contexts that compete with the notion of endorsing/conforming to masculine ideology (i.e., deviating or violating gender role norms), then why would one expect to see positive correlations between these constructs?



Put in a different way, by self-reporting low MI scores (i.e., not endorsing masculine standards), a person can still experience GRC. Further, if an individual experiences conflict because of the presence of a masculine norm that he does not endorse, then why should MI correlate positively with the GRCS?

This may reflect two issues related to the GRCS: (a) content overlap and (b) emphasis on the conflicts relating to conformity to masculine norms (i.e., gender role dysfunction).

### ***Is There an Issue with Content Overlap?***

Research, to date, has not addressed the issue of content overlap as it pertains to the GRCS. Content overlap is problematic because it can inflate correlations, which, in turn, affects the reliability and validity of the measure. Inspecting the GRCS items reveals possible overlap in relation to the RE factor. For example, three of the ten items in this factor (i.e., “Talking (about my feelings) during sexual relations is difficult for me” [item 13], “Telling others of my strong feelings is not part of my sexual behavior” [item 22], and “Telling my partner my feelings about him/her during sex is difficult for me” [item 30]) seem to measure the same aspect of restricted emotionality in relation to sexual behavior. Further, two other items (i.e., “I have difficulty expressing my tender feelings” [item 19], and “I often have trouble finding words that describe how I am feeling” [item 25]) also share the same inability to express emotions. Two items on the CBWFR also seem to share the same meaning: item 11 (i.e., “My career, job, or school affects the quality of my leisure or family life”) and item 31 (i.e., “My work or school often disrupts other parts of my life [home, health, leisure]”).

### ***Does the GRCS Emphasize Conflicts Relating to Conformity to Masculine Norms?***

As previously mentioned, the GRCS has been associated with the gender role dysfunction subtype of the GRSP.<sup>3</sup> O’Neil (2008a) deemed this subtype as having the most theoretical relevance to GRCS because it “implies negative outcomes from endorsing restrictive gender role norms” (p. 366). O’Neil et al. (1986) did not specify what situational contexts were included in the initial item pool and on the remaining items (37 items). As a result, there seems to be an overemphasis/focus on conflicts associated with the endorsement of masculine standards/norms, in particular, the RE, RABBM, and SPC factors. In support of this assertion, the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI; Mahalik et al. 2003) has been shown to correlate highly with the GRCS. The CMNI was developed to measure men’s conformity to 11 masculine norms: “Winning,” “Emotional Control,” “Risk



Taking,” “Violence,” “Power over Women,” “Dominance,” “Playboy,” “Self-Reliance,” “Primacy of Work,” “Disdain for Homosexuals,” and “Pursuit of Status.” It differs from masculine ideology measures because the former assesses the extent that men endorse/reject masculine norms, whereas the CMNI measures the extent to which men either conform or do not conform to masculine norms (Levant 2011). The CMNI and the GRCS were significantly correlated at  $r = .56$  ( $p < 0.001$ ) and corresponding subscales were very highly correlated. For example, the SPC correlated with nine of the CMNI subscales and was highly correlated with the “Winning,” “Dominance,” and “Pursuit of Status” subscales:  $r_s = .52, .59$ , and  $.42$ , respectively. RE was significantly correlated with eight of the CMNI factors and correlated highly with “Emotional Control” at  $r = .66$ . RABBM correlated significantly with seven of the CMNI subscales and highly correlated with “Disdain for Homosexuals” and “Emotional Control” at  $r = .40$  and  $r = .39$ , respectively. However, CBWFR correlated significantly with only two CMNI factors, the highest being its correlation with “Primacy of Work” ( $r = .21$ ). Some of these correlations are of concern because the GRCS and CMNI are interrelated yet conceptually distinct with the former referring to conflict and the latter referring to conformity to masculine norms; interestingly, higher correlations between CMNI and the GRCS (i.e., RE, RABBM, and SPC) than between masculine ideology scores and the GRCS were observed.

The range of the gender role conflicts present in the scale may be too narrow and may not reflect the breadth or the global nature of the GRC framework. Thompson et al. (1992) criticized the narrow range of gender role conflicts present in the GRCS on the grounds that it excludes nontraditional masculinity standards. For example, gender role conflicts can be experienced by men who engage in nontraditional roles such as men employed as nurses and engaging in full-time childcare.

GRC is theorized to be experienced in three contexts: (a) within the self, (b) caused by others, and (c) expressed toward others (O’Neil 1990). The latter occurs when individuals devalue, restrict, or violate other individuals because they deviate from, or fail to conform to, masculinity ideology norms (O’Neil 2008a). However, this facet of the theory is not represented in GRCS items. Inspection of scale content suggests that only 1 out of 37 questions measures the expression of GRC toward others, albeit in a subtle way. The item (i.e., “I evaluate other people’s value by their level of achievement and success”) is arguably measuring “devaluation” as defined by O’Neil (2008a). However, as a consequence of this item displaying the largest standardized residual and failing to meet an *a priori* effect size criterion of 10% in a CFA result among a sample of European American men, Norwalk et al. (2011) advised deleting the item to improve model fit. Norwalk et al. also observed that this item failed to meet the same criteria for effect size in a separate sample of African American men. In further development of the GRCS-SF, Wester et al. (2012) did not retain this item (i.e., the item loaded at  $.55$  and, thus, did not meet the retention criteria of  $> .68$ ).

It is the incorporation of the definitions of devaluations, restrictions, and violations and various situational contexts<sup>4</sup> in which GRC is experienced that differentiates GRC items and masculinity ideology items. The endorsement of a masculinity

item does not differentiate between males that are affected by the presence of an expectation/masculine norm and males that merely acknowledge the existence of, but are not affected by, this expectation/masculine norm. The development of the items and the conceptual issues raised affect each of the GRCS measures, namely, the GRCS, the GRCS-SF, the GRCS-A, and the K-GRCS-A and their equivalent subscales.

### ***Does the GRCS Possess Face Validity?***

*GRCS.* In the development of the GRCS, and subsequently for the GRCS-SF, there is no reference to face validity (i.e., items were not reviewed by individuals for whom the scale was designed—namely, men). Hardesty and Bearden (2004) contend that face validity is essential “since inferences are made based on the final scale items and, therefore, they must be deemed face valid if we are to have confidence in any inferences made using the final scale form” (p. 99). Further, items that are not deemed face valid characterize a measure that “cannot be a valid operationalization of the construct of interest” (Hardesty and Bearden 2004, p. 99). Instead, items on the GRCS were developed based on theoretical papers (O’Neil 1981a, b) and a perceived need to measure GRC, which emanated from the male and female liberation movements (O’Neil 2008a). Critiques of SPC, RE, and CBWFR subscales of the GRCS are discussed below.

### ***GRCS: Success, Power, and Competition Factor (SPC)***

Three of the 13 items of the SPC factor are framed in terms of conflict (e.g., failing to meet masculine standards and deviating from or violating standards of masculinity) and the remaining ten items measure different facets associated with masculine ideology, such as the importance of success, winning, competitiveness, and dominance of individual. Examples of these non-conflict items are: “Moving up the career ladder is important to me,” “Making money is part of my idea of being a successful man,” “I strive to be more successful than others,” and “Being smarter or physically stronger than other men is important to me.”

The SPC factor has been criticized for measuring masculinity ideology more broadly than gender role conflict (Betz and Fitzgerald 1993). Walker et al. (2000) found high correlations between the SPC factor and the four-factors of the Brannon Masculinity Scale (BMS; Brannon and Juni 1984;  $r_s = .36-.56$ ). They contend that the SPC factor might be better conceptualized as a measure of adherence to “traditional male role norms (i.e., masculine ideology) than masculine gender role conflict” (p. 105). Berger et al. (2005) also supported these findings by identifying a strong correlation ( $r = .50$ ) between SPC and the Male Role Norms Inventory-Revised (MRNI-R; Levant and Fischer 1998 as cited in Levant 2011). Further,

a majority of the SPC items do not directly assess men's GRC, and therefore, SPC is "defined as a masculine norms/ideology factor that more indirectly assesses GRC by measuring personal attitudes about success pursued through competition and power" (O'Neil 2008a, p. 401).

Three items measure conflict on the SPC factor, namely, "I worry about failing and how it affects my doing well as a man" (i.e., measuring situational contexts of "failing to meet masculine standards of success"), "I evaluate other people's value by their level of achievement and success" (i.e., assessing the situational contexts of "devaluing others for failing to meet masculine standards of success"), and "I am often concerned about how others evaluate my performance at work or school" (i.e., measuring situational contexts whereby devaluation occurs "due to failing to meet masculine standards of success"). Unfortunately, all three items failed to meet a priori effect size criterion in CFAs conducted with two samples of men (Norwalk et al. 2011). The latter item loaded on the CBWFR factor and was the largest contribution of misfit. In the same study, 30% of GRCS items failed to meet a priori effect size criterion on the European American sample and 46% of items on the GRCS failed to meet a priori effect size ( $R^2 = .10$ ) for the African American sample. The authors qualified that the findings may be a result of modeling invariance but suggested that it still highlights potential "weaknesses in the scale" and could supply support for "revision to the scale" (p. 138).

Further, the presence of a less than optimal factor (i.e., SPC) is problematic for the field of men and masculinities because inferences have been made about the factor and other constructs. For example, Galligan et al. (2010) measured resilience in adolescent males, using the GRCS; SPC correlated with positive coping strategies. The authors then reported that "the SPC component pattern of gender role conflict was associated with a positive change in resilience" (Galligan et al. p. 16). However, as the SPC does not measure conflict per se, the authors' interpretation that an element of gender role conflict correlates with resilience is misleading.

### ***Is the Conflict Between Work and Family Relations (CBWFR) Subscale Conceptually Meaningful Within the Framework of GRC?***

CBWFR has been questioned in relation to whether it is unique to masculinity because it is experienced by both men and women (Zamarripa et al. 2003 as cited in Liu et al. 2005). The CBWFR factor was not designed to measure GRC in women but "the results suggest that some aspects of GRC may be universal" for both sexes (Liu et al. 2005, p. 138). However, contemporary theorizing suggests that masculinity and femininity are germane to both men and women. Therefore, the conflict identified by the CBWFR subscale may be best regarded as masculine in nature—albeit with the understanding that both sexes potentially experience it. Regardless, queries about the psychometric properties of this factor have been raised.

Low correlations between masculinity measures and this component have been documented (Walker et al. 2000;  $p < .21$  on Brannon Masculinity Scale). Also, as noted earlier, Mahalik et al. (2003) observed significant correlations between the CBWFR and only two of nine CMNI factors: “Primacy of Work” and “Dominance,”  $r = .21$  and  $.16$ , respectively. Norwalk et al. (2011) observed that the four-factor structure of the GRCS did not meet the established fit criteria and suggested that “revisions are needed particularly for the CBWFR items” (p. 141).

### ***Is the Restricted Emotionality (RE) Subscale Content Valid?***

RE has been described as the “best predictor of stress levels” (Good et al. 1995, p. 3). When creating the GRCS, O’Neil et al. (1986) developed scale items to reflect the RE theme, defining it as “having difficulty expressing one’s feelings or denying others their rights to emotional expressiveness” (p. 340). However, inspection of the items on the GRCS (ten items) and subsequent measures (e.g., GRCS-A, 8 items) reveals that none of them reflect “denying others their right to emotional expression” (p. 340). If items reflecting the aforementioned definition of RE were included in the original item pool, the reasons for their removal remain unclear. Does the non-emergence of items reflecting GRC toward others in the GRCS mean that this aspect possesses little relevance to GRC theory? Or, perhaps, these sorts of items were not included in the original item pool? Regardless, the original definition of RE is not reflected in the RE factor.

### ***Is the Response Format Used Compatible with the GRCS Items?***

Another point of concern is the response format employed by the GRCS. Ryan and Gartland (1999) argue that having a nonresponse option may hold valuable information for the researcher. If the patterns of responses are not random, then it may indicate that respondents are experiencing difficulty because of the wording of an item or possess a “genuine lack of opinion” (p. 108). The advantages of including a “don’t know” or a non-forced choice response option is that if problems such as evasion or contamination arise, these issues can be corrected retrospectively (Dolnicar and Rossiter 2009).

Also, three items loading on the SPC factor (i.e., “I often feel that I need to be in charge of those around me,” “I sometimes define my personal value by my career success,” and “I am often concerned about how others evaluate my performance at work or school”), one item loading on the RE factor (i.e., “I often have trouble finding words that describe how I am feeling”), and one item in the RABBM factor (i.e., “I am sometimes hesitant to show my affection to men”) do not really fit with a strongly agree/disagree response format. The use of words to describe “prevalence” such as “often” and “sometimes” are problematic because self-reporting

“strongly disagree” to these items may still denote some level of “conflict.” For example, “strongly disagreeing” that you “often feel the need to be in charge of those around you” does not logically imply an absence of this need.

### *Are the Aforementioned Critiques Applicable to the GRCS-A?*

None of the psychometric concerns that have been raised about the GRCS were addressed in the adolescent version of the GRCS developed by Blazina et al. (2005) and the subsequent Korean version (K-GRCS-A).

*Content Validity.* Blazina et al. adapted the items from the adult GRCS. Items that had been previously criticized for not reflecting conflict were not changed/improved and only nominal modifications were made to item content (e.g., “When I am sexually involved with others, I do not express my strong feelings” was changed to “When I am personally involved with others, I do not express my strong feelings”).

Critically, in the development of the GRCS-A (and the K-GRCS-A), adolescents did not inform item generation and no contact was made with adolescents to see if the factors were relevant to them (i.e., there is no reference to face or content validity). A psychometrically sound measure that targets adolescent boys should be “grounded in and relevant to [their] experiences” (Chu et al. 2005, p. 99) as there may be factors used in adult scales that are irrelevant or there may be latent factors that have been unexplored or unrealized due to not involving adolescents in the development of the scale.

One qualitative research paper has specifically investigated GRC in adolescence. Watts and Borders (2005) examined whether GRC theory and, more specifically, the four-factors of the GRCS and its modified version (GRCS-A) resonated with a small sample of American adolescent boys ( $N=11$ ,  $M=16.2$  years,  $SD=1.18$ ). The authors reported general support for the theory and recommended that the wording of some of the items of the GRCS-A be modified (i.e., “men” be changed to “males”). A major limitation with this study, however, is that the authors constrained the boys’ analysis to the four subscales derived from GRC theory. Thus, the boys were unable to describe forms of gender conflict that (potentially) operate outside the boundaries established by the initial formulation of GRC theory. Also, a systematic approach to asking boys what items were suitable/not suitable was not undertaken by the researchers nor were participants asked how they would reframe/improve certain items.

Recent developments in a masculine ideology scale for adolescents (Oransky and Fisher 2009) highlight the importance of involving adolescents in the scale development process. The “Meanings of Adolescent Masculinity Scale” (MAMS) aimed to assess the “degree to which one endorses or rejects traditional male roles” (p. 59). This measure of masculine ideology was informed by a qualitative investigation “of boy’s” conceptions of what it means to be masculine in today’s society” (Oransky and Fisher 2009, p. 61). The MAMS contains four subscales:

“Constant Effort” (i.e., boys must maintain a confident, tough, and strong image in order to perform masculinity), “Emotional Restriction” (i.e., boys need to be stoic and refrain from sharing their feelings with others in order to be masculine), “Heterosexism” (i.e., one must not show any attitudes and behaviors associated with femininity or homosexuality), and “Social Teasing” (i.e., boys must be able to tease other boys and stand up to teasing from other boys in order to be masculine).<sup>5</sup>

Factors such as “Constant Effort” and “Social Teasing” were identified as unique factors in the MAMS and underscore the importance of involving members of the target population for which the scale has been developed (i.e., adolescent males). Through discussions with adolescents, this masculine norm and expectation was identified and items reflecting the salience of this dynamic for adolescent males were included in the development of the MAMS. Further, Cournoyer and Mahalik (1995) found that men may experience *different* patterns of GRC at *different* developmental stages, suggesting that adolescent males (potentially) adhere to aspects of masculine ideology dissimilar to their adult counterparts.

*Response Format.* The same 6-point response option used in the GRCS was adopted (i.e., “Strongly Disagree” to “Strongly Agree”). One item loading on the RE factor (i.e., “I often have trouble finding words that describe how I am feeling”) and one item in the RABBM factor (i.e., “I am sometimes hesitant to show my affection to men”) are not optimal with a strongly agree/disagree response format.

*Subscale Difficulties.* Notwithstanding the criticism of the SPC factor (i.e., that it measures masculine ideology instead of GRC), this issue was not addressed in the development of the GRCS-A (Blazina et al. 2005). The SPC factor was reduced from 13 items to 6 on a factor now labeled, the “Need for Success and Achievement” (NSA). The absence of items reflecting competition and power over others was notable due to six of those items being excluded from the adapted version and one further item “I judge other people’s value by their level of achievement and success,” loading onto the “Conflict Between Work, School, and Family” factor. Most of the remaining items focus on the importance of success through competition, the importance of money, and doing well (e.g., “Doing well all the time is important to me” and “I strive to be more successful than others”). Blazina et al. (2005) also observed that the NSA was the only factor not related to negative mental health indicators noting that “results may suggest this subscale is more reflective of the positive aspects of masculine ideology rather than measuring gender-role conflict” (p. 43) and suggested that striving for success during adolescence is a protective factor against “conduct disturbance” (p. 43). These results are similar to those reported by Galligan et al. (2010). They, too, suggested that different items need to be developed and that further research relating to success, power, and competition be conducted.

Further, items of the NSA factor were changed to include drive for success within the area of school (e.g., “I sometimes define my personal value by my career success” was changed to “Sometimes I define my personal value by my success at school”). This change occurred despite research suggesting that doing well

in sports may be a great priority for boys (Messner 1992; Steinfeldt et al. 2011). Items focusing on athletic prowess may have been more appropriate.

The equivalent CBWFR factor for the GRCS-A (i.e., CWSF) has been criticized by Watts and Border (2005), whose qualitative research indicated that CBWFR related only to older adolescents. The item content was criticized for the inclusion of activities such as “career” and “job,” activities that did not apply to younger adolescents and the omission of extracurricular activities, which are germane to this age group.

*Age Appropriateness.* A different constellation of masculine ideology exists for adolescent males than their adult counterparts (Oransky and Fisher 2009) and it is reasonable to assume that this constellation produces unique expectations, pressures, and restrictions to this age cohort. Some of the features that differentiate adolescent males’ experiences from their adult counterparts are (a) dependence on parents, (b) living at home, (c) pressures from school (e.g., teachers), and (d) being in close proximity with others their own age (e.g., girls and boys). Further, the relevance of different forms of masculinity may be more intense for younger males, especially those functioning within an institutional setting such as secondary school—an environment which Connell (2005) describes as “a masculinity making device” (p. 131). Inspection of the GRCS-A suggests that these unique “conflicts” are not captured.

*Cultural Suitability.* The social constructionist view (or psychosocial view) of gender acknowledges that cultures have different norms with different expectations about masculinity and that masculinity “does not exist within a person, but rather within an interaction between a person’s experience and the norms of their culture” (Kahn 2009, p. 211). Whorley and Addis (2006) noted that the predominant research methodologies in the area of men and masculinities printed in US journals are quantitative in nature. They advocate that more qualitative research be conducted, in particular, research outside of North America. This recommendation concurs with several researchers’ suggestion that cross-cultural analyses of GRC are essential (e.g., O’Neil 2008b; Wester 2008). Further, Hearn and colleagues (2002) state that research in Ireland has been “slow to incorporate the study of men and masculinities into gender studies, and men as gendered subjects have remained largely outside of the gaze of critical [inquiry]” (p. 393). According to the authors, in comparison to research conducted in North America and the United Kingdom, Irish work in the field of men and masculinity has “barely begun” (p. 394).

## Purpose

The purpose of the current investigation was to determine how the GRC theory and, more specifically, the scale items of the GRCS-A were evaluated by a sample of Irish adolescent males. We believe this type of inquiry serves as a critical step in formulating a measure of GRC that is better attuned to the lived experiences of adolescent boys.



## Method

### *Participants*

As part of a qualitative examination of the patterns of gender role conflict among Irish adolescents, a subsample of 41 boys was recruited from six secondary schools in the Republic of Ireland. Their mean age was 15 years and 10 months ( $SD = 1.6$  years; range 13–19 years).

Nine focus groups were conducted, with the number of discussants per group ranging from 2 (one focus group) to 5 (four focus groups). To maximize the representativeness of discussants' experiences, boys from every school year were targeted (i.e., one focus group was conducted with 1st year, 2nd year, 3rd year, 5th year, and 6th year students and four focus groups were carried out with 4th year students).<sup>6</sup> Four individual interviews also were conducted (i.e., interviews were conducted with 1st, 2nd, 5th, and 6th year students).

Participants were recruited from six schools from both the east and west of Ireland; two schools were from urban areas (i.e., School A and B, both in Dublin city), one school was from a semi-urban area (i.e., School C, in Tralee, Co. Kerry), and three schools were from rural areas (i.e., School D, Co. Kerry; School E, Co. Clare; and School F, Co. Mayo).

Two of these schools were English-speaking (School E and F) and four were Irish-speaking schools; however, all of the boys enrolled in the latter institutions were fluent in English. No differences emerged in terms of thematic content between participants from Irish-speaking and English-speaking schools. Four of these schools were coeducational schools, one school was an all-boys school (E), and one school had mixed-sex classes for senior cycles (School B; 5th and 6th year). Again, no differences emerged in terms of thematic content between participants from mixed-sex and single-sex schools.

### *Procedure*

Ethical approval was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Schools were contacted by post or by email and were followed up by phone or, when practical, a face-to-face meeting with the principal of the school. Following approval from the board of management of each school, times and dates were scheduled for the senior author to come to the school and speak with students.

To recruit participants, the researcher spoke in a number of classrooms outlining what involvement in the study would entail. Parental consent forms were handed out for students to bring to their parent(s)/guardian(s) to be signed. Only boys returning signed parental consent forms were permitted to take part in a focus group or individual interview. The interviews were scheduled for the following week and

all were conducted within designated classrooms. Adhering to ethical guidelines, each interviewee and focus group discussant also signed a consent form, which outlined rights in terms of anonymity, confidentiality, and freedom to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Prior to interviews convening, participants were told that there were two stages to the interview. Stage one involved a general discussion and stage two involved participants discussing a questionnaire. Interviews and focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Individual interviews lasted between 23 and 80 min ( $M=48$ ,  $SD=19.8$ ), whereas the focus groups ran from 39 to 120 min ( $M=59$ ,  $SD=18.9$ ).

### *Measures*

#### *Gender Role Conflict Scale for Adolescent (GRCS-A)—discussed above* *Question guide*

At the start of the interviews/focus groups, participants were informed that they could say anything they wanted. A conversational exchange was encouraged at the beginning of the interview/focus group by asking participants general questions (e.g., “What is your age?” and “What classes are you taking at school?”).

Stage 1 consisted of questions that were designed to identify the stresses, expectations, and masculine norms prevalent among Irish adolescent males. To minimize the possible impact of the researchers’ preconceived ideas and expectancies, questions were open-ended and, initially, broadly framed (e.g., “I’m interested in the kinds of stress that young people experience and I was hoping you could say something about this”—see Appendix 1 for the full interview guide). A list of current themes in the literature was compiled, and as topics naturally arose during the interviews, these themes were checked off the list. Themes that were not explored during the course of the interview/focus group were revisited near the end (e.g., “If there was something bothering a friend of yours, would he talk to somebody about it?”). All questions were subject to revision; that is, any questions participants did not understand and/or had difficulty answering were rephrased. Participants also were encouraged to elaborate on certain topics by use of prompts (e.g., “Can you say a bit more about that?”).

Stage 2 involved presenting the GRCS-A to participants. Initially, they were asked to read through all the items and to make note of the suitability and appropriateness of each question and they were given 10 minutes to do so. Participants were asked open-ended questions regarding how they regarded the items on the questions. For example, participants were asked “Related to what we have been taking about just now, I was wondering if you’d mind reading through this questionnaire and tell me if you think these questions apply to Irish boys?” Participants were encouraged to discuss the content of each item, paying particular attention to the issue of cultural relevance (i.e., did the item have relevance to their lives as adolescents residing within the Republic of Ireland?). Items that lacked clarity and relevance were discussed and suggestions on improving items’ phrasing and wording were explored. Items that had particular relevance to male adolescents also were noted.

## ***Analysis***

Stage 2 was the primary focus of this analysis. All of the focus groups ( $N=9$ ) and personal interviews ( $N=4$ ) relating to stage 2 were reviewed by the principal investigator and seven transcripts of focus groups and interviews were sent to coauthor B (four focus groups and three individual interviews). In accordance with guidelines set out by Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis consisted of five phases.

Phase 1 involved becoming familiar with the data through reading the transcripts repeatedly. Interesting and important aspects of the transcripts, including figures of speech, phraseology, and gender dichotomies, were noted. In Phase 2, the principal investigator and coauthor read the transcripts and developed codes for text that was perceived as relevant to (1) masculine ideologies, idealized representations of masculinity and masculine norms; (2) gender role conflict; (3) the appropriateness of each item; (4) the participants' general impression of the scale; and (5) the positive and negative aspects of each item. In all cases, the principal investigator met with the coauthor to ensure that their identified codes reflecting, for example, masculine ideology and GRC, were similar. The remainder of the transcripts then were coded independently by each individual and grouped into themes (Phase 3). Phase 4 involved reviewing the quoted extracts to see if they fit the generated themes. Any emergent discrepancies between the principal investigator and coauthor B were discussed and resolved. Themes were then further refined in which the names and definitions of themes were consolidated (Phase 5). The frequency of approval and disapproval of each item was calculated by the primary investigator.

## **Results**

These discussions highlighted three themes concerning the use of the GRCS-A. Respondents indicated that some items (1) were inappropriately worded/phrased and irrelevant to the experiences of Irish adolescent males, (2) were deemed as being more appropriate for girls or homosexual boys, and (3) would cause some boys not to take the exercise seriously.

### ***Theme 1: Inappropriate Wording/Phrasing***

During the interview discussions, the boys highlighted a select number of problematic items related to the GRCS-A (i.e., items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 12, 13, 18, 21, 24 and 26,

**Table 1** The frequency and percentages for each item’s approval and disapproval

	√	x	Nonresponse	% of answered items (√)	% of answered items (x)	% of total items (√)	% of total items (x)	% of nonre- sponse items
Item 1	6	27	8	18	82	15	66	19
Item 2	8	24	9	25	75	20	59	21
Item 3	20	4	17	83	17	49	10	41
Item 4	11	14	16	44	56	27	34	39
Item 5	19	4	18	83	17	43	10	47
Item 6	11	10	20	52	48	27	24	49
Item 7	7	16	18	30	70	17	39	44
Item 8	20	3	18	87	13	49	7	44
Item 9	12	12	16	50	50	29	29	42
Item 10	14	6	11	70	30	34	15	51
Item 11	16	9	26	64	36	39	22	39
Item 12	16	12	14	57	43	39	29	32
Item 13	11	13	17	46	54	27	32	41
Item 14	15	7	19	68	32	37	17	46
Item 15	17	6	18	74	26	41	15	44
Item 16	18	4	19	82	18	44	10	46
Item 17	9	10	22	47	53	22	24	54
Item 18	13	9	19	59	41	32	22	46
Item 19	10	13	18	44	56	24	17	59
Item 20	14	7	20	67	33	34	17	49
Item 21	15	6	20	63	37	37	15	48
Item 22	18	4	19	82	18	44	10	46
Item 23	13	8	20	62	38	32	20	48
Item 24	5	14	22	26	74	12	34	54
Item 25	16	6	19	73	27	39	15	46
Item 26	10	7	24	59	41	24	17	59
Item 27	11	8	22	58	42	27	20	53
Item 28	14	4	23	78	22	34	10	56
Item 29	11	13	17	46	54	27	32	41

Note: 9 of the 29 items received greater proportions of disapproval

and 29—see Table 1 for evaluation of items by adolescents and see Appendix 2 for the wording of these items). These items were grouped into the following sub-themes: (a) problems with wording and phrasing of particular items (items 1, 2, 6, 7, 12, 13, 29), (b) contextual issues of items (item 4), (c) focus of items (items 18, 21, 24, and 26), and (d) cultural differences reflected in constructed items (items 1, 2, and 7). The frequency of each item’s approval and disapproval was also estimated (see Table 1).

## Problems with Wording and Phrasing of Items

*Item (1) “Verbally expressing my love to another man is hard for me”*

Fiun: “I’m not gay.”

Joe: “Yeah, what the hell.”

Fiun: “Is hard for...”

Aengus: “It still sounds wrong.”

Cillian: “Take out the love part.”

Derick: “Why would we express our love to one another?”

(Focus group, 4th year, age 15 years old)

Twenty-seven out of 33 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of this item, many of whom highlighted the word “love” as being inappropriate for use with adolescent samples. Responses to this item, which reflects restrictive affection between men (RABBM), illustrate that intimate expression between men does not appear to be part of the adolescent male script. This was evident in Derick’s response (above) when he questioned “why would we [i.e., adolescent boys] express love to one another?” Further, one of the participants wrote beside this item “No, because I don’t find any man attractive” (focus group, 1st year student, aged 12–13 years old). However, the boys participating in this study made it clear they “knew” they were friends with one another through actions and nonverbal expressions. For example, “going downtown together during lunch time” or “staying over in a friend’s house” or “playing football” with one another were ways of “doing,” “showing,” and “knowing” friendship. The phrase “hard for me” was highlighted in a number of instances and was followed by laughter because boys associated this phrase with getting an erection.

When boys were asked how they would improve the item, some suggested changing the words “verbally,” “love,” and “hard for me” (see below).

Graham: “Verbally expressing my love to another man” is that I’m not being funny but it....

All: [laughing]

Graham: Sorry, sorry... I’m not being funny, but in a gay way or in a friend way?

Bernard: Yeah.

Interviewer: Sorry?

Graham: Did you mean that in a gay way or straight?

Interviewer: I think they mean in a friendship way.

Pádraig: Nobody is ever going to say that.

Alex: Yeah...

Graham: Yeah, I’d say if you make it in a different context.

Alex: Maybe, ah.

Interviewer: How would you?

Alex: Showing that....

Graham: It’s difficult for me to tell my friends how much they mean to me.

Bernard: Yeah.

Alex: Yeah.

(Focus group, 4th year, aged 15–16 years old)

*Item (2) “Affection with other men makes me tense”*

All: [laughter]

Eamon: ... it’s getting weirder.

Padraig: ... yeah, it is.

Eamon: I don’t get [feel] comfortable about these questions ...

(Focus group, 4th year, 15 years old)

Twenty-four out of 32 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of this item.

Joe: “Affection with another man makes me tense”... that’s kind of, again, very strong like... am... “affection with another man makes me tense”... what kind of affection, hugging or something? Well, you wouldn’t be affectionate, you’d kind of do, you just kinda d’you know punch them in the arm and kind of laugh about it. You go “Oh ya you are sound guy” like, d’you know, it wouldn’t make you tense like really... uncomfortable I suppose would be a better word than tense.

(Individual Interview, 6th year, aged 18 years and 4 months)

In response to this item, one boy wrote on the questionnaire “No, unless they are near my thing [penis]” (focus group, aged 12–13 years old, 1st year student).

Graham suggested that the item be removed from the questionnaire.

Alex: “Affection with other men” yeah it does “makes me tense.” Very... am don’t say that even, cause its...

All: [laughing]

Graham: I’d just get rid of that question.

(Focus group, 4th year, aged 16 years old)

*Item 6 – “Being personal with other men makes me feel anxious”*

Ten out of 21 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of this item. Respondents commented on the use of the word “anxious,” suggesting that it was “too strong a word” (Dara, individual interview, 14 years and 1 month), and Damien (focus group, 6th year, aged 17 years 11 months) suggested that the word “uncomfortable” would be more suitable for adolescent males.

*Item 7 – “Men who are too friendly to me make me wonder about their sexual preference”*

Sixteen out of 23 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of this item. Some of the respondents believed that this item was too broadly framed and lacked clarity and that certain situational contexts should be included.

- Graham: "Men who are too friendly to me make me wonder about their sexual preference."  
 Pádraig: Definitely not.  
 Bernard: I don't think they do.  
 Interviewer: Is that ok?  
 Graham: It depends on how friendly friendly is.

(Focus group, 4th group, 15–16 year olds)

Being "too friendly" was highlighted as something that men don't really show, and by being "too friendly," your sexuality was going to be questioned. This is illustrated in the following exchange:

- Tim: I dunno you don't find men, you wouldn't find men too friendly like, I suppose the odd one alright.  
 Anthony: You'd be wondering what's the story with him like d'you know?  
 Interviewer: Would you be wondering if he was gay?  
 Anthony: Yeah, you would I suppose, yeah.

(Focus group, 5th year, 17 years old)

The item does reflect a dynamic present in adolescent lived experiences; however, most boys did not agree with the item as it was presented. As Eoin commented, "you wouldn't put those words in it."

Certain words and phrases present in items 12, 13, and 29 were not understood by participants. For example, in response to item 12 (i.e., "*It's hard for me to express my emotional needs to others*")—12 out of 28 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of this item), Graham said "What are emotional needs? I don't know if we're all thinking that [the same thing] but I don't know what it really means." In response to item 13 (i.e., "*When I am personally involved with others, I do not express my strong feelings*")—13 out of 24 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of this item), some respondents asked "what does personally involved mean? What do you mean by that?" (Dara, individual interview, 14 years and 1 month). Finally, for item 29 (i.e., "*I strive to be more successful than others*")—13 out of 24 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of this item), Dominic, for instance, asked "what's 'strive'?" (focus group, 2nd year, age 15 years).

### Contextual Difficulties with Items

#### Item 4: Hugging other men is difficult for me

Fourteen out of 25 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of this item. Some of the participants highlighted that this item was unclear because under some circumstances "hugging" was acceptable. For example, Donal responded "I don't really see the point in that question... it depends what way they're hugging." Eoin interjected by saying "if you're hugging after you



score a goal or you're hugging because...you want a bit of loving [laugh]." Donal added "cause you'd be grand hugging someone after scoring a goal as I said, but if you just walked up to him on the street and hugged him... it'd be a bit odd like, playing for the wrong team like" (focus group, 4th year, 15 years old). Homonegative attitudes surfaced in this exchange, suggesting that in general, restrictions exist relating to intimate expressions between boys; however, under certain situational contexts (i.e., during sports games), physical displays of affection were acceptable. Other examples where "hugging" boys is permissible are articulated below:

Joe: D'you know if you win a match, [would] you go up and hug them like, well, I suppose that could be a straightforward. Yeah, it could be a question; yeah, like, most fellas wouldn't care about hugging another man like... you wouldn't just go up and hug a lad like... am but I suppose if he came back after 17 years or something and seeing [him] for the first time and you gave him a hug like I suppose that would be grand, and winning a match and... something like that...

(Individual interview, 6th year, 17 years and 5 months)

For the purpose of measurement, including a specific situational context to this item would be preferable because it would be less confusing to participants.

### Focus of Certain Items ("School" Rather than "Sport" or Hobbies)

*Items reflecting the CBWSF factor ("My career, job, or school affects the quality of my leisure or family life" (item 18), "My need to work or study keeps me from my family or leisure more than I would like" (item 20) and "My work or school often disrupts other parts of my life" (item 21)).*

Across all the interview discussions, 9 out of 24 boys disapproved of item 18, and 7 and 6 out of 21 boys disapproved of items 20 and 21, respectively. The appraisal of these item depended on whether the boys were in exam years (i.e., 3rd year or 5th or 6th year depending on the school). In a focus group interview with 4th year students, Alex qualified these items by saying: "it depends. I suppose, if you're in third year or sixth year." Later in the interview, he said, "I suppose this year it's grand [fine] because we don't do much in school" (aged 16 years and 5 months). These items also emphasized the importance of "school" rather than "sport" or other hobbies, a criticism that emerged for items 23 "*Overwork and stress caused by the need to achieve on the job or in school affects or/hurts my life,*" 24 "*Getting to the top of my class is important to me,*" and 26 "*Sometimes I define my personal value by my success at school.*"<sup>7</sup> Respondents noted that the emphasis of being good at "school" did not represent hegemonic masculinity within boys. For example, Tadhg explains that boys can strive to be good at many different activities and not necessarily "school." Further, he suggests that people who are not good at sports tend to focus more on school, implying that sports rather than school is the hegemonic standard to which boys attempt to excel.

Further, similar to Watts and Border's (2005) findings, Tadhg notes that people have different interests depending on their self-identification (i.e., what their "image" is).

Interviewer: Is that important for fellas?

Tadhg: No, not in general; there's always a few [people] that think "Oh you have to be [strive to be good at school], there [are] some people.... People like me [want] to be like the best at sport all of the time; it's more important to me to be honest with you; there's other people [that] say don't play sports, they don't have any other hobbies [that] they are good at, they're good at school...

Interviewer: It depends on what you're kind of interested in.

Tadhg: Yeah, there (are) lads in the year... they're known as, they're known as really good hurlers and there's other people in the school and they're known for being good at school and they feel that they have to be really good at school... I don't think that question like...

Interviewer: If it was reworded to kind of...

Tadhg: If you like getting to the top of ... yeah, of your hobby or something like that or, get to the top of whatever your image is.

(Focus group, 6th year, 17–19 years old)

Also, it was recommended to delete the words "or hurts" from item 23 (focus group, aged 15 years old, 4th year students).

### **Cultural Appropriateness: "Like the Black People Say"**

Many of the words used may reflect cultural differences between Ireland and America. For example, Kevin commenting on the use of the word "love" (item 1) said "like the black people say" (Kevin, focus group, 2nd year, aged 14–15 years). This was followed by Dominic when he said "it's too strong" (Dominic, focus group, 2nd year, aged 14–15 years). This may allude to cultural differences in Irish boys' use of vocabulary, their interpretation of certain words, and their openness to using emotive words.

A number of items were evaluated positively and deemed appropriate/suitable by adolescent. Items 3, 5, 8, 11, 12, 15, 16, and 22 evidenced the strongest levels of approval and reflect items across each GRCS-A subscale. These items, except item 22, represent the difficulty boys experience when deviating from the tradition of being non-expressive.

### ***Theme 2: It's for Homosexuals or Girls***

Adolescent males interpreted the items in the RE and the RABBM factors as being more appropriate for girls or for homosexual boys. When a separate focus group was asked whether they believed the items were suitable for Irish adolescents, Bryan

and Joe said “No” and started to laugh. Fiún quickly answered by saying “Yes, if you’re giving these sheets to a woman they would” and Bryan added “It’s for homosexuals” (focus group, 4th year, 15 years old).

Ciaran: I think its phrasing is a bit... it nearly makes you sound a bit, well not really, yeah, it kinda nearly makes you sound homosexual the way you say “expressing my love to another man”...

(Individual interview, 6th year, aged 17 years and 5 months)

As Donal (focus group) commented that “expressing my love just sounds like Romeo and Juliet like, Romeo and another man.”

### ***Theme 3: Nobody Would Answer That Seriously***

Some respondents said that the items presented would cause them or other boys not to take the exercise seriously. For example, when the focus group was presented with the item “Men who are too friendly to me make me wonder about their sexual preference” (item 7), Donal (focus group, 4th year, aged 15 years and 4 months) responded by saying “Nobody would answer that seriously, no boys... they’d only try and act funny; well, I would anyways.” When the group was asked what they thought about the items relating to the factor RABBM, Eoin replied “the first five or six, they’re shocking[ly] bad.” When asked what it was about the items they wouldn’t take seriously, Donal said “they’re all about loving men; who’s going to take that serious?” Further, Donal said “I wouldn’t take that serious... some people are just going to write down stuff...taking the piss.”

The GRCS-A was presented to participants and they were asked to evaluate each item in the context of discussions during stage 1. Bryan said “I didn’t realize the questions would be like this.” Fiun said “I wouldn’t do it” (focus group, 4th year, 15 years old). Interestingly, during one of the focus group interviews, the interviewer left the room for a couple of minutes. In the meantime, the following was said about the items: “Joke of question” (Dara, focus group, 6th year, 18 years and 7 months), “In all fairness, the first ten of those questions are fucking stupid” (Colin, 18 years and 9 months); this was followed by laughing (referring to the items in the RE and RABBM factor). Further, during an individual interview, Garry explained that it would discourage some boys from taking the exercise seriously but qualified his statement when he said “[I’m] not saying that all men would.”

## **Interim Discussion**

There was general support for the GRC theory among the Irish adolescent sample; however, issues were raised about a number of items presented in the GRCS-A. Many of the problematic items reflecting RE and RABBM were criticized for the wording

and phrasing used, suggesting that cultural differences exist in the language that Irish adolescents use in comparison to American students. [These issues were not raised by Watts and Borders (2005)]. Emotionally “laden” words such as “love,” “affection,” and “anxious” were deemed inappropriate and “too strong” for Irish adolescent males, suggesting that different standards or more restricted standards of expression may exist among adolescent boys in Ireland. Across most interviews, items 1, 2, and 7 were highlighted as being most inappropriate. Boys deemed these items, among others, as being more suitable for girls and homosexual boys, evidencing the associations of certain phrases, words, and expressions with homonegativity and femininity. A minority of the participants supported the sentiments of the items and understood what the GRCS-A items were trying to imply, but most were very critical of the presentation and structure of the items.

Other items on the GRCS-A were criticized for lacking clarity and not accounting for situational contexts in which certain behaviors were perfectly acceptable (i.e., hugging another boy after someone scored a goal). Items particular to the NSA and CBWFR factors were criticized for not taking into account the hegemonic ideals of adolescent males; for example, items seemed to overemphasize achievement in school rather than other extracurricular activities and hobbies. The emphasis on sports, was not acknowledged or included in any of the amended items of the GRCS-A. The incorporation of these aspects of adolescent experience would reflect the complexity and individual differences among adolescent males, aspects that were overlooked in the development of the GRCS-A.

Participants’ approval of the items on the CBWFR factor depended on adolescents in exam years (i.e., 3rd year and 6th year students). This observation supported Watts and Border’s (2005) findings that these items were relevant to older adolescents who were preparing for end of school exams.

Participants indicated that if they were presented with the items on the GRCS-A, they would not take the exercise seriously. In its present form, boys suggested that the scale would cause others to “take the piss” or to not participate in the research questionnaire. One participant explained that certain boys, but not all, may be enticed to spoil their research participation due to the presence of aforementioned problematic items. This assertion suggests, firstly, that suboptimal items could prompt a skeptical individual to spoil the questionnaire. Secondly, it suggests that a very important cohort of young males may be excluded from this type of research. It is possible that these individuals are cognizant of masculine standards/norms, but will not respond “appropriately” to questions they regard as devoid of personal meaning.

Some researchers have acknowledged that the incorporation of items relating to sexuality may “create an insurmountable obstacle to collecting data with young adolescents” (Levant 2011, p. 770). Specifically, in the development of the adolescent version of the Male Role Norm Inventory (MRNI-A; Brown 2002 as cited in Levant 2011), the researchers decided not to include both the “Hatred of Homosexuals” and “Non-relational Attitudes towards Sexuality” subscales. Contrary to this assertion that “controversial” items should simply be removed, a more fruitful approach may involve asking adolescents to reframe items in language that is age appropriate. When the boys participating in this study were asked to improve items’ presentation,

they came up with questions that were deemed more suitable and acceptable to other boys. For example, rather than “verbally expressing my love to another man is difficult for me,” Graham (focus group, aged 15–16 years) suggested that the alternative version “It’s difficult for me to tell my friends how much they mean to me” would be more appropriate. This item was less explicit than the original item and grounded in the language that boys use and understand. Further, many of the items were deemed appropriate and suitable for adolescent use. In particular, items were supported as seen by responses on Table 1. Approved items were seen across all factors with the most supporting the RAM (three items) and RE factors (two items). Thus, there appears to be support for GRC theory; however, the difficulties evident with participants’ interpretation of the items used to measure this theory underscores the need to include boys in the scale development stage and lends itself to developing items and factors previously disregarded as “insurmountable issues.” These results also support psychometric guidelines suggesting the use of qualitative interviews with target populations to inform item development, guidelines that have been incorporated by those developing contemporary masculine ideology scales (e.g., Chu et al. 2005; Oransky and Fisher 2009). Further, Levant (2011) suggests that developing instruments should incorporate a “mixed methods approach, starting with focus groups and individual interviews to generate items” (p. 770).

## Discussion

In this chapter, a number of criticisms of the GRCS were outlined: (a) the lack of information relating to the development of scale items; (b) the fact that not all items measure conflict; (c) the observation that elements of devaluation, restriction, and violation are missing from scale items; (d) the limited attention that GRC toward others is given (i.e., it is measured by a single item); (e) the absence of face or content validity from the vantage of adolescent boys; (f) mismatches between items and the response format; and (g) conceptual issues relating to what each factor is measuring (e.g., SPC as a measure of masculine ideology). These issues relate to all the versions of GRCS – the GRCS-SF, the GRCS-A, and the K-GRCS-A.

With respect to the adolescent version of the measure, data from our focus groups and personal interviews with Irish adolescents illustrate that a number of items were identified as problematic (i.e., items 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 12, 13, 18, 21, 24 and 29). Further, myriad issues relating to administering questions to Irish adolescents surfaced. For example, the phrasing and wording of items were criticized and were deemed as being inappropriate for boys and deemed more suited for homosexual males and girls. Participants explained that presenting the items without alteration would preclude boys from taking the questionnaire seriously or refusing to complete the measure. These assertions have serious consequences for the utility of GRCS-A, at the very least among Irish males, and for future research conducted with this scale.

The importance of including the target population (i.e., adolescents) was demonstrated with adolescents from the Republic of Ireland and the advantages of involving adolescent boys in the item development process were underscored

by (a) the identification of a number of problematic items and (b) suggestions for improving items to incorporate cultural nuances in masculinity standards and ideals specific to Irish adolescents.

The definition of GRC “has evolved” (O’Neil 2008a, p. 362) since the concept was originally theorized in the early 1980s (O’Neil 1981a, b, 1982). During this period, progress has been made in terms of gender equality and the dissemination of gender research findings has made an impact on the public consciousness. For example, RABBM scores have significantly declined in the past 25 years (McGinness 2011), suggesting that comfort with same-sex relationships may have increased during this period. Also, some of the discrepancies between the GRCS and the GRC theory discussed herein may allude to this reality. The standards of measurement have progressed in the past 26 years with the emergence of SEM cutoff points, standards that were not available during the periods when the GRCS was developed (Norwalk et al. 2011). Examinations of the psychometric properties by means of CFAs have consistently fallen short of cutoff points. In spite of these social and psychometric developments, the same measure of GRC exists and has been unchanged since it was designed in 1986. Given the success of the GRCS since its inception and the acknowledgement that “measures of the gender-related conflicts or stresses of manhood are likely to predict male’s behavior more directly than measures of masculinity ideology” (Thompson et al. 1992, p. 573), it is surprising that other measures of conflict have not been developed. The popularity and utility of the GRCS and the contribution it has made to the field of men and masculinities may have awarded it more latitude with respect to its performance on indices of psychometric quality. It is also possible that researchers may find the breadth of GRC theory, the theoretical ambiguity (i.e., the distinctions between the GRSP and GRC theory or the situational contexts versus what the GRCS is measuring), and the definitional difficulties of the GRC theory challenging to negotiate.

The results of this examination of the GRCS-A scale items support the theoretical tenets of the GRC theory and reflect the realities of the masculine ideology approach. *Masculinity ideology* refers “to beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behavior” (Pleck 1995, p. 19), incorporating a social constructionist (psychosociological) framework, implying that within each culture, there are varied expectations of males. GRC is a “cofactor of masculinity ideology” (O’Neil 2008a, p. 364) and is included in all the situational definitions of GRC. Consequently, GRC must be manifested differently within different cultures. O’Neil (2011) acknowledged these premises stating that using “American gender role concepts exclusively without grasping the cultural history of another country oversimplifies and clouds the real differences between two cultures” (p. 384) and explaining that theories emanating from any country may “have limited ability to explain attitudes and psychological processes in any other country” (p. 368).

The difficulties with adopting masculine ideologies and GRCSs from other cultures are that potential factors relevant to other cultures are left unexplored. Explicitly, one concern about “role” theories is that when researchers identify and produce specific themes [for a measure], “we can only learn about masculinity as it relates to that theme” (Kahn 2009, p. 64) which means that experiences

of masculinity that are related to a variety of other experiences are omitted. Therefore, the importance of developing measures of GRC that are culturally nuanced and that are language appropriate to that country cannot be understated. Many researchers have called for more international research on the GRC theory (Heppner and Heppner 2008; O'Neil 2011), and based on the findings of this research and our critique of the GRCS, we recommend that new measures of the GRC be developed.

Norwalk et al. (2011) recommended that “revising and updating the GRCS would not only improve its psychometric properties but also increase its viability as a current and future measure of gender role conflict in men” (p. 141). Attempts have been made to improve the psychometric properties of the GRCS by developing a short-form version of the measure. However, many of the criticisms relating to the foundation of the measure and the construct validity of the items still apply to the GRCS-SF.

Given the breadth of GRC theory, new measures should be developed that quantify and focus on individual aspects of GRC. We propose that two measures should be developed that capture (1) GRC within the person and experienced from others and (2) GRC expressed toward others. The reasons for grouping these situational contexts in this way are as follows: (a) inspection of items on the GRCS seem to reflect GRC within the person and experienced from others (i.e., the fear of experiencing GRC from others); (b) theoretically, aligning with a social constructionist framework and social learning theory, GRC is internalized from social surroundings and this makes it difficult to distinguish between GRC within the person and GRC experienced from others; (c) GRC theory assumes that those who experience GRC within the self and from others are going to express GRC toward others; however, these aspects need to be disentangled and empirically tested; and (d) GRC within the person and GRC from others appear to be conceptually similar.

We recommend new measures of GRC take into account (1) the age of the participant, (2) GRC within the person/from others versus GRC toward others, (3) the situational contexts of GRC, and (4) conflicts potentially emanating from both traditional and nontraditional masculine ideologies. This approach would provide a more nuanced and in-depth understanding of gender role conflict as it pertains to men.

## Notes

1. “The masculine mystique is seen as a front that men put up by giving up their femininity (expression and emotion) in order to maintain their position or power” (Kahn 2009, p. 221).
2. We acknowledge that causal language has been used in the presence of many studies that are correlational in nature. However, it is possible that those evidencing compromised psychological well-being are more likely to regard themselves as “defective men.”
3. The endorsement of traditional masculinities can have negative consequences for either the male himself or others because many of these characteristics are inherently negative.
4. These contexts are (a) deviating from or violating gender role norms of masculinity ideology; (b) trying to meet or failing to meet gender role norms of masculinity ideology; (c) experiencing discrepancies between real and ideal self-concepts; (d) devaluing and/or restricting oneself for failing to meet masculinity ideology norms; (e) experiencing personal devaluations and/or



restrictions from others for deviating from masculinity ideology norms; and (f) personally devaluing, restricting, or violating others because of their deviation from or conformity to masculinity ideology norms (O'Neil 2008a).

5. However, the endorsement of masculine ideology items do not differentiate between males that are affected by the presence of an expectation/masculine norm and males that merely acknowledge the existence of, but are not affected by, this expectation/masculine norm.
6. A total sample of 41 participants were given the GRCS-A to evaluate each item by indicating an "x" next to the items they deemed inappropriate/unsuitable and a "tick" next to items they deemed appropriate/suitable. Stage 2 of the interview process, in some instances, only lasted a number of minutes, whereas other interviews were longer. As some boys omitted certain items, an estimate of the approval of items is based on those who indicated either a "tick" or an "x" to a specific question. Hence, there is a difference in the total number of participants for each item.
7. Eight out of 21 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of item 23, 14 out of 19 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of item 24, and 7 out of 17 participants across both focus groups and individual interviews disapproved of item 26.

## Appendix 1

### *Expectations of Adolescent Males*

1. I'm interested in the expectations that young people experience and I was hoping you could say something about this.
2. What are the sources of these expectations?
3. Are there differences in these expectations with age?
4. How do you deal with these expectations?

### *Stress in Adolescents*

5. I'm interested in the kinds of stress that young people experience and I was hoping you could say something about this.
6. What are the sources of these stresses?
7. Are there differences in stresses with age?
8. How do you deal with these stresses?

### *Social Norms*

9. Generally speaking, are there differences in the ways fellas act as opposed to how girls act?
10. Are there differences in the way fellas act in front of parents/teachers and the way they would generally act without parents/teacher being around?

11. Are there differences in the way fellas act when they're older or younger?
12. Are there certain ways a fella should act?
13. Are there inappropriate ways for a fella to act?

If so,

- (a) Why?
  - (b) What would happen if someone acted like this (deviating or violating norms)?
  - (c) What is likely to be said to someone/about someone if they did?
  - (d) Would people think less of someone as a result? If so, in what way?
14. Are there differences between how fellas act around their male friends and how they might act around their female friends?

If so,

- (a) Why?
- (b) What are these differences?

## **Appendix 2**

### ***The Gender Role Conflict Scale for Adolescents (GRCS-A)***

#### **Restricted Affection Between Men (RAM)**

1. Verbally expressing my love to another man is hard for me.
2. Affection with other men makes me tense.
3. Expressing my emotions to other men is risky.
4. Hugging other men is difficult for me.
5. I am sometimes hesitant to show my affection to men because of how others might judge me.
6. Being very personal with other men makes me feel anxious.
7. Men who are too friendly to me make me wonder about their sexual preference (men or women).

#### **Restricted Emotionality (RE)**

8. I have difficulty telling others I care about them.
9. Strong emotions are difficult for me to understand.
10. Expressing feelings makes me feel open to attack by other people.
11. It's hard for me to talk about my feelings with others.
12. It's hard for me to express my emotional needs to others.

13. When I am personally involved with others, I do not express my strong feelings.
14. I often have trouble finding words that describe how I am feeling.
15. I do not like to show my emotions to other people.
16. Telling others about my strong feelings is difficult to me.

### **Conflict Between Work, School, and Family (CWSF)**

17. I feel torn between my hectic work or school schedule and caring for my health.
18. My career, job, or school affects the quality of my leisure or family life.
19. I judge other people's value by their level of achievement and success.
20. Finding time to relax is difficult for me.
21. My need to work or study keeps me from my family or leisure more than I would like.
22. My work or school often disrupts other parts of my life (home, health, leisure).
23. Overwork and stress caused by the need to achieve on the job or in school affects or/hurts my life.

### **Need for Success and Achievement (NSA)**

24. Getting to the top of my class is important to me.
25. Making money is part of my idea of being a successful man.
26. Sometimes I define my personal value by my success at school.
27. I worry about failing and how it affects my doing well as a man.
28. Doing well all the time is important to me.
29. I strive to be more successful than others.

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