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**Integrating General Strain Theory and the Gender Role Strain Paradigm:  
Initial Considerations**  
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## **ABSTRACT**

While General Strain Theory (GST) continues to serve as a useful lens through which to examine criminality, its ability to account for gender disparities in crime commission within the United States remains uncertain. Drawing on Broidy and Agnew's (1997) considerations, I argue that integrating Pleck's (1995) Gender Role Strain Paradigm (GRSP) into GST helps to explain males' higher rates of criminal involvement. Specifically, I draw on existing literature within the broad areas of crime and deviance, work and family, and health and illness, to outline how integrating these paradigms highlights both the unique, criminogenic strains males face, as well as their lack of access to culturally-approved mechanisms for addressing that strain, within a cultural context characterized by hegemonic masculinity. The resultant theoretical extension addresses the concerns outlined by Broidy and Agnew (1997) and offers a novel way of examining gender disparities in crime commission within the U.S. through the lens of GST.

## *Keywords:*

General Strain Theory; Gender Role Strain Paradigm; hegemonic masculinity; crime; culture

## INTRODUCTION

General strain theory (GST) has provided a useful lens through which to investigate the distribution of crime in America since its conceptualization by Robert Agnew in 1992. It has been usefully employed in micro-level studies of crime, and it broadens the scope of the classic theories of Merton, Cohen, and Cloward and Ohlin to account for several distinct sources of strain and a variety of mechanisms with which individuals respond to strains, including crime (Broidy and Agnew 1997). Revisions to GST have expanded even further and now include considerations of the specific types of strains that are likely to result in criminal coping, as well as the traits of individuals who are most likely to resort to such behaviors (Agnew 2001; Agnew 2011).

Despite the useful framework provided by GST and its most recent revisions, however, the theory has not yet been able to convincingly address perhaps the most consistent and troubling aspect of crime trends in America: males' significantly higher rates of property and violent crime compared to females. Broidy and Agnew (1997) suggest that there are four ways in which GST might explain this gender disparity: males experience more strains or stressors than females; males experience different strains than females, and those strains are more conducive to criminal coping; males respond to strain differently than females, and those responses are more conducive to crime; and/or males are more likely to respond to strain or anger with crime (277). Tests of these possibilities (e.g., Mazerolle 1998; Piquero and Sealock 2004; Ngo and Paternoster 2013) have, to date, yielded mixed results. Here, I offer here a novel means of expanding GST to improve its ability to account for gender differences in crime commission that is consistent with Broidy and Agnew's (1997) suggestions.

In accordance with the second possibility, I argue that males' higher rates of crime, particularly property and violent crime, can be attributed to their gender role strain. Originally modeled by Pleck in the early 1980s, the "gender role strain" paradigm (GRSP) attempts to "integrate the new ideas about masculinity then starting to appear in the professional literature into a systematic theoretical framework" predicated on ten distinct propositions about the creation, maintenance, and consequences of societal gender role expectations (Pleck 1995, 11). Although GRSP acknowledges that gender role strain impacts both males and females, it emphasizes the differential effects on males, whereby "violating gender role norms has more severe consequences for males than females" (Pleck 1995, 12)<sup>1</sup>. Additionally, in accordance with the third possibility, I argue that males also suffer from a lack of socially-sanctioned mechanisms through which to address that strain, and their responses to strain are thus more likely to be conducive to crime than females' responses.

In this paper, I will outline my arguments for viewing male gender role strain as a significant source of strain that GST must examine and account for in order to more fully shed light on the distribution of crime among individuals, particularly by gender. First, to provide context for these arguments, I will offer brief overviews of GST and the GRSP. I will then discuss ways in which the GRSP can be conceptualized as a form of strain in the GST tradition; to do this, I will examine both how gender role strain impacts men and how men suffer from a deficit of culturally-approved,

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<sup>1</sup> Due to spatial limitations, I will not discuss female gender role strain within the context of this article; to do so while attempting to craft a comprehensive theoretical argument regarding the integration of GRSP and GST would result in an abridged discussion that would do justice to neither. Issues related to females' experiences of gender strain are treated at length in various literatures; research of note explicitly examining gender in the context of GST includes De Coster and Zito (2010), Jang (2008), Mazerolle (1998), and Moon and Morash (2017). The reader is also directed to classic works on the issues of work, family, and motherhood by Hays (1996), Hochschild (1983, 1997), Hochschild and Machung (1989), and Edin and Kefalas (2005), as well as recent work by Gunnison and Helfgott (2018). I will also address the issue of female gender role strain in the conclusion and suggest directions for future research into this area.

legitimate means to address their strain. I will conclude by showing that this combination of intense strains and lack of appropriate alternative responses can tip the balance in favor of higher rates of criminal coping among males. To begin, I will first offer an overview of GST and how it currently fares in the criminological literature.

### **GENERAL STRAIN THEORY (GST)**

Classic strain theory traces its roots to the work of Merton. In the context of his macro-level conception of anomie, Merton (1938) puts forth a typology of “alternative modes of adjustment or adaptation by *individuals* within the culture-bearing society or group;” these ideal types frame the ways in which individuals react to societal forces in ways that are either more or less conducive to crime (676; emphasis in original). These adaptive strategies are invoked, Merton (1938) argues, when conventional cultural goals or markers of success become unattainable through normative or legitimate channels. In the context of American society, success is defined in relation to the economy (i.e. monetary wealth, financial security, etc.) (Merton 1938). Essentially, some individuals will resort to alternative means of achieving success when traditional avenues to acquiring wealth or economic stability are blocked; crime is one of those available alternatives. In response to this narrow construction of strain, however, Agnew sought to extend the paradigm beyond the economic realm through his general strain theory, which now stands as the predominant strain theory employed in the criminological literature.

Agnew formally conceptualized his version of strain theory in 1992, extending the work of earlier theorists such as Merton (1938) while remaining faithful to the theory’s basic assumption that individuals engage in crime because they experience stressors or strains. In his iteration, Agnew (2011) defines different types of strains (i.e. objective and subjective), the conditions under which these strains manifest (i.e. the loss of positively-valued stimuli, the receipt of negative stimuli, and the failure to achieve a positively-valued goal), and even the specific circumstances in which experiencing strain is most likely to lead to crime. He specifically posits that strain is most likely to provoke a criminal response when it is 1) seen as high in magnitude; 2) seen as unjust; 3) associated with low social control; and 4) creating pressure or incentive for coping via criminal behavior (Agnew 2011, 193–194). Agnew (2001) has even suggested specific examples of strains likely to lead to criminal behavior: Failure to achieve conventional goals that are easily attainable through crime, such as money or thrills; “negative secondary school experiences;” menial employment; and criminal victimization have all been implicated as strains that potentially lead to the commission of crimes (343–346). These will have important implications in later considerations of the differential impacts of certain strains on men and women.

Agnew’s (2006) work on storylines also provides a firm theoretical basis for understanding the potentially differential impacts of gender-associated strains. Conceptualized as “the key events and conditions leading up to a crime or a series of related crimes” (120), Agnew (2006) positions storylines as a means through which to understand the linkages between background factors (i.e. primarily-stable characteristics that can predispose an individual to criminality) and situational factors (i.e. conditions that influence the likelihood of a predisposed individual acting on his/her criminal impulses). Within the context of GST, a storyline might comprise an initial period in which “something happens” that alters the modal conditions of an individual, leading to an increase in the amount/types of strains s/he experiences; following this, the individual returns to previous levels of strain after engaging in either criminal or noncriminal activity to neutralize the temporary increase (Agnew 2006, 121).

In addition to types of strains and potential storylines, Agnew (2011) has also identified traits of individuals that may make them more likely than others to cope with strains through crime; these individuals are often those who 1) lack the ability to address strain in legitimate or conventional

ways; 2) experience low costs associated with criminal versus noncriminal coping strategies; and 3) are predisposed to crime; these too will have important ramifications when considering gendered differences in types of and experiences with strains. Drawing upon the foundation laid by Agnew, Eitle and Turner (2003) further posit that “the more major life events people are exposed to, the more likely they are to engage in contemporary criminal activity,” thus suggesting that there may be a cumulative effect of strain such that any single strain might be insufficient to provoke a criminal response, but the accumulation of multiple strains across the life course might tip the balance in favor of an individual resorting to criminal behavior (254).

Despite evidence in support of general strain theory in the U.S., Botchkovar and colleagues (2009) find little support for the theory when applying it internationally. They conclude that “strain does seem to operate differently in various contexts,” and perhaps “perceptions of various life events as adverse may be culturally scripted,” such that individuals may develop habitual methods of addressing strain that reflect the shared expectations of people within that cultural context (Botchkover, Tittle, and Antonaccio 2009, 160–161). Based on this rationale, there may be something unique about the American context that lends itself well to explanation by general strain theory; I argue that “something” is the gender role strain experienced by men in America. Before detailing the ways in which gender role strain manifests, however, a brief background of the gender role strain paradigm (GRSP) is necessary.

### **THE GENDER ROLE STRAIN PARADIGM (GRSP)**

Joseph Pleck (1981) first proposed the “gender role strain” paradigm of masculinity in the early 1980s, and according to his (1995) conceptual model, strains arise when males’ gender role displays deviate from the dominant, or hegemonic, masculine ideology, defined as a set of socially-constructed norms that dictate appropriate male behavior (Thompson and Pleck 1995). Although evidence suggests that numerous masculine ideologies exist and vary along racial/ethnic, cultural, and even class lines (e.g., Lazur and Majors 1995; Levant et al., 2003; Majors and Billson 1992; Watkins, Walker, and Griffith 2010), Pleck (1995) argues that “there is a *particular* constellation of standards and expectations that individually and jointly have various kinds of negative concomitants,” i.e. a hegemonic masculine ideology to which all men will be held, in greater or lesser degrees, to account (20; emphasis in original). Contemporary researchers and theorists alike continue to emphasize the salience of hegemonic masculinity for modern scholarship, highlighting its particular importance for understanding persistent gendered inequality and patriarchal dominance (Messerschmidt 2019). Hegemonic masculine ideology emphasizes four components: avoiding feminine behaviors or activities, striving for respect and achievement, never showing weakness, and seeking adventure, risk, and even violence (David and Brannon 1976). Ethnographic work by Gilmore (1990) synthesizes these components into three key social roles for men: father, provider, and protector. Gilmore (1990) notes that these roles are shared by the majority of contemporary societies, and an extensive body of literature on men and masculinities provides compelling evidence for the continued dominance of these idealized roles in modern American society.

In Pleck’s (1995) conception, male gender role strain arises from failure to live up to, or deviation from, these idealized norms, and it can take the form of any of three theoretical subtypes: gender role discrepancy, gender role trauma, and gender role dysfunction. Male gender role discrepancy draws upon Goffman’s (1963) description of the hegemonic image of the male in American society; when an individual fails to conform to the “standards, expectations, or norms” inherent in the cultural conception of his gender role, this discrepancy can lead to negative psychological outcomes, such as lowered self-esteem, as well as “negative social feedback” (Pleck 1995, 13). Additionally, as Goffman (1963) notes, “any male who fails to qualify in any one of these [aspects of gender roles] is likely to view himself—in moments at least—as unworthy, incomplete, and inferior” (128). In Pleck’s (1995) conceptualization, males who experience gender role discrepancy

are also subject to “internalized negative self-judgments,” which have important implications for men’s mental health; gender role discrepancy and mental health outcomes will be revisited in greater depth in the context of legitimate mechanisms for addressing strains.

Pleck (1995) considers male gender role trauma the second sub-type of gender role strain in his theoretical framework. In his conception, boys experience “trauma” as part of the process by which they are socialized into hegemonic male gender roles (Pleck 1995). Ethnographies conducted at schools provide vivid examples of this sub-type: Harrison’s (1987) work with elementary school children demonstrates that the social learning processes whereby even young children come to understand and differentiate appropriate gendered behavior can have severe psychological consequences for boys. She notes that it was not uncommon for mothers of boys in the school district she examined “to report that their sons had arrived home in tears because peers had called them ‘fags,’ ‘queers,’ ‘gay’” in response to actions perceived as not conforming to gendered proscriptions (Harrison 1987, 82). C.J. Pascoe’s (2007) work on high school students two decades later reveals a similar pattern: Adolescent boys routinely invoke the “specter of the fag,” a direct challenge to heteronormative sexuality and sexual capabilities, to discipline boys who deviate from appropriate gendered behaviors, including showing weakness, dancing, or expressing platonic interest in other boys (Pascoe 2007, 57).

Due to the trauma experienced during the gender socialization process, boys and men endure specific social deficits that can impact their ability to address their gender role strain in legitimate ways. Drawing upon the work of Levant (1992), Pleck (1995) notes that “such male ills as overreliance on aggression and difficulties with emotional tenderness and intimacy stem from a nearly universal socialization of males to be “alexithymic” (unable to put emotions into words)” (16). Kindlon and Thompson (1999) echo this sentiment, arguing that emotional literacy, the ability to express one’s own emotions and respond appropriately to others’, is culturally devalued among boys and men, and this deficit significantly limits the availability of constructive mechanisms for addressing strain. Specifically, by

“lacking an emotional education, a boy meets the pressures of adolescence ... with the only responses he has learned and practiced—and that he knows are socially acceptable—the typically “manly” responses of anger, aggression, and emotional withdrawal (Kindlon and Thompson 1999, 5).

Alexithymia also significantly impairs both males’ relationship quality and psychological wellbeing into adulthood: Guvensel and colleagues (2018) find that normative male alexithymia (NMA), “the commonplace experience of emotional restrictiveness with which Western men struggle on a regular basis” (57), is positively associated with conflicts within undergraduate male college students’ non-intimate relationships; these results remain consistent with Karakis and Levant’s (2012) finding that NMA adversely impacted the satisfaction and communication quality that adult males experienced in their intimate relationships. The authors also find that both relational conflicts and NMA are negatively correlated with psychological wellbeing (Guvensel et al. 2018). Additionally, although previous investigations (e.g., Berger et al. 2005) failed to find a significant association between clinical alexithymia and attitudes toward psychological help-seeking, more recent investigations into subclinical or normative alexithymia suggest that it is, in fact, negatively associated with help-seeking attitudes and behaviors (Sullivan, Camic, and Brown 2015). As can be seen, then, failure to develop adequate cognitive and linguistic skills for addressing emotions limits both the quality of males’ relationships and the repertoire of culturally-sanctioned coping mechanisms (e.g., psychological help) males can draw from to address strain.

In addition to receiving deficient emotional educations, Pollack (1998) also argues that boys

endure trauma as a result of the societal push to separate them from their mothers at early ages. These forced separations, Pollack (1998) contends, appear most vividly when boys enter school, at which point they separate physically from their mothers but also symbolically from reliance on maternal sources of comfort (e.g., female teachers) in social settings; boys who cry after leaving their mother or boys who are overly affectionate with their teachers often endure teasing from their peers. Pollack (1998) argues that “this forcing of early separation is so acutely hurtful to boys that it can only be called a trauma, an emotional blow of damaging proportions” that ultimately limits boys’ repertoires of constructive learned behaviors in which to engage to address stresses and strains (12). Boys’ separation, both symbolically and figuratively, from their mothers could also help to explain their higher rates of delinquent engagement that, according to Hagan’s (1985, 1987) power control theory, stem from a lack of parental control: According to Hagan (1987), mothers in patriarchal families are primarily responsible for parental disciplinary control of children, especially daughters, who are steered away from delinquency through inculcation into the “cult of domesticity;” boys, in contrast, are less subjected to maternal control and are therefore freer to engage in delinquency and develop an affinity for risk-taking. Thus, the weakening of the mother-son bond, encouraged by boys’ traumatic gender socialization, could account not only for boys’ limited internal resources from which to draw to cope with strains in legitimate ways, but also their greater engagement in delinquency and risk-taking (Hagan 1987).

Pleck’s (1995) final sub-type, gender role dysfunction, is predicated on the idea that fulfilling gender role standards can lead to negative outcomes as “the behaviors and characteristics these standards prescribe can be inherently dysfunctional” (17); empirical investigations into potential links between psychological outcomes and gendered personality traits have borne this out: Specifically, studies dating back to the late 1970s lend support to the existence of a positive correlation between conformity to gender role standards and poor psychological outcomes. Spence, Helmreich, and Holahan (1979) found that negative aspects of masculinity, including being aggressive and exploitative, were correlated with fighting, while Snell, Belk, and Hawkins (1987) found a correlation between these aspects and drug and alcohol use. Studies utilizing O’Neil and colleagues’ (1986) Gender Role Conflict Scale-I have also found strong predictive relationships between high scores on the scale and low self-esteem, anxiety, and depression (e.g., Sharpe and Heppner 1991), while investigations using Mosher and Sirkin’s (1984) Hypermasculinity Inventory have found correlations between conformity to hypermasculine traits and self-reported drug use, drinking and driving, aggressive behavior, and delinquency (see Pleck 1995 for an overview). More recently, a series of meta-analyses conducted by Wong and colleagues (2017) highlights the negative relationship between conformity to masculine norms and psychological functioning. Interestingly, the authors also note an even stronger correlation between masculine conformity and negative social functioning; this finding will have important implications for considering the role that interpersonal relationships play both in contributing to maladaptive displays/maintenance of masculinity and serving (or failing to serve) as sources of social support that protect against psychological distress (Wong et al. 2017).

### **INTEGRATING GRSP INTO THE GST TRADITION**

It is evident from the above discussions that the GRSP possesses features of strain as defined in GST; I now turn attention to the specific ways in which gender role strain can influence criminal behavior, for which GST seeks to account. I argue the following: First, gender role strain, although experienced to some extent by both men and women, differentially impacts the former in American society. Particularly, men are faced with the constant struggle to exhibit and maintain their masculinity in social contexts (Goffman 1963). Examination of the sociological literature on work and family reveals that hegemonic masculinity, as noted above, “provides the basic cultural patterns of expectation and outlook that all men and women must confront,” regardless of whether they fulfill its requirements (Townsend 2002, 5). Townsend (2002) further posits that these “dominant cultural

models are used to judge and exclude [men] and thereby contribute to the material and political oppression so many men experience. Frequently, men who are found wanting by their culture also judge themselves as failures” (6–7). Fathers, for example, are expected to express their manhood through a sort of “package deal” encompassing “work, marriage, home, and children;” failing to attain the “package deal” can have severe consequences for both society’s view of a man and his conception of himself (Townsend 2002, 30). Men who do not bear children are also subject to judgment by the overarching cultural standards, and men are socially compelled to account for deviations from the prescribed path to masculine self-identity when recounting the details of their lives (Townsend 2002). Even convicted criminals are often expected to uphold these societal values: the majority of studies on prison subculture, for example, highlight the pressure inmates experience to embody hypermasculine ideals, including resorting to extreme aggression and victimizing weaker individuals (see, for example, Dolovich 2011; Haney 2011; Toch 1998); even in instances where researchers observed tolerance for coexisting multiple masculinities, unique circumstances were often present, such as a high concentration of “lifers,” individuals with long sentences that required them to develop familiarity with other inmates, or a predominantly older population (de Viggiani 2012; Kennedy 2016; Toch 1998). By and large, young, relatively “fresh” prison populations reflect and even intensify the normative masculine ideologies found in broader American society (Kennedy 2016). Second, it is not merely the experience of gender role strain by males that leads to their higher rates of crime commission, but also a lack of socially-sanctioned noncriminal alternatives to addressing that strain. As I will show, men lack a repertoire of culturally-approved nonviolent options from which to choose to address their strain; I will specifically examine the literature on gender differences in mental health diagnoses and help-seeking behaviors to highlight the barriers men face with respect to health-related treatment.

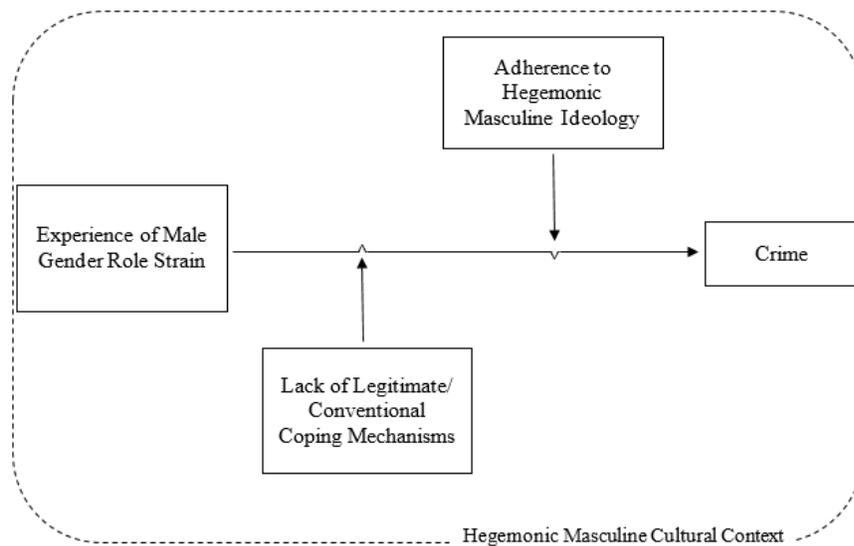
The seeming universality of this argument (i.e. that *all* men experience some form of gender role strain and *all* men suffer a lack of legitimate, gender-appropriate responses to that strain) might initially appear to suggest that all men are equally likely to resort to criminal coping strategies. This is not the case. At the macro level, masculine ideals broadly shape and constrain males’ behavior in ways that align with cultural expectations; at the micro level, however, individual males might vary in the extent to which they embody these ideals and feel constrained by them in their intra- and interpersonal environments. As Pleck (1995) argues, the content of an individual male’s “masculine ideology” plays a critical role in determining to what extent hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and the resultant strains will exert themselves. Pleck (1995) defines masculine ideology as both the “beliefs about the importance of men adhering to culturally defined standards for male behavior” and the extent to which an individual endorses and internalizes those beliefs (19). As noted previously, there are numerous versions of masculine ideologies, although adherence to hegemonic ideals largely determines a man’s susceptibility to gender role strain (Pleck 1995, 20). Essentially, a man must specifically endorse and value hegemonic masculine norms in order to experience the strains associated with embodying or failing to embody them. Therefore, the extent to which an individual male’s masculine ideology aligns with hegemonic masculine norms will moderate the relationship between his experience of gender role strain and his involvement in crime in the absence of other legitimate coping mechanisms.

Here too, Agnew’s (2006) concept of storylines offers a useful means of visualizing how individual differences in preexisting (i.e. “background”) levels of masculinity and endorsement of masculine norms can influence both individual exposure to gender-specific strains and engagement in criminal coping strategies. While Agnew (2006) does not specifically reference gender-specific storylines, it is easy to envision how this concept could further understandings of gender differences in crime; specifically, a “storyline of masculinity” may be a fruitful way in which to link gender-specific background factors (e.g., an individual’s typical level of masculinity), gender-specific strains (e.g., an event that threatens or disrupts that level of masculinity, such as job loss), and criminal coping

mechanisms (e.g., engaging in property crime to restore adherence to the masculine role of “provider”). Inherent in this potential storyline is the foundational role of background characteristics in contextualizing how gender-specific strains may lead to engagement in criminal coping; that is, although *all* men will likely experience gender-specific strains at one point or another, *individual* men will vary in their preexisting levels of masculinity and adherence to masculine norms, and will thus vary in their predisposition to reverting to criminal coping mechanisms for addressing that strain.

To help clarify these arguments, I outline the relationships between male gender role strain, a lack of legitimate coping mechanisms, adherence to a hegemonic masculine ideology, and crime, within a broader cultural context of hegemonic masculine norms in Figure 1:

Fig. 1. Integrated GST/GRSP Theoretical Model



I will now address each argument in turn, drawing on both the available criminological literature and the burgeoning social psychological literature that focuses specifically on men and masculinity.  
*Impacts of Gender Role Strain*

Broidy and Agnew (1997) specifically suggest that gender differences in the types of strain experienced may account for the gender disparities in rates of violent and property crime. Specifically, they assert that “males experience somewhat different types of strain than females, and perhaps these types of strain are more likely to lead to crime” (Broidy and Agnew 1997, 278). They go on to observe that “males more often report financial problems and are more upset when they experience financial and work problems. ... In addition to experiencing greater financial strain, males are said to experience more problems with peers” (Broidy and Agnew 1997, 279). These specific types of strain are, respectively, suggested to lead males to engage in more property and violent crime (Broidy and Agnew 1997). Broidy and Agnew’s (1997) evidence remains compatible with the view of male’s gender role strain and the social construction of masculinity as specific types of strain that may influence males’ higher crime rates. While Broidy and Agnew (1997) reference financial and peer issues, they fail to elaborate further on *why* males may, in particular, be susceptible to these problems; I argue that the construct underlying both of these concepts is male gender role strain, specifically, the cultural expectations of males as providers and the combative performativity of masculinity.

Despite women's recent advancement into the paid labor market, the American cultural context still embraces and sustains the image of the male breadwinner, particularly with respect to fathers (Townsend 2002). Townsend (2002), in his work detailing the "package deal," argues that provision is a central facet of fatherhood, which is, in itself, an element of the culturally-approved construction of successful manhood in American society. The role of provider demonstrates not only the most important gauge of the successful father, but more generally it reflects "the central place of employment in men's sense of self-worth, . . . because holding a job and earning a living are so important for American men's identity" (Townsend 2002, 53). Failure to get or keep stable employment can, as Broidy and Agnew (1997) suggest, help to "explain [males'] higher rates of property crime," as well as male's participation in secondary labor markets (280); this is particularly evident in Edin and Nelson's (2013) work on fatherhood in the inner city. Despite the lack of resources available to fathers (and men generally) in low-income neighborhoods, the norm remains that "good fathers ought to do at least *something* to financially provide for a child," and fathers in these communities strive to create an image of "doing the best they can" given their situational disadvantages (Edin and Nelson 2013, 118, emphasis in original). Accomplishing this, however, may sometimes require resorting to illegal means: For example, in urban areas marked by economic decline and the outmigration of jobs, illicit economies such as the drug trade establish footholds as markets in which men can make money and maintain their images as (at least partial) providers (Edin and Nelson 2013).

Recent research by Datchi (2017), however, suggests that, rather than propelling males into criminal behavior, investment in fatherhood may protect against incarceration; these results remain consistent with earlier work on the links between fatherhood and criminal desistance (Visher, Bakken, and Gunter 2013). Interestingly, however, "younger participants had a tendency to be less committed to fatherhood" (Datchi 2017, 57) Results of a recent Pew Research Center survey imply that younger males, particularly Millennials aged 18-36, may also internalize hegemonic masculine norms to a greater extent than males in other age groups, as Millennial males are more likely to report that individuals of their gender feel pressure to behave in prototypically-masculine ways, including use of aggression in resolving disputes ("be willing to throw a punch if provoked") and engaging in sexual promiscuity or dominance ("have many sexual partners;" "join in when other men are talking about women in a sexual way") (Parker, Horowitz, and Stepler 2017). If younger males are indeed more likely to internalize or even endorse hegemonic masculine norms, then they would fail to reap the protective benefits that, according to Datchi (2017), investment in fatherhood provides. Such a possibility is bolstered by the persistent finding that engagement in crime and deviance tends to peak in adolescence and early adulthood (see, for example, Massoglia and Uggen 2010; Rocque, Posick, and Hoyle 2016; Steffensmeier and Streifel 1991) Additionally, Datchi (2017) finds that "endorsement of dominant masculinity ideology was not associated with [men's] investment in the fathering role" (57); however, limitations of the investment measure, including its exclusive focus on emotional aspects of fatherhood (i.e. "level of happiness about being a parent" (56), as well as behaviors such as calling, writing, and visiting, that serve as indicators of parental bonding), may preclude findings of investment in instrumental aspects of fathering. It is possible, if not probable, then, that younger males *are* invested strongly in fathering their children, but, rather than manifesting that investment through emotionality, they instead demonstrate their commitment to the fathering role through internalizing traditionally-masculine ideals, such as providing, and engaging in criminal activity, such as participating in illicit economies, when culturally-legitimate means of financial security are unavailable to them. Such a supposition remains consistent with the persistent "age-crime curve" (Massoglia and Uggen 2010; Rocque et al. 2016; Steffensmeier and Streifel 1991).

Fathers, of course, are not the only ones who may experience pressures related to providing financially for their intimate others; recent research into gendered differences in experiences of

strain suggest that females as well as males broadly suffer the effects of financial strain. According to Moon and Morash (2017), no significant gender differences were observed between male and female Korean adolescents' experiences of several types of strain, including financial strain. Consistent with Broidy and Agnew's (1997) previous supposition, the authors posit that "all contemporary adolescents may be encouraged to succeed financially and academically in an economically developed and consumerist society, and thus they may experience similar levels of financial and examination strain" (Moon and Morash 2017, 499). Despite similar experiences with financial strain, however, only males' strain appeared to be associated with violent and property-oriented delinquency, suggesting that there is something unique about males' experiences with money-related strain that influences their engagement in delinquency, even during adolescence, in a way that females do not experience (Moon and Morash 2017). While the authors cite participants' age as a potential limiting factor in their ability to draw firm conclusions, I argue that it is equally likely that adolescent males in "economically developed and consumerist" societies either uniquely experience an aspect of financial strains that is particularly criminogenic, or cultural expectations in these contexts place specific burdens on males to absolve such strain through criminogenic means (Moon and Morash 2017). In either case, such experiences are unlikely to be confined only to the developmental period of adolescence, and indeed, Agnew's (2006) own work reveals adult males' self-perceptions of their criminality coincide with the latter possibility regarding cultural expectations.

Storylines, particularly those involving a desperate need for money, offers additional insights into how criminals contextualize their offenses with respect to culturally-normative expectations of males as providers (Agnew 2006): Despite noting that the need for money often applies to "what most people would view as luxuries—including the desire to maintain the "partying lifestyle" or "high living" characteristics of some criminals," rather than "necessities" like food and shelter" (127), several of the examples Agnew (2006) selects to illustrate his conception of the desperate-for-money storyline point to criminals' own perceptions of the need to provide for their intimate others:

- "I think the primary factor is being without. Rent is coming up. A few months ago, the landlord was gonna put *us* out, rent due, you know. Can't get no money no way else [but] I know I can get some money [by committing an armed robbery]" (Wright and Decker 1997, 42–43; as cited in Agnew 2006, 128, emphasis added).
- "I was working long hours and not getting along with *my wife* and we had a lot of bills and some sickness. I don't know what happened to me. Next thing I know, I'm stealing things" (Cromwell, Parker, and Mobley 2003, 117; as cited in Agnew 2006, 128, emphasis added).
- "I broke into a school. I broke into a school I used to work at, in the daycare, and I stole two Nintendo systems. I needed to. I had to make money. *She* ["girlfriend"] was starving; I was starving... So I um, broke into school, and I stole the two systems, and I sold them" (Hagan and McCarthy 1997, 86; as cited in Agnew 2006, 128, emphasis added).

Each of the above passages illustrates how, when asked to describe their motivations for engaging in crime, individual males highlight not just their own need for money, but the need to provide financially for a spouse (second example), romantic partner (third example), or other intimates (first example; note the use of a plural pronoun when describing who would be impacted if the rent was not paid). Although none of these individuals explicitly cites masculine connotations of the need to provide as motivation for their offenses, their descriptions nevertheless suggest a common underlying impulse for getting money to cover expenses; I argue that impulse is a culturally-contextualized expectation of males to provide financially for their intimate others.

Interestingly, less-educated males may be disproportionately impacted by the deleterious effects of strain related to social expectations of breadwinning: As Wimer and Levant (2013) note, "working class men have been found to endorse traditional masculine norms more strongly than men of higher social classes," and, according to Levant (2017), this heightened adherence to such

norms may impact their experiences of gender-related financial strain by contributing to their unwillingness to engage in “feminine” lines of work, such as healthcare, childcare, and education. Levant (2017) highlights how lower-educated males’ plight results from “the confluence of large-scale economic, political, and social changes. These changes include the Great Recession (dubbed at one time the ‘Mancession’ because of its disproportionate effect on men), the technological revolution in manufacturing, the globalization of the economy,” and other sociocultural events that have contributed to the rise of employment in traditionally-“feminine” fields (4; Bureau of Labor Statistics 2019). Lower-class males’ unwillingness to transition into these female-dominated sectors not only impedes their ability to maintain financial dominance in heterosexual and familial relationships, but also likely contributes to poorer psychosocial functioning, particularly due to their similar reluctance to engage in “family work” such as childcare and housework (Levant 2017). As I will later discuss, the relational strain resulting from lower-class males’ unwillingness to contribute to the household labor also deleteriously effects these men’s mental health by undermining a key source of potential social support, their wives.

As illustrated above, cultural conceptions of masculinity and successful manhood require that males provide (at least partially) for their children, families, and/or romantic partners, as well as remain active in the paid labor market. Additionally, as Broidy and Agnew (1997) note, males also suffer from combative and competitive peer relations, another manifestation of their gender role strain, specifically, male gender role dysfunction (Pleck 1995). As Pleck (1995) indicates, “fulfillment of gender role standards can have negative consequences because the behaviors and characteristics these standards prescribe can be inherently dysfunctional, in the sense of being associated with negative outcomes either for the man himself or for others” (17). This supposition is borne out in research by Lease et al. (2010), who note that, specifically for White men,

it appears that conforming to the traditional male role norms requires them to be more emotionally isolated and competitive in relationships and less competent at providing support to others, disclosing their own feelings, or managing conflict effectively. Adhering to norms of emotional self-control, the use of physical force as a viable response, and avoidance of anything deemed feminine or “weak” is likely to reduce one’s ability to be emotionally available and open when frustrated with coworkers and romantic partners (202).

Wong and colleagues (2017), in a series of meta-analyses, also find a strong correlation between conforming to masculine ideals and negative social functioning. Such dysfunction can manifest in response to real or perceived threats to men’s masculine self-identities.

In the criminological literature, investigations of criminal or delinquent subcultures reveal that men will often aggressively defend their masculinity, or the masculinity of close associates, against perceived or actual threats. In a recent study of male bar fighters, researchers found that “defending and verifying character is a major motivator for violence . . . and many [of the participants] tied this belief directly to masculinity” (Copes, Hochstetler, and Forsyth 2013, 772). Specifically, “they believed that fights were an important part of maintaining self-image . . . Fighting affirmed a sense of self as a capable and dependable man, but also it fended off powerful negative emotions and shame from refusal to meet the call when provoked” (Copes et al. 2013, 772). Similarly, Topalli’s (2005) work on extending neutralization theory, which asserts that criminals must *ad* or *post hoc* develop rationalizations for behaviors that depart from accepted codes of conduct, reveals that “hardcore” offenders often feel pressured to neutralize conventionally-good behaviors, as opposed to their criminal acts: “Findings indicate that these offenders strive to protect a self-image consistent with a code of the streets orientation rather than a conventional one. That is, they neutralize being good rather than being bad” (797–798).

Agnew's (2006) conception of storylines offers additional insights into how men engage in criminal violence to defend not only their own masculinity, but also the reputations or safety of their intimate others. Consistent with the unresolved-dispute storyline, crime often results when individuals experience negative treatment, including abusive behavior, status threats, and romantic disputes and subsequently view violence (or other criminal activity) as the most appropriate means through which to resolve their dispute (Agnew 2006). Again, one of Agnew's (2006) examples of this storyline points to how conflict between aggressors and a male's intimate other can result in a status threat to the male himself, resulting in a need to aggressively defend both his own and his intimate other's reputations:

- "Audrey was being harassed by some of the boys and girls in her neighborhood. For several days they had been bothering her, sitting and standing outside her house, teasing her and calling her names... Upset, she would call John and complain, and he would feel, as a *man*, compelled to respond... At about eight o'clock on the night in question, Audrey called John and reported harassment by the local youths. John told her not to worry, that he would come over and see about it. *Because the young men of the neighborhood has fought with him before*, John knew there was a good chance for trouble that night" (Anderson 1999, 239–240; as cited in Agnew 2006, 131, emphasis added).

This passage from Anderson's (1999) seminal work on street culture clearly illustrates how "John" felt compelled to engage in violence not only to defend "Audrey" from harassment, but also to uphold his own neighborhood reputation and masculine status.

The above examples from Anderson's (1999), Topalli's (2005), and Copes and colleagues' (2013) studies are drawn primarily from samples comprised of individuals who were identified as deviant or criminal (inner-city African American "street" people, Southern bar fighters identified by an informant who had a history of violent conviction himself, and self-identified active offenders from the streets of St. Louis, Missouri, respectively). While these sampling techniques are useful for targeting subsets of the population that are often difficult or impossible to recruit for study, it could be argued that they do little to demonstrate how violence and/or aggression may manifest in the average, non-offending male's construction of masculinity. I argue that *all* men experience some degree of coercion to aggressively or violently defend their masculine self-identities; however, consistent with general strain theory, the extents to which this pressure is applied and normative opportunities are available to resolve disputes of masculinity will determine whether a male's defense of his self-image will rise to the level of being criminal. Regardless of whether an individual male's construction of masculinity requires him to commit criminal acts, however, the cultural expectation that men must defend their self-images is nevertheless frequently present, and it serves to exemplify how one facet of gender role strain differentially impacts males in America.

Masculine honor ideology holds that "men should adhere to a strict code of conduct in their treatment of others which corresponds to the treatment they expect to be afforded by others. If these expectations are not met, cultures of honor dictate swift reassertion of masculinity as a way for men to reclaim their reputation" (O'Dea et al. 2018, 132). Originally conceptualized as a regional trait predominant in the American South, O'Dea and colleagues (2018) note that masculine honor more likely comprises an individual difference that males across the United States exhibit, although regional concentrations of endorsement of this ideology may exist. Strong adherence to masculine honor ideology predicts a variety of behaviors and attitudes, including the need to respond physically to threats and insults; O'Dea and colleagues (2018) specifically note that, for these individuals, "threats and insults require decisive and aggressive responses from men... because manhood needs to be earned and continuously demonstrated to preempt future threats" (133). Moreover, results of a series of vignette studies indicate that both male and female third parties' positive perceptions of males increase when those males respond aggressively to provocation (O'Dea et al. 2018). Thus,

males who adhere strongly to beliefs regarding masculine honor feel pressured by their ideology to defend, even physically, against threats to their masculine self-conceptions, and are often rewarded for doing so through others' positive valuations (O'Dea et al. 2018).

In addition to protecting against threats, violence and aggression may also serve as vehicles through which men establish masculinity in the absence of other normative methods. As Messerschmidt (1993) notes, "crime by men is a form of social practice invoked as a resource, when other resources are unavailable, for accomplishing masculinity" (85). Messerschmidt (2013), commenting on Willis's (1977) ethnographic work, observes that the "lads," a group of white, British working-class boys, "evolve into an unstructured, counterschool group that carves out a specific masculine space within the school" (364). More specifically, the "lads" use violence and aggression as a means of constructing their masculinity in opposition to conventional others, such as the nonviolent ear'oles," another group of boys that adheres to school rules (Messerschmidt 2013, 364). Essentially, the lads assert their masculine identities through defaming and devaluing the ear'oles' conventionality, thus resulting in the problematic peer relations that Broidy and Agnew (1997) indicate are typical of males. Competitive and combative juxtapositions between selves and peers are also demonstrated in Pascoe's (2007) work on the performative elements of American adolescent masculinity construction: Pascoe (2007) notes that to establish an appropriately-gendered (i.e. masculine) self-image, the adolescent boys she interviewed often undermined peers' masculine self-conceptions through homophobic taunts, specifically the "specter of the fag." Employment of the "specter" was not limited to just the boys; adult males, including teachers, often peripherally referred to the fag discourse when further chastising a boy who had already been singled out by peers as failing to maintain his masculine self-image (Pascoe 2007). Such policing of boys' masculinities by both other boys and adult males illustrates the extent of combative relations among males; this combativeness consequently fuels a sense of competition rather than cooperation among males, limiting their access to peer support systems and contributing to a deficit of socially-approved strategies for coping with gender role strain. As I argue in the next section, this deficit contributes to both the differential impacts of gender role strain on men, as well as the higher rates of crime observed among American males.

### **Culturally-Sanctioned Mechanisms for Addressing Gender Role Strain**

In addition to enduring the criminogenic strains noted above, males also suffer a lack of access to culturally-approved means through which to cope with their strains. In particular, for males, hegemonic masculine ideals serve as barriers to treatment-seeking for health- and mental health-related ailments, while these same services remain accessible to and acceptable for women to utilize. Research has shown that women tend to ask an average of six questions during a 15-minute doctor visit (men tend to ask none), and clinical manuals, such as the American Psychological Association's *DSM-V*, even include diagnostic criteria for female-specific disorders, including premenstrual dysphoric disorder (PMDD) and late luteal phase dysphoric disorder (LLPDD) (Eriksen and Kress 2008; Pleck 1995). While some feminist scholars have contended that inclusion of these female-specific disorders unnecessarily pathologizes aspects of women's natural hormonal cycles, recognition of disorders stemming from strictly female bodily processes could also be seen as part of a growing sensitivity within the medical community to women's health and functioning, therefore allowing medical professionals to more precisely differentiate between normal and abnormal functioning and offer treatments that can significantly improve women's quality of life (Eriksen and Kress 2008).

In contrast to women, men have fewer socially-sanctioned means of coping with gender role strain; this is highly problematic, given that the specific gendered expectations that men face (i.e. economic success/providing for their families and establishing and maintaining their masculinity) lend themselves well to accomplishment through crime or deviance. As will be shown, without

legitimate alternative coping mechanisms, men are more likely to act out in violent or aggressive ways, thus accounting for the gendered disparity in rates of violent and property crime. Of particular concern is males' discouragement and disengagement from health, and particularly mental health, treatment-seeking behavior due to hegemonic masculine ideals. Not only do men ask fewer questions of their doctors than women, as noted above, but they also provide less information, suggesting an overall discomfort with discussing health concerns (Pleck 1995). According to Pattyn and colleagues (2015), such discomfort is particularly pronounced for interactions related to mental health treatment-seeking, and this is directly related to the social construction of masculinity:

Emotional expressiveness, caring for one's health, and asking for help are constructed as forms of idealized femininity. Men are expected to be in emotional control and to appear strong, independent, and self-reliant. Consequently, to conform to the socially prescribed male role, men are encouraged to define themselves in opposition to women by suppressing their own health needs and by not seeking help. Otherwise, a gendered role conflict might arise if men behave in a way that is not in accordance with the (hegemonic) idea of masculinity (1090).

Raviv and colleagues (2000) find similar patterns of apprehension regarding treatment-seeking among adolescents: Consistent with a vast existing literature, the authors note that girls generally had more positive attitudes regarding help-seeking than boys, although, unexpectedly, no gender differences were observed with respect to self-referrals to professional sources of support (i.e. psychologists). The authors posit that methodological limitations may account for this discrepant finding, noting that the hypothetical nature of the measures "made it easier on the boys to admit readiness to refer themselves to help" (Raviv et al. 2000, 734). In natural settings, however, the authors contend that boys are primarily less willing than girls to seek help, perhaps due to their tendency to "use defences [*sic.*] such as denial and avoidance" to deflect the need for treatment (734). Findings from Raviv et al. (2000) and recent others (e.g., Ando et al. 2018; MacLean, Hunt, and Sweeting 2013; Seamark and Gabriel 2018), then, suggest that males learn from an early age to use psychological tactics such as avoidance, denial, and concealment to divert attention away from their problems, thus maintaining a competent and stoic self-image.

The extent to which social constructions of masculinity impede males' help-seeking behaviors may also be compounded by recent findings that shed light on the detrimental impacts of hegemonic masculinity on men's social functioning: As Wong and colleagues (2017) note, conformity to the masculine norms most closely associated with sexism, including self-reliance, power over women, and playboy, is strongly correlated with negative psychological and social functioning. Not surprisingly, the authors contend that "heterosexual men who adhere strongly to norms associated with sexism might struggle in their relationships with women," which can detrimentally impact both their mental wellbeing and potential sources of social support that could buffer against the deleterious effects of strain (Wong et al. 2016; Wong et al. 2017, 89). Contemporary perspectives in the sociology of mental health, particularly the stress process perspective (see, for example, Pearlin 1989; Pearlin and Bierman 2013; Pearlin et al. 1981), highlight the protective influence of both perceived and received social support on the impact of psychosocial stress; by struggling in relationships with their female partners and intimate others, males who conform to sexist masculine ideals isolate themselves from a key source of potential support against the negative impacts of both gender-specific and everyday stress (Bolger and Amarel 2007; Cobb 1976; Uchino 2009).

Concerns regarding masculine gender roles can also impact the types of treatments that men are willing or able to undergo; specifically, men tend to favor self-care over psychotherapy for the treatment of mental illnesses, in part to avoid entering into a subordinate relationship with a health care provider (Pattyn, Verhaege, and Bracke 2015). When they do opt for treatment, they

prefer “quick fixes,” such as psychotropic drugs, to more time-intensive treatment options, possibly, as Pattyn and colleagues (2015) contend, to avoid long-term disruptions to their work roles (1094). These self- and socially-imposed treatment limitations are exacerbated by medical professionals’ gender biases with respect to diagnostic procedures and treatment recommendations. Eriksen and Kress (2008) note that “simply knowing a client’s sex can influence the diagnostic process, even among experienced practitioners,” and “mental health professionals have been found to label people *disturbed* if their behavior does not fit the professional’s gender ideals” (154, emphasis in original). More specifically, men

run the risk of underdiagnosis; that is, they might demonstrate all of [the] listed characteristics for a healthy adult, but the very bias about these being “healthy” might cause practitioners to overlook men’s emotional suffering. Research in fact indicates that well-socialized White men (i.e., those who have adapted well to the expectations of the dominant culture) run the risk of being underdiagnosed for mental disorders with the possible implication that they do not receive the services that they may need to address these disorders (154).

Pattyn and colleagues (2015) support this assertion, noting that clinicians remain “less likely to identify the presence of depression in men, resulting in fewer prescriptions for psychotropic drugs for men compared to women” (1094). Real (1997) highlights how such misidentification may result from differential presentations of depressive symptoms among men: In response to the shame they experience for demonstrating emotional vulnerability during the gender socialization process, men often manifest depression in grandiose or narcissistic ways that align with masculine ideals, such as antisocialism and violence. Because these behaviors diverge from prototypical expressions of affective disorder, which mental health professionals often associate with women and femininity, males’ depression goes largely un- or misidentified and consequently untreated (Real 1997).

Such under-/misdiagnosis and lack of treatment, however, is not limited to adult males; ramifications for assessment and treatment as a result of masculine gender ideals also manifest among adolescents. In Sweden, Rosvall and Nilsson (2016) found that school nurses associated mental health-related concerns primarily to girls, and, consequently, the interventions and health-promotion activities they implemented were specifically targeted to females. Boys who did seek help from the school nurses typically did so only for physical ailments or injuries, which, unlike mental health problems, “does not jeopardize the idealization of masculinity, as the pain of the injury can be associated with an active lifestyle” (Rosvall and Nilsson 2016, 6). Similar to adult males, social stigmatization of adolescents’ psychological distress can influence how boys present with symptoms: As Kindlon and Thompson (1999) note, the manifestations of depressive symptoms among adolescent boys are often difficult to discern; in contrast to stereotypic depictions, “boys often don’t look sad or “depressed.” They look edgy or angry, hostile or defiant” (159). Consequently, “a boy’s depression is often ignored because he is meeting cultural expectations of masculinity,” including “stoicism, emotional reserve, [and] withdrawal” (Kindlon and Thompson 1999, 159).

Given males’ discouragement from pursuing conventional health and mental health treatments, individuals who are suffering from psychological distress may instead opt to “act out” their suffering in ways that both more closely align with masculine norms and, consequently, are more criminogenic, such as substance use/abuse. Beginning in adolescence, drinking and drug use becomes associated with male socialization, and sizeable percentages of boys have tried or are regular users of illicit substances. Kindlon and Thompson (1999) note that “drug use rates in the senior year of high school tend to be at least 1.5 to 2.5 times as high among boys as among girls, [and] teenage boys account for an even greater share of the frequent or heavy users of” hard drugs, such as heroin, cocaine, and crack (177). Recent research reveals a promising turn in trends,

although some significant gender differences remain: According to the CDC's most recent installment of the Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), drug use trends are on the decline for both male and female high school students, and no significant differences exist between male and female students' overall illicit substance use (Centers for Disease Control 2018). However, male students still greatly outnumber females (2.0% and 0.8% respectively) in injection drug use, which carries significant health risks, including increased chances of contracting a blood-borne disease (Centers for Disease Control 2018). Moreover, gender norms appear to influence males' substance use: Wilkinson and colleagues (2018) find that "increased adherence to gender-typical behavior is associated with an increased risk of high-frequency substance use for" adolescent males, and this association remains strong throughout the transition to young adulthood (150–151). The researchers also note that "while the type of behavior men use to demonstrate adherence to masculine norms may change developmentally, those behaviors may still be associated with substance use," suggesting that while the substance itself may change, the underlying emphasis on substance use remains throughout males' developmental transition (Wilkinson et al. 2018, 151).

Alcohol consumption also remains an important aspect of adolescent boys' socialization that can escalate into problems: Specifically, alcohol activates the brain's endogenous opiate system, which regulates endorphin production and "partially governs emotional attachment by its connection to the sense of touch" (Kindlon and Thompson 1999, 185). Kindlon and Thompson (1999) suggest that some boys "avoid physical contact out of fear, shame, or anger;" consequently, boys turn to alcohol as it "allows them to be more emotionally expressive and socially at ease," thus aiding in socialization and bonding (Kindlon and Thompson 1999, 185). More recent findings from Iwamoto and Smiler (2013) highlight how adherence to masculine norms among adolescent males is both directly associated with alcohol use, as well as indirectly related, through susceptibility to peer pressure. Specifically, they note that endorsement of heterosexual norms and competitiveness predicted both boys' vulnerability to the influence of their peers and alcohol consumption; the authors posit that this heightened susceptibility may stem from the performative aspects of masculinity, in which males feel compelled to demonstrate their masculine self-worth to others (Iwamoto and Smiler 2013). Pressure to perform and display their masculinity also underlies some adolescent males' engagement in drinking games: Zamboanga and colleagues (2017) specifically note that endorsement of competitive masculine ideals, including winning and risk-taking, is positively associated with the frequency with which males engaged in social drinking games; similarly, Iwamoto and colleagues (2011) find that these same ideals serve as risk factors of drinking to intoxication for college males.

Alcohol's influence on male interactions is not limited to adolescence; Copes, Hotchstetler, and Forsyth (2013) note that alcohol can also contribute to unwarranted altercations among adult male bar fighters. While investigating subcultural codes of violence, Copes and colleagues (2013) found that, even though these bar fighters frequently employed aggression and violence to resolve disputes and defend their honor, alcohol and drug use can lead to fights that are unsupported by their codes. Specifically, "when fights occur because of drunkenness, the fighter may experience guilt" after realizing that the altercation "occurred for "irrational" reasons" (Copes et al. 2013, 782). Fights that result from intoxication can also result in feelings of shame or immaturity among the combatants, and fighters often retrospectively acknowledge how substance use "interfere[d] with decision making" and provoked an altercation that likely would not have otherwise occurred (Copes et al. 2013, 782). As Copes and colleagues' (2013) findings indicate, even individuals who adopt a "code of the street" approach to using violence to establish and defend their masculinities acknowledge how substance use, particularly alcohol consumption, can escalate conflicts into violence when, had the combatants been sober, other conflict resolution strategies might have been employed. Interestingly, alcohol use also appears to serve as a coping mechanism for males who feel they are not meeting cultural standards of masculinity: Reidy and colleagues (2016) note that

men who experienced high levels of “discrepancy stress,” distress related to perceiving themselves as sub- or un-masculine, had the highest self-reported rates of arrest for DWI. Combined, the results of Copes et al.’s (2013) and Reidy et al.’s (2016) investigations suggest that adult males’ alcohol use can result in an array of negative outcomes, from serious legal troubles to unintentional escalation into violence.

Overall, ignorance and misunderstanding surrounding both men’s and boys’ suffering, as well as ramifications from males acting out their emotional distress in gender-normative ways, can lead to severe consequences. For example, given men’s preference for medication compared to other forms of treatment, individuals who don’t “make the cut” for receiving a prescription are unlikely to seek out another treatment modality and instead are at risk for going untreated (Pattyn et al. 2015). Additionally, cultural discouragement from using “feminine” options, such as psychotherapy, to address psychological concerns leaves males at risk of mitigating their distress in ways that are prototypically masculine, such as through substance use/abuse or even violence against themselves or others. For example, persistent, untreated depression in adolescent males can lead to maladaptive coping behaviors, such as trouble at school or with the law, or can even prompt a boy to take his life (Kindlon and Thompson 1999). Suicide is the second leading cause of death among youth aged 15 to 24, and recent statistics indicate that within this age group, males’ rate of suicide deaths remains over four times as high as that of females (22.0 per 100,000 pop. vs. 5.0 per 100,000, respectively) (National Institute of Mental Health 2019). Similar gender differences in suicide rates persist throughout the life-course, peaking in late adulthood (65 years of age and older), when males’ rates of suicide deaths are more than six times higher than that of females (31.0 per 100,000 pop. vs. 5.0 per 100,000, respectively) (National Institute of Mental Health 2019). Moreover, findings from Boysen et al. (2014) suggest that disorders considered to be “masculine,” such as antisocial personality and substance use disorders, are more highly stigmatized than “feminine” conditions, posing yet another barrier to males’ psychological treatment-seeking and potentially contributing to males’ subsequently higher rates of suicide.

### **Cultural Differences in Experiencing/Managing Gender-Related Strain**

It is important to note that, while the cultural limitations to psychological help-seeking and subsequent negative outcomes discussed above remain, broadly speaking, endemic to the experience of being a male in contemporary America, key cultural differences exist that could influence how men of various races/ethnicities and socioeconomic statuses respond to overarching masculine ideologies. As noted previously, compared to white males of higher social statuses, working-class white males appear to differentially experience strain related to breadwinning as a result of recent economic and political changes, particularly the Great Recession and the related shift to growth in “feminine” economic sectors, such as healthcare and childcare; this is not surprising, given the latter group’s stronger adherence to traditional masculine norms (Levant 2017; Wimer and Levant 2013). In addition to deleterious effects on their psychological functioning, these sociocultural changes have also been shown to influence lower-class men’s physical health: Case and Deaton (2015), in their review of male morbidity and mortality rates between 1999 and 2013, find that middle-aged males’ rates show a marked increase, largely due to a number of risky health-related behaviors, including cirrhosis and “deteriorations in liver function” due to alcohol misuse, drug- and alcohol-related poisonings, and suicide (1). The most marked increases in morbidity and mortality were observed among males with lower levels of education (Case and Deaton 2015).

In addition to socioeconomic differences, racial and ethnic differences also influence the extent to which males’ endorsement of hegemonic masculine ideologies influence their help-seeking behavior and psychological functioning. Although recent findings suggest that “the endorsement of traditional masculinity ideology [is] more strongly related to alexithymia [the inability to communicate emotions] for White men than for racial minority men,” the latter have been found to endorse

masculine ideology to a greater extent than the former, presumably as an adaptation to the marginalizing effect of these largely-Eurocentric, heteronormative ideals (Levant and Wong 2013). Despite their higher endorsement, Levant and Wong (2013) posit that racial minority men may be “less personally invested in conforming to the norms associated with traditional masculinity ideology, thereby weakening the link between ideology endorsement and alexithymia” within this group (331–332). Additionally, Lease et al. (2010), in a comparison of White and African American males’ masculinity endorsement and interpersonal competencies, highlight how interpretations of “masculinity” may differ between racial/ethnic groups in important ways: For African American men, they contend,

the meaning and expression of [the masculine ideal of] status, especially in the absence of [the masculine ideal of] toughness, may reflect a sense of self-confidence, strength, and respect (rather than competition with other males) that is reflected in greater competence in being emotionally supportive and able to manage conflict while asserting one’s own needs in interpersonal situations (203).

Thus, they conclude that, consistent with Gibbons and colleagues’ (1997) work, “African American men might associate masculinity with self-determinism and accountability more than with wealth, power, or ambition since they may experience societal barriers to traditional indicators of masculine success” (203).

Given that interpretations of masculinity are subject to vary from one racial/ethnic group to another, it is not surprising, then, that the extent to which minority males endorse masculine ideals and therefore experience psychological impairments also appears to depend on the specific racial/ethnic group to which they belong. Levant et al. (2015), for example, note that the extent to which certain masculine ideals coincide with traditional cultural values influences whether/how males experience psychological dysfunction. Specifically, the authors argue that Latino males may experience “masculinity cultural incongruence” due to conflict between the traditional Latin cultural value of familism, which permits greater emotional expressivity, and the Western masculine norm of emotional repression, “thus creating acculturative stress arising from having to negotiate two competing masculine norms” (Levant et al. 2015, 465). Their analyses reveal that Latino males’ endorsement of the Western masculine norms of emotional restraint and control is indeed positively associated with levels of alexithymia, consistent with the masculinity cultural incongruence hypothesis (Levant et al. 2015).

In contrast to Latino males’ experiences with competing cultural norms, Asian American males appear to suffer fewer psychological consequences as a result of endorsing Western masculine ideals, likely due to the complementary relationship between these ideals and traditional Asian cultural values (Levant et al. 2015). Levant and colleagues (2015) note that the relationship between emotional restriction/control and alexithymia is weakest among this minority group, likely because Asian cultural norms already value emotional restraint, and conforming to similar Western ideals does not lead to the same acculturative stress experienced by Latino males. While emotional restriction does not appear to engender psychological distress, Iwamoto and colleagues’ (2010) research reveals that endorsement of Western masculine ideals that do conflict with Asian cultural norms can impair psychological functioning, specifically by increasing depressive symptomatology. Specifically, the authors find that Asian American males who endorse the masculine ideal of dominance report more symptoms of depression, likely because adherence to this norm “may create distress and tension in interpersonal relationships” (20). Such interpersonal dysfunction may be especially detrimental in light of many Asian ethnic groups’ shared values of filial responsibility and a collective worldview, values that highlight the importance of community and family and would be difficult to uphold if interpersonal relationships were impaired or rendered impossible (Iwamoto,

Liao, and Liu 2010).

In addition to influencing psychological functioning, the intersections of hegemonic masculinity and cultural experiences also impact behaviors and attitudes toward help-seeking. Asian American males, for example, are less likely to seek professional help than their female counterparts; while this finding mirrors research from other ethnic groups, it also highlights how “it may be that the differences between men and women of color is not simply gender, but the impact of their culture on their gender attitudes” (Wong 2017, 267). Other racial/ethnic minority males’ attitudes toward help-seeking are similarly influenced by how their cultural values and experiences interact with hegemonic masculinity. For Latino males, the relationship between masculine norm endorsement and help-seeking behaviors is complicated by contradictory cultural values, as discussed above. Davis and Liang (2015) therefore advise conceptualizing Latino masculinity as a multidimensional hybridization of hegemonic and cultural ideals that “can include contradictory dimensions such as restrictive emotionality and empathy concurrently” (29). For Latino males, then, some hegemonic aspects of masculinity may inhibit help-seeking behaviors while other cultural components of masculinity may permit or even endorse it. Specifically, Davis and Liang (2015) find that “higher endorsement of *machismo*,” a constellation of hyper-masculine traits including aggression, emotional restrictiveness, and antisocial behaviors, “was associated with more negative attitudes toward psychological help seeking” (29, emphasis added).

For African American males, experiencing racism appears to influence both attitudes toward help-seeking as well as sensitivity to masculine threats: Powell and colleagues (2016), for example, note that while endorsing masculine norms can mitigate general health help-seeking, particularly among individuals with depression, specific race-related factors, predominantly exposure to racial discrimination, appear to work in tandem with masculine ideals, thus reducing the likelihood of health help-seeking even further (Powell et al. 2016). Furthermore, Goff and colleagues (2012) posit that racist experiences like discrimination could serve as threats to men of color’s sense of self-efficacy, which in turn threatens self-perceptions of their masculinity. In a pair of experimental tests of this hypothesis, the authors find that Black males who were exposed to racially-discriminatory feedback became more vigilant to threats to their masculinity and, as a result, engaged in “compensatory masculine behaviors,” in this case performing push-ups (Goff, Di Leone, and Kahn 2012). Interestingly, White males exposed to racially-discriminatory feedback did not engage in more masculine behaviors (i.e. push-ups); rather, they disengaged, presumably in an effort to reaffirm their social status (Goff et al. 2012). For African American males, then, the combination of endorsing hegemonic masculine norms and experiencing race-related inequality, such as discrimination, not only presents significant barriers to help-seeking, but also produces heightened attunement to threats toward their masculinity, which, as noted previously, could lead to an increased propensity for aggression as a means of defending their self-image (Copes et al. 2013; Goff et al. 2012; Powell et al. 2016).

Among Native Americans, historical trauma, a diminished sense of belonging, and other forms of cultural inequality remain among the most salient barriers to treatment seeking: In their exploration of both males’ and females’ barriers to help-seeking, Venner and colleagues (2012) highlight how American Indians (AI) seeking treatment for alcohol dependence experience “unique barriers to seeking help [that] had to do with ethnic matching of treatment providers and clients as well as lack of cultural interventions such as traditional healing. Some participants felt that substance abuse interventions were not for AIs” (357). Pervasive negative stereotypes about AI’s drinking behavior also engendered a sense of discomfort and contributed to some AI’s reluctance to participate in treatments where other AIs were not present (Venner et al. 2012). Indeed, historical discrimination, forced deculturization, and the federal government’s failure to uphold conditions of treaties concerning AI mental healthcare continues to influence Natives’ attitudes toward “White

man's medicine," fostering suspicion and reluctance to engage in Western psychological treatment practices (Grandbois 2005). Moreover, past ethnic trauma has been identified as a potential underlying cause of Natives' poor psychological functioning, specifically with respect to substance use: Interviews conducted with key informants on an ongoing intervention development project reveal that

participants viewed substance use and SUD as symptomatic of underlying trauma and poor community health. Poor community health was linked to historical trauma resulting from colonization and from recent racial trauma in the form of microaggressions and institutionalized racism (Skewes and Blume 2019, 96).

Given the breadth of cultural experiences and cultural values highlighted above, it is crucial that future investigations into the integrated GST/GRSP paradigm remain sensitive to males' racial/ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds, to ensure that findings accurately portray the nuances of the interrelationships between endorsement of hegemonic masculine ideals, gender role strain, and culturally-approved help-seeking mechanisms. Consideration of cultural differences may also help explicate how gender- and other status-related strains influence men of color's propensity for engaging in criminal behavior, therefore further enhancing contemporary criminological understanding.

### **CONCLUSION**

I have broadly sketched a theoretical argument for integrating aspects of Pleck's (1995) gender role strain paradigm into Agnew's (2011) general strain theory to explain the higher levels of male criminal behavior present in contemporary American society. I argue specifically that males face discouragement and disengagement from health- and mental health-related treatment-seeking behaviors as a result of socially-constructed and reinforced hegemonic masculinity; consequently, the coping strategies that they do develop are often maladaptive, encouraging mental health disorders and suicide, substance use/abuse, and even criminal violence. This discouragement and subsequent adoption of alternative coping mechanisms, when combined with the strains males experience as a result of hegemonic masculine gender ideals, can be seen as at least a partial explanation for the gendered disparity in crime commission. If men cannot address their strain through legitimate channels, the pressure they experience to conform to a masculine gender role may encourage them to seek deviant or criminal means of coping. As noted above, however, not all males, and not even all males who suffer from gender role strain, will resort to crime; the extent to which males internalize and aspire to masculine gender norms will influence both how they respond to strain and to what extent they adopt alternative coping strategies in place of engaging in traditionally "unmasculine" health or mental health treatment. Cultural and racial/ethnic differences must also be considered when assessing the extent to which males endorse masculine norms and the associated codes of conduct; this is especially prescient in light of research that suggests the very content of masculine ideologies may vary among different sociodemographic groups due to their unique cultural experiences (e.g., Lease et al. 2010). Overall, for males who strongly adhere to hegemonic masculine ideologies, experiencing substantial gender role strain while simultaneously facing discouragement from accessing culturally-sanctioned coping strategies could tip the balance in favor of a criminal response.

Outside the scope of this paper, however, are the steps necessary for continued refinement and testing of this theoretical assertion: devising reliable and valid means of measuring male gender role strain and adherence to the dominant masculine ideology, as well as employing such measures in empirical investigations. Future research is encouraged to undertake these tasks and continue to explore the impacts of gender role strain on male criminality; the burgeoning field of the psychology of men and masculinity provides a potentially fruitful starting point. Existing instruments such as the Brannon Masculinity Scale and the Male Role Norms Inventory- Revised (MRNI-R), reviewed

extensively by Levant (2011), offer techniques designed to measure males' experiences with hegemonic masculine ideals and corresponding gender role norms; integrating these measures into more traditional criminological studies of crime, including ethnographies, may serve to highlight ways in which male criminality intersects with the experience of tensions related to gender role norms. Despite the issues inherent in criminological measures of crime (see, for example, Cantor and Lynch 2005; Gove et al. 1985; and Krohn et al. 2010), inventories that assess men's adherence to dominant masculine ideologies, as well as the resulting strains, can add useful insight that is largely missing from the current criminological literature. Such inventories lend themselves well to incorporation into investigations of GST for, as Krohn and colleagues (2010) argue, tests of GST are best accomplished using self-report measures.

Additionally, qualitative methodologies for investigating males' experiences of strain and subsequent involvement in crime may prove especially illuminating given the key assumptions upon which the theoretical extension I have laid out here is founded: Individualization in both the extent to which a male adheres to hegemonic masculine conceptions and lacks culturally-legitimate means of addressing his strains points to the usefulness of viewing this theoretical extension through a constructionist lens. While the broader cultural context in which hegemonic masculinity is established and promoted provides an invaluable backdrop within which males' criminality must ultimately be understood, individual males likely use cues within this context to then socially construct their own subjective realities about how they "measure up" to masculine expectations. Specifically, Goffman (1963) points to how males internalize social feedback to construct identities for themselves as "unworthy, incomplete, and inferior" in situations where they fail to adhere to hegemonic masculine norms (128). Thus, understanding the ways in which males utilize culturally-situated feedback to construct their own personal realities will be key to thoroughly examining how gender-related strains influence individual males' engagement in criminality.

Agnew's (2006) work on storylines also points to the usefulness of qualitative lines of inquiry for understanding the relationship between background characteristics, strains, and subsequent offending behavior: Although contemporary criminological theories often favor explanations of crime predicated on background and situational factors, Agnew (2006) notes that criminals themselves often use narratives as a means of socially-constructing not just "the events and conditions leading up to the crime... [but also the] events and conditions prior to that situation" (120). He highlights the need for criminologists to consider not only the objective events and factors that influence criminality, but also the role of individuals' perception of those events to fully understand the linkage between background and situational factors. Methodologies that enable researchers to explore these processes, including in-depth interviews, are therefore strongly recommended for future research. Furthermore, Agnew (2006) asserts that "storylines are influenced by a range of somewhat idiosyncratic factors" (139); as noted above, qualitative methods may be particularly well-suited to allowing researchers to explore the individualized experiences and confluences of factors that contribute to criminality. This methodology could be especially effective when investigating gender-related strains, since, as I have argued here, the pathway between an experience of gender-related strain and subsequent criminality is often moderated by both a lack of conventional noncriminal coping mechanisms and the extent to which the individual endorses hegemonic masculine conceptions. Individual inventories, then, provide opportunities for criminologists to investigate how both objective experiences and individual perceptions of these factors interact to influence crime commission, ultimately resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of male criminality.

While I have offered several ways to investigate the integrated GST/GRSP paradigm as a means of illustrating some lines of inquiry that could yield particularly interesting insights, these ideas are meant to serve solely as a starting-point for potential empirical testing and is by no means exhaustive. Additionally, although I have given preference here to qualitative methodologies,

quantitative approaches can and should be considered as well. As Agnew (2006) notes with respect to storylines, quantitative research can shed light on the extent to which experiencing gender-related strain is predictive of criminal involvement, holding availability of conventional coping strategies and adherence to masculine norms constant (i.e. all things being equal, are males who experience specifically-gender-related strains more likely than males who experience general strains to engage in crime?) Methods that can target large samples of individuals, such as surveys, are particularly useful in examining the prevalence of gender-related strain in the broader population, as well as contextualizing any findings stemming from qualitative investigations (e.g., determining how widespread lack of access to culturally-legitimate coping mechanisms is, or identifying specific subgroups based on age, socioeconomic status, or other sociodemographic variables that are particularly predisposed to adhering to hegemonic masculine norms). As with all social phenomena, a multifaceted approach to examining the integrated GST/GRSP paradigm will yield the most robust and informative results; therefore, I encourage future researchers to utilize both qualitative and quantitative methodologies as appropriate to examine the assertions I have made here.

Future research into this area is also encouraged to examine female gender role strain and the corresponding mechanisms for addressing that strain. As I have noted above, cultural gender expectations permit certain help-seeking behaviors more readily for women (e.g., seeking mental health counseling or psychotherapy) than for men, and, as argued here, it is likely that not only the mechanisms but also the strains themselves vary by gender. Perhaps women experience strains that can more easily be addressed by culturally-acceptable means, or perhaps their strains lend themselves less well to resolution through criminal activity. An extensive literature exists detailing what is perhaps the most pervasive source of gender-related strain for women of child-bearing age, balancing work and family roles (see, for example, Gunnison and Helfgott 2018; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Hochschild 1997); this body of work should be thoroughly examined to determine the extent to which these predictions regarding females' gender role strain and the mechanisms available for addressing that strain can be empirically substantiated. While out of the scope of the current article, it is nevertheless crucial that further investigations into this proposed integration of GRSP and GST contextualize any findings relative to males' experiences of gender role strain with a parallel consideration of females' experiences. Ultimately, integrating aspects of the gender role strain paradigm into general strain theory offers criminologists a more nuanced view of gender disparities in crime commission, and future empirical assessments of these theoretical assertions, including the development of appropriate measures, utilization of both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, and considerations of females' experiences with gender role strain, may shed further light on gender differences in crime commission in the contemporary United States.

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