Men's Work-Related Stress and Mental Health: Illustrating the Workings of Masculine Role Norms

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Abstract

Although a strong relationship between employment and men's mental health has been identified, theoretical linkages between masculinity, employment, and mental health are not well developed and mental health supports that account for gender and employment are correspondingly inadequate. The purpose of this study is to contribute to theoretical understandings of men's employment-related mental health experience and raise possibilities for gender-responsive employer supports for men's mental health. Specifically, this study is a secondary analysis of narrative accounts from 18 men employed in male-dominated occupations about their employment-related mental health. Results of this study present evidence of processes by which theoretical concepts of masculine role norms influence work-related stress and mental health including: (a) injunctive norms, which operate through an internal sense of the cultural "shoulds" and "should nots"; (b) descriptive norms, which are communicated through the behaviors that a man sees other men enacting in his immediate environment; and (c) cohesive norms, which exert influence through observations of how men who are leaders, behave. Men's insights into the complexity of employment-related stress and mental health according to masculine role norms related to work demands and leadership modeling and messaging are discussed. This study concludes with potential ways forward for employer support for men's mental health.

Research at the intersection of gender, mental health, and work has begun to uncover the complexity of how men identify with employment and its stresses, yet much remains to be learned about how to best support working men's mental health. The importance of employment to men's mental health is underlined by connections between men's unemployment and outcomes such as suicide (Platt & Hawton, 2000), hopelessness (Soares, Macassa, Grossi, & Viitasara, 2008), and impairment of mental health (Paul & Moser, 2009). Even when men retire from employment voluntarily, men may experience unemployment as a "roleless role" in which mental health problems present through deteriorations in personal meaning and social support (Gill et al., 2006; Shapiro & Yarborough-Hayes, 2008). Evidence of work as foundational to men's mental health is further elaborated by qualitative work

focused on men's mental health problems. In a meta-ethnography of 38 qualitative articles gathering men's perspectives on the causes of their depression by Hoy (2012),

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men's firsthand explanations for depression rarely invoked biology and were characterized by abundant references to work-related factors such as unemployment, poverty, financial insecurity, and stressful working conditions (Hoy, 2012, p. 212). The profound impacts of employment on men's mental health therefore begin at the very presence or absence of paid employment status and are persistent throughout the life course.

For men who are employed, work itself has far-reaching implications for mental health. While jobs entailing moderate levels of strain appear to have a protective effect against the development of depression for men in the wider workforce (J. Wang, Patten, Currie, Sareen, & Schmitz, 2012), men have been found to be at higher risk for depression than women in work conditions of high strain (Woo & Postolache, 2008) and low job control (J. L. Wang, Lesage, Schmitz, & Drapeau, 2008). The prevalence of depression within male-dominated workforce groups such as transportation, police, and manual occupations is higher than in the general population, and has been associated with factors such as job demands, time pressure, and effort-reward imbalance (Roche et al., 2016; Z. Wang et al., 2010). In addition to mental health risks arising from occupational characteristics of male-dominated work, researchers have also theorized that male-dominated work environments can play host to "masculinity culture contests," wherein social pressures and stigma to conform to gendered behavior may result in a "conflation of top performance with masculine gender performance" with deleterious impacts on employee mental health (Berdahl, Cooper, Glick, Livingston, & Williams, 2018, p. 430).

Although researchers have illuminated a strong relationship between employment and men's mental health, theoretical linkages between masculinity, employment, and mental health are at an early stage and mental health supports that account for gender and employment are correspondingly inadequate (Oliffe & Han, 2014). The gap in theory-informed services targeted to men has become pronounced amidst an increase in overall employer efforts to mitigate work stresses and support mental health. For example, the availability of counseling services offered through Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) continues to grow, with EAP now accessible to employees in 65% of large Canadian workplaces (Csiernik & Csiernik, 2012). Although EAP services have shifted from an early focus on addictions in the 1970s to an increasingly "broadbrush" approach, reflected for example in the availability of comprehensive family services (Kurzman, 2013), contemporary EAP programming has not been designed to accommodate men's unique relationships to mental health and work. Further, the Canadian National Standard for Psychological Health for Safety, a resource available to Canadian employers striving to improve mental health outcomes in the workplace, contains no reference to gender-specific dimensions of workplace mental health (Conference Board of Canada & Bureau de normalisation du Quebec, 2018). Gender is also absent from the findings about barriers to implementation and promising practices from a case study of 41 organizations that adopted the National Standard since 2014 (Wilson & Bradley, 2017).

While gender is not often part of the design of workplace mental health supports, or standards that guide design of workplace mental health supports, some researchers derive insights about the workings of gender and workplace mental health by examining the effectiveness of workplace mental health support programs. Through a scoping review of international health promotions interventions for men, Seaton et al. (2017) collected nine reports of workplace-based interventions, including five in male-dominated workplaces and four in more gender-balanced workplaces. While none of the workplace interventions reviewed were gender specific, women participants tended to report better mental health outcomes than men following interventions that were delivered in gender-balanced workplaces (p. 1831). At the same time, these researchers reported that interventions designed to promote behavioral change appeared to yield better outcomes for men than those which encouraged men to participate in organizational change (p. 1831).

While findings about the nature and availability of EAP together with reports about the effectiveness of workplace mental health programs give evidence of broad developments in supporting employee mental health, employee mental health is unequivocally influenced by gender and these gender-influenced needs are not well understood and incorporated into employer-provided programs. A conspicuous gap remains in workplace gender analyses that are both theoretically-driven and applicable to the creation of male-centered workplace health promotion programs (Oliffe & Han, 2014, p. 47).

In the endeavor to build theoretical understandings from which to better support working men's mental health, this study is guided by concepts of masculine role norms, which describe the socialized expectations for how "being a man" should be embodied through men's thoughts, feelings, and actions (Addis, Reigeluth, & Schwab, 2016). A theoretical relationship between masculine role norms and work has been established through the development and use psychological instruments such as the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory (CMNI), which feature subscales of norms relating to work both indirectly, for example, "winning" and "self-reliance," and directly, for example, "primacy of work" and "pursuit of status" (Mahalik et al., 2003). The CMNI and similar instruments have become influential in the psychology of men and masculinities in studies measuring individual men's conformity to masculine role norms, yet the insight of these instruments into mental health as a function

of gendered learning and expression in workplaces has limitations. Embedded in the CMNI and similar instruments is an assumption that masculine role norms are stable psychological traits, while in practice role norms are "discriminated repertoires of activity that are highly sensitive to context" (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010, p. 80). This study works toward deeper contextual knowledge of masculine role norms through an analytic interpretation sensitized to processes by which role norms are communicated and expressed in male-dominated workplaces.

Methods

Study Context and Design

This study is a secondary analysis of narrative data collected as part of a larger project titled "Early detection and prevention of depression in working men," a 3-year mixed-methods project aimed at understanding working men's stress, strategies for managing stress, and suggestions for employers for supporting the mental health of male employees. For the qualitative component of the mixed-methods study, a narrative approach was used to collect and analyze working men's stories of workplace stress, strategies, and suggestions for employers. Approaching qualitative data narratively rests on the belief that people use stories, or consequential linkings of events or ideas (Lal, Suto, & Ungar, 2012) to represent themselves and their experiences, and further, that through sharing stories, people ascribe meaning to their experiences (Riessman, 2001). In this secondary analysis, attention was focused on data that included evidence of masculine role norms and the relationship of these norms to men's employment-related mental health.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through avenues including: municipal Kijiji directories across the country, emails targeting male-dominated work sectors, and telephone and email invitations to the professional network of the fifth author, who has conducted previous studies on depression. To expand the range of participants targeted, Canadian Immigration Services also disseminated the call for participants. Interested participants contacted the project coordinator by email and/or telephone to obtain information, ensure they met inclusion criteria, and schedule an individual or focus group interview at a time and location convenient to participants.

Sample Description

This secondary analysis is conducted using a subsample of data collected from 37 men who took part in either a focus group (three focus groups, total $N = 13$) or an individual interview ($N = 24$). These 37 participants were employed full-time and the majority appeared to be Caucasian. The present subsample is comprised of 18 men employed in male-dominated occupations, defined as occupations with predominantly male workforces. These 18 participants' data were selected from the broader data set because these 18 participants shared stories that included evidence of the workings of masculine role norms in their workplaces. Of these 18 participants, nine took part in two focus groups ($N = 5$ and $N = 4$) and nine took part in individual interviews. Thirteen participants were employed in the energy sector working in oil and gas extraction, transportation, and storage; two participants worked in police services; one participant was an airline pilot; one participant managed a landscaping services company; and one participant was a financial advisor at a major Canadian bank.

Data Collection

This study was approved by the Conjoint Health Research Ethics Review Board at the first author's University. Before the start of each focus group or individual interview, all participants had the opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns; participants then signed written informed consent forms.

A semistructured interview guide developed by the broader project team was used to focus interviews while allowing flexibility to pursue topics initiated by participants. Interviews were opened with questions about each participant's workplace and the details of their position including the nature and schedule of the work they performed. Following questions inquired into the sources of stress in participant's lives and how participants see workplace stress impacting themselves and colleagues. Finally, participants were asked to share views and experiences about preventative strategies for managing stress and suggestions for how employers may best support employee mental health. Interviews were conducted by authors 2, 3, and 4 who worked in varying pairings. Interviews ranged from 30 to 130 min in length and the average interview length was 44 min. All interviews were audio recorded and detailed field notes were taken by interviewers.

Data Analysis

This analysis of men's narrative accounts of their employment-related stress and mental health was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) outline of the "contextualist" approach to qualitative thematic analysis. As such, data were thematically analyzed in an effort to balance between focusing on data as purely descriptive, and focusing on

data as evidence of theoretical concepts related to enactment and transmission of masculine role norms. Early analysis began during interviews for as Seidman notes: "Even as interviewers question their participants, tentative interpretations may begin to influence the path of their questioning" (Seidman, 2015, p. 130). Interviewers elaborated early analysis by debriefing immediately following each interview. Evolving analysis was led by the first four authors beginning with each conducting repeated readings of field notes and listening and re-listening to corresponding audio files. Comparison of individually compiled lists of different ways that concepts of work stress and gender served as the foundation for developing initial themes, with the goal of "reflecting all relevant aspects of the messages and retain, as much as possible, the exact wording used in the statements" (Berg & Lune, 2004, p. 268).

Secondary analysis of narrative data was guided by Addis and Mahalik's (2003) typology, which theorizes three ways in which masculine role norms are communicated and expressed. This typology affords a means for distinguishing between injunctive, descriptive, and cohesive masculine norms as follows: (a) injunctive norms operate through an internal sense of the cultural "shoulds" and "should nots" of masculinity; (b) descriptive norms are communicated through the behaviors that a man sees other men enacting in his immediate environment; and (c) cohesive norms exert influence through observations of how men who are "popular," or leaders, behave (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). This typology of masculine role norms was used to identify and code instances in which participants specified, whether by direct reference or allusions, injunctive versus descriptive versus cohesive workplace norms related to workplace stress and mental health. Given the workplace context of participant narratives, evidence of descriptive norms are drawn from participant observations of coworkers, while evidence of cohesive norms are drawn from participant observations of workplace leaders. Evidence of injunctive norms are drawn from participant comments that reflect their beliefs about what they should and should not be doing in their work.

Triangulation of Investigators

Triangulation of investigators in this study began in the planning stages as the eight authors collaborated on the purpose and design of the broader project, and evolved through this project with authors 2, 3, and 4 leading data collection, each of whom took part in conducting interviews and immediate debriefing of key impressions of, and themes evident in, each interview. The first four authors who led data analysis presented and invited input into evolving analyses during two full-day meetings that included all authors. All authors also reviewed mental health literature related to men, employment, and employed men, to provide foundation for this study and sensitizing concepts for focusing data analysis (concepts included workloads, unpredictable economies, mental health awareness, and masculine resistance to help-seeking). The four authors leading analysis had subsequent meetings to negotiate evolving iterations of themes and corresponding quotes, and eventually reached consensus on how best to illustrate themes while reflecting on the often complex and layered nature of themes.

Members Checking

Members checking efforts in this study were aimed at confirming and clarifying interpretations of the views and perspectives shared by participants. This began during interviews with pairs of interviewers involved to collaborate and balance perspectives in interpreting participants' responses. Focus group data collection was also elaborated by requesting and conducting follow-up interviews with two participants who had shared proportionally less during their focus group participation. As such, steps were taken to address a limitation of focus group data collection wherein discussion can be skewed given the dynamics of groups comprised of participants who are vocal and others who are subdued.

Results

In Table 1, the subsample of participants on whose data the secondary analysis was conducted is provided. These 18 participants are listed by pseudonym, age (if provided), employer, management status, and the interview format in which they participated.

Throughout this thematic analysis, descriptive, injunctive, and cohesive masculine role norms were used to organize how participants described workplace stress and mental health. The first theme, descriptive norms, encompasses evidence of how men align their workplace conduct with the conduct of their coworker peers. The descriptive norms theme includes subthemes of (a) work quantity and pace, and (b) work intensity. The theme of injunctive role norms reflects evidence of men's beliefs about what they should and should not do as part of their workplace conduct. Finally, the third theme of cohesive norms encompasses evidence of how leaders model and communicate managing workplace stress and mental health.

Descriptive norms. Participants discussed workplace stress in terms of work quantity and pace as well as in terms of work intensity and through their descriptions, they illuminated how such stress was managed by themselves and their peers.

Table 1. List of Participants.

Name	Age If Shared	Interview Type	Employer	Manager: Yes/No
Matt	47	Focus group	Energy Company A	Yes
Jeremy	44	Focus group	Energy Company A	No
Marcel	–	Focus group	Energy Company A	Yes
Lloyd	–	Focus group	Energy Company A	Yes
Brett	–	Focus group	Energy Company A	Yes
Reese	45	Individual	Energy Company A	No
Caleb	58	Individual	Energy Company A	Yes
Darcy	–	Individual	Energy Company A	Yes
Seth	29	Individual	Energy Company A	No
Mitch	49	Focus group	Energy Company C	Yes
Dustin	34	Focus group	Energy Company C	Yes
George	–	Focus group	Energy Company C	No
Raj	48	Focus group	Energy Company C	No
Dylan	55	Individual	Landscaping Services	Yes
Jeff	42	Individual	Airline	No
Calvin	43	Individual	Police Service A	No
Paul	–	Individual	Police Service B	Yes
Lawrence	–	Individual	Bank	No

Work quantity and pace: Stress of overwork versus twiddling your thumbs. Participants frequently noted the stress of heavy workloads including in relation to time limitations and other resource constraints. During a focus group interview, Matt, a manager in the IT department of Energy Company A, described the burn-out he has observed as a result of the quantity and pace of work:

> There's been a few cases where people take time off for mental health related issues in our group. There's always more work than you can actually get done, there's a list of things you can't get to. It's easy to get overworked and over stressed in that situation.

Matt framed the allocation of heavy workloads within his department as an organizational reality, yet continually persevering through "more than you can actually get done" volumes of work seems to operate as a descriptive norm that is visible among Matt's team. Matt described a scenario team members were willing to adhere to the descriptive norm of overwork until disability leave for mental health became necessary. Therefore, while workloads are stressful, this form of stress becomes normalized through reinforced perceptions that team members are dealing with comparable workloads. While being surrounded by team members facing comparably high workloads likely mitigates stress to some degree, taking time off to attend to mental health entails a potentially stressful point of conflict with the descriptive norm of withstanding heavy workloads which may result in team members delaying seeking help until it becomes absolutely necessary.

Contrasting with the stress of heavy workloads, participants also described stress associated with lower work demands, or "dead times." During his individual interview, Dylan, a landscaping services manager, was asked about slower times and pointed to how the pace of work in the unit he supervises is beholden to the cycles of nature:

> Interviewer: So what do people do, if it's, you know if it's really quiet?
> Dylan: It's really tough… the fellows that are… on the evening shift right from October…you're basically twiddling your thumbs … I mean, you can only clean so much eh?

In describing a shared sense of falling short of high standards for productivity, Dylan depicts the operation of descriptive masculine norms as reflected in a "twiddling your thumbs" style of restlessness among the "fellows" on his team.

Work intensity: Keeping problems under the rug and getting back on the saddle. Participants spoke of stress associated with the intense nature of their work wherein responsibilities included human safety and "always on" services or products and where expectations overlapped with fatigue inherent to on-call or shift work. Jeff, an airline pilot who has experienced depression, spoke about the high stakes of maintaining an official record of mental health with his employer:

There there's tons of fatigue. We're dealing with shift work, so… very stressful. It's dynamic. We have flight tests every 6 months. So if you don't pass… if you're depressed you lose your medical [medical certificate] and your medical is tied to your income. You have no medical you have no income. And a lot of pilots don't have a lot of transferrable skills, cause we've spent so much time getting to this point. And we're making good money. And if you're, if I'm going to share with you that I'm depressed and lose my medical, I lose my career.

In Jeff's position, career security is tied to regular monitoring of mental health and descriptive role norms entail pressure to measure up to a high standard of mental health despite the work-related stress and fatigue, which can both contribute to, and be difficult to manage in the presence of, mental illness. Jeff showed how such norms preclude disclosing his mental health struggles.

Workplace norms that preclude disclosure of mental health struggles were also evident during an individual interview with Calvin, a frontline police officer in a large city. Calvin described facing traumatizing situations as extreme as having experienced losing colleagues to suicide. Calvin illustrated the workings of descriptive norms as he reflected on having unknowingly worked alongside colleagues experiencing suicidal ideation: "We don't realize what he's actually going through… we all just keep it kind of under the rug there at work."

During an individual interview, Paul, a police officer in charge of a rural detachment, offered additional first-hand insight into the emotionally traumatizing potential of police work when he recalled having to attend to a scene directly related to the death of a loved one. Paul used metaphorical language in his depiction of processing these events:

No, you just try, and like I said, you just, you have to get back on the saddle, so yeah, you have to pick yourself up. That's the way it goes, eh… if you don't, you, well you can't crawl into a hole and pull the dirt over you. It doesn't work. [laugh]

Descriptive norms are evident in Paul's approach to pressing on while processing an emotional trauma despite potential negative impacts to mental health.

Many interviews during data collection were conducted during a recession in the Canadian economy, and energy sector participants were acutely aware of the implications of the recession for their companies. Energy sector participants spoke of uncontrollable shifts in their workplaces and consequent job insecurity as contributing to intense feelings of pressure and uncertainty in their work lives. In a focus group with employees from Energy Company C, Dustin, a manager of regulatory affairs, put this concern in terms of "a feeling of anxiety and fear at

long term prospects," and claimed "the feeling is around… you turn into more work because you don't want to lose your job." Raj, an information technology specialist, agreed with Dustin and added that their company's recent record of "month by month unemployment" was "very stressful." George, a legal counsel, responded to these comments from Dustin and Raj with a reinforcement of work as part of masculine identity by summarizing: "It's our whole definition of ourselves." Together these Energy Company C focus group participants suggest that demonstrating their value through overwork is increasingly necessary to maintaining employment and employment is an encompassing reflection of identity.

Taken together, participants providing evidence for the theme of work intensity described expectations to manage and perform at work despite stressful forms of intensity ranging from chronic fatigue to emotional trauma, to the need to adapt to unpredictable changes in the workplace and economy.

Injunctive norms: Scrutinizing self-worth. Drawing further on participant stories of "feast or famine" workloads, evidence of injunctive role norms for what participants believe they should be doing in their work were drawn from participant descriptions of meanings they assigned to their experiences with slow times and low workloads.

During a focus group interview, Brett, an information technology manager with Energy Company A, spoke of "strings of time… where you are somehow not able to be a contributor to the degree you want to be, and not necessarily by any fault of your own," as "mentally exhausting." Other focus group participants endorsed Brett's point and in this process, gave a sense of injunctive norms as shared among colleagues.

For his part, during an individual interview, Reese, a manager at Energy Company A, described "dead times" as he characterized how time spent on lower priority work "increases anxiety and makes self-worth up for scrutiny." Reese claimed that on "less busy days… thoughts questioning value added to the company arise."

Brett and Reese depicted injunctive norms as their descriptions reflect internal distress over not adhering to their beliefs about the contributions they "should" be making. Reese's distress leaves him feeling anxious and scrutinizing his self-worth, while Brett's distress is evident in his description of an unrealized ideal born of being unable to contribute "to the degree you want to be." Brett distanced himself from personal fault as he recognized that not being able to contribute to the degree he wanted is not "any fault of your own," yet Brett framed times of lesser contribution as exhausting.

Cohesive norms: High stakes and carrying your share of the stress. Evidence of cohesive role norms is drawn from

participant stories about how leaders in their workplaces model and communicate the managing of workplace stress and the uptake of mental health support.

While participants spoke of positive relationships with workplace leaders, they also highlighted stress related to hierarchical dynamics. In a focus group with participants from Energy Company C, Dustin, an energy manager, claimed that the biggest tensions occur from "the top down," when things have not worked out to meet the expectations of management. Dustin pointed to diverse reasons including: "a commodity price going down, an unsuccessful bid on a project… disappointment that something hasn't gone quite right or if someone isn't working quickly enough… a lot of potential conflict." In the same focus group, Mitch, an energy director, picked up on Dustin's point, noting that tensions often arise during meetings among "ambitious leaders with high expectations," for whom "stakes are high" and implications of "messing up can be far-reaching." In their descriptions, Dustin and Mitch reflect the workings of cohesive role norms as they present their workplace stress as a result of workplace leaders modeling role norms and establishing "far-reaching" consequences for lack of adherence to these norms.

In a focus group interview with participants from Energy Company A, Jeremy, a marketing and communications worker, invoked cohesive masculine norms conveyed by leaders who expect their employees to share their stress; Jeremy quoted an off-the-cuff, yet powerfully explicit, remark from his boss who told Jeremy: "You better be as stressed as I am." In an individual interview, Darcy, an information technology manager at Energy Company A, added dimension to the workings of cohesive role norms by pointing out instances where leaders tolerate disrespectful or inconsiderate behavior from employees who are high achievers:

> There can be conflict between people who get away with counterproductive behaviour, right. Because they're delivering… it's okay if they maybe don't treat people how they ought to be treated. So there's pockets of that.

Invoking cohesive masculine norms conveyed in yet another form, participants described leaders who send messages about the importance of work-life balance, yet fall far short in modeling balance. Lawrence, an accounts manager at a major Canadian bank, illustrated with a tone of sarcasm:

> I mean the biggest catch phrase that our business line and everybody uses now is work-life balance. And like they all say that but then say can you be in [Canadian city] next week. Like yeah, sure that really helps the work-life balance…

Lloyd, a manager, and part of a focus group with employees from Energy Company A, echoed Lawrence's cynicism about "catch phrases" as Lloyd pondered a video on workplace mental health created by company executives for its potential to be merely "lip service." Lloyd proceeded to make sense of the video in terms of how mental health support can translate into company productivity:

> Isn't that lip service though? It did seem genuine in the sense that I think there's a recognition that, that providing, uh, EAP programs results in higher productivity, and so that therefore it makes economic sense for the company to provide those resources.

At the same time, Lloyd communicated awareness of the discrepancy between his own advice to his employees versus the example he sets as a leader. Lloyd tells his employees not to model themselves after him: "Don't do what I do, take your breaks." Lloyd said that among male colleagues there is an understanding that taking breaks is valuable but "Practical implementation is the current barrier. As men, we're figuring out that we need help on this stuff."

Participants reported that while their leaders do not directly disparage workplace mental health-promoting policies such a taking breaks, leaders fuel cohesive norms that run counter to policies by not adhering to the policy themselves or by declaring expectations that run counter to policies in forms such as expecting employees to shoulder intense levels of stress, allowing disrespectful conduct from high-performing employees and advancing messages about the importance of avoiding disappointing ambitious leaders.

Discussion

As part of responding to the growing concern of men's mental health and its consequences for workers in Canada and internationally, this study offers a contribution to a deepening of theoretical understanding of men's employment-related mental health experiences. Through a variety of depictions of work stress offered by participants, evidence of descriptive masculine roles norms of withstanding high levels of job strain is provided. As illustrated by Matt, descriptive norms may push men to persevere beyond their limits in contexts of unattainable job demands. While it is known that conditions of high job strain put men at risk for depression (Woo & Postolache, 2008), descriptive norms may provide an additional layer of risk if teams of men in high-strain environments generate social pressure to ignore early inclinations to justify seeking help and/or taking time off to attend to mental health. In other high-strain job environments such as law enforcement, emotional control was evident as a descriptive norm and a primary means for handling job strain. Paul's "back on the saddle" framing of his emotional experience as a challenge to be managed exemplifies the claim by Addis and Mahalik (2003)

that men's framings of emotional experience can simultaneously "support the norm of emotional control while… constructing masculinity as a competition with one's emotional self" (p. 10).

A circular pattern is evident as participants not only attempted to maintain emotional control by forging ahead with work in the face of challenges, but also relied on work to feed their sense of emotional control as they saw work performance as key to staving off new feelings of anxiety and questioning of self-worth. While injunctive norms about how men should perform as emotionally controlled, highly productive workers are pronounced, opportunities to shift these norms are obstructed as leaders model and compel cohesive norms of pressure to perform. Leader communication of these norms occurs outside the channels of workplace policy and is key to a fundamental tension identified by participants between policies in support of mental health versus how performance expectations are conveyed.

Implications: Possibilities for More Gender-Responsive Employer Support for Men's Mental Health

While the body of research literature focused on men's mental health and designed to guide policy and mental health support is at an early stage of development (Bilsker, Fogarty, & Wakefield, 2018), researchers are identifying the value of bringing awareness of masculine role norms into workplace mental health supports through methods such as tailoring language to men at every stage of service (Rice et al., 2017; Seidler, Rice, Ogrodniczuk, Oliffe, & Dhillon, 2018). Building on these recommendations, "structural audits" of workplace features that contribute to work stress may raise awareness of masculine norms and provide starting points for gender-specific mental health-promoting responses. For example, lines of questioning or conversation points in mental health programming or employee engagement surveys that guide employees toward discussing workplace expectations and stress could offer more contextually rich connections between structural influences and injunctive, descriptive, and cohesive role norms for the purpose of promoting the mental health of male employees through shifts in organizational structure.

Such lines of questioning and conversation might entail asking questions such as: What role norms are operative in this work environment? How does the nature of work and styles of leadership perpetuate versus disrupt norms that compromise mental health? Are norms that compromise mental health in or out of control of workplace leaders, and why? In asking such questions, ideally directly to employees, the limits that preclude organizing work in ways that are more positive for men's mental health may be cast in a more critical light. Indeed, what

prevents work from being organized in a different way? Does it come down to the inevitable characteristics of certain jobs, the demands of economic efficiency, politics, tradition, or a tangled mixture of all the above? Men deserve clearer answers to these questions, and workplaces stand to gain a better understanding of gendered dimensions of mental health by working toward awareness of how structures within and beyond organizations exert pressure on gendered workplace practices.

It remains important to recognize that wider economic climates externally pressure organizations, and resulting perceptions of strong competition and high risk of failure within workplaces likely reinforce behaviors and attitudes rooted in masculine role norms that run counter to mental health (Berdahl et al., 2018). Indeed, the energy sector, where downsizing and uncertainty have been widespread seemed particularly characterized by descriptive norms of overwork. Accordingly, there are practical limits to the extent that workplaces can, or would be willing to, restructure around fostering role norms that are more supportive of mental health. Yet there is value in prioritizing employee voices in examining determinants of workplace health. In particular, "calling out" ways in which unspoken workplace norms can run counter to men's mental health provides a scaffold for greater accounting of unspoken workplace expectations.

Limitations

As part of a broader project about working men's mental health, this study endeavored to recruit a diverse sample of working men. Yet, the sample for this study was relatively homogeneous. The majority of participants appeared to be Caucasian and of middle to upper socioeconomic status. Thus, the perspectives of men from diverse socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds are not represented. A further limitation of findings is participant self-selection wherein participants who value and wish to discuss workplace mental health volunteer to participate. Further, all men in the sample were employed full-time; thus the perspectives of part-time, seasonal, or precariously employed men were not captured. In addition, and likely owing to the geographic location of the lead qualitative investigator and data collection team for the broader project, the sample over-represents the recently fraught energy sector. Finally, analysis was conducted on data collected in response to broad questions about workplace stress and not specifically about masculine role norms. Accordingly, this secondary analysis is drawn from approximately half of the broader sample (18 of 37 participants). Yet, findings from this study forge important links between masculine role norm concepts and experience that can provide valuable foundation for continued research in these topics.

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