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## Masculinity and Violence: Sex Roles and Violence Endorsement among University Students

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### Abstract

The relationship between masculinity and violence is examined in this paper. Masculinity is defined by key characteristics such as a willingness to take risks, having self-reliance, possessing a strong personality, exhibiting leadership abilities, defending ones self-beliefs and acting rationally. To be a real man, an individual must be seen being ambitious, dominant, self-reliant, competitive, independent, assertive and aggressive. Most of the characteristics of masculinity mentioned here are often associated with a culture of violence which is male dominated. The data was drawn from a survey administered to college students in a Turkish University by the authors. The results of this research confirmed that sex, masculinity and violence are very closely related.

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### 1. Introduction

The concept of gender roles (masculinity and femininity) was explored by sociologist Talcott Parsons who stated that social differentiation was a requirement of society and that the division of labor in the family between men and

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women was fundamental in ensuring the socialization of children (Bird, 2008). According to Parsons and Bales (2002) the father's role was 'instrumental' and the mother's role was 'expressive'.

The primary agents of socialization of children are through their interactions with institutions such as the family, media, peer groups and the school. They thus internalize proper gender roles and become men or women via the practices embedded within these institutions (Bird, 2008).

Kimmel (2004) stated that masculine attributes are associated with the gendered social roles that young males are expected to fulfill. For example traditional male attributes are associated with being dominant, stoic and rational compared to female roles which are characterized as being submissive, passive or irrational. Through their life course of "doing gender" most males will commonly define themselves as masculine and females will usually define themselves as feminine (Stets and Burke, 2000).

The conceptualization of masculinity is heterogeneous when comparing cultures. (Norman, 2007). For example in western countries such as the USA, Australia and in Turkey, masculinity is often stereotyped with men exhibiting characteristics such as independence, physical strength, aggressiveness, competitiveness, objectivity, rationality and showing less emotion than their female counterparts. By comparison women are considered to be more co-operative, physically weak, affectionate, attractive, emotional, neat, dependent, gentle, religious, quiet, strong irrational, passive, and more communicative than men (Stets and Burke, 2000; Franklin, 1984; Demez, 2005).

According to Hofstede (1998), masculine societies place more emphasis on tangible achievements in terms of status and financial success. Successful men are thought to be assertive, ambitious and tough compared to women who are expected to be tender, less career oriented and more focused on developing close relationships with others. The dominant image of males is associated with competitiveness and strength while females are more aligned with emotional well-being. Traditional male and female roles are reinforced by parents when socializing their children. For example boys are not expected to show their emotions when upset or hurt while girls are discouraged from participating in activities which are considered non-feminine such as playing rugby football.

In the Hofstede Masculinity index of 53 countries, Turkey is ranked 32 with a score of 45. The highest masculinity scores are from Japan (90), Austria (79) and Venezuela (73) and the lowest scores from Nordic countries such as Denmark (14), The Netherlands (14), Norway (8) and Sweden (5).

It is commonly believed that the dominant characteristics of masculinity are learned during the young person's formative years and is associated with violent forms of behavior (Moore, 2001). In contemporary society there is a belief that violence is closely associated with masculinity. Aggression and violence is often perceived as the negative side of conventional masculine identities. It can become a way of asserting or emphasizing masculinity through interactions with the peer group particularly during adolescence. (Accad, 2007; R.W. Connell, 1995; Van Hoven and Horschelmann, 2005; Edwards, 2006, Spierenburg, 1998; Hong, 2000; Kimmel and Mahler, 2003; Stets and Osborn, 2007; Aytac et al., 2009; Aytac, et al., 2011, Hall, 2002: 36).

Violence has been analysed from a number of perspectives such as psychoanalytical theory as in Freud's Oedipal drama, (Lafrance, 2004); biological theories which identify the hormone testosterone as the catalyst for aggression in males (Edwards, 2006, Moore, 2001; Pope and Englar-Carlson, 2001) and homosocial behaviours which explain the competitiveness among men (Kimmel, 2004a). By comparison, female behaviours which focus on communication and affection are said to be attributable to the female hormone estrogen (Demez, 2005).

There is a body of research literature which has focused on the role that an individual's environment plays in fostering forms of violent behavior. For example some research has implied that boys living in a violent culture learn that violence is a way to resolve conflicts and to assert power over others. Connell's (1995) theory of hegemonic masculinity states that this dominant form of masculinity asserts control over women and less powerful males such as homosexuals. Connell asserts that boys learn how to be violent and aggressive by copying the behaviours of their fathers who act as role models in terms of "how to act like a man". Feminist theorists argue that the patriarchal model is responsible for the subjugation of women and explains why women are often the victims of forms of domestic violence at the hands of their partners.

## **2. Masculinity and Violence Endorsement**

The association between masculinity and violence was initially made by Parsons who claimed that masculinity was internalized during adolescence which may explain why more boys have interactions with the criminal justice

system than girls (Krienert, 2003). Violence is therefore more strongly *associated* or indeed statistically correlated, with men or masculinity compared to women or femininity (Edwards, 2006). In addition Kimmel (2004a) argued that men are inherently more prone to violent forms of behavior compared to women.

In most studies males are viewed as the perpetrators of violence while females are more likely to be the victims of violence (Mills, 2001). For example in one study it was found that adolescent males were four times more likely to settle disputes through fighting compared to females and that over half of the sample of males stated that they were involved in fights at least once a year (Kimmel and Mahler, 2003).

Men therefore have more masculine status if they can demonstrate that they can protect themselves which results in a higher self-esteem with other males and females (Krienert, 2003). However if females exhibit forms of aggression or violence they are more likely to attract criticism for the behavior or become marginalized from the rest of society due to their non-conformity of feminine behaviours (Irwin and Chesney-Lind, 2008).

As discussed earlier the male hormone *testosterone* has been identified as one cause for amplified aggressive behavior among younger males. By comparison other researchers have cited other socio-biological factors like homosocial competition as a predictor of male violence. This has been linked to the evolutionary need for men to struggle with others for sexual access to females to procreate and ensure the survival of the human species (Kimmel, 2004a).

As mentioned by Kimmel, Freud explained that male violence occurs because of their roles in the Oedipal drama. In this scenario the young male desires to detach himself from his mother in order to align with his father in order to establish his masculine identity (LaFrance, 2004).

Boys are socialized from a young age to be “a real man” characterized by the ability to provide for his family and display traits such as bravery and a willingness to take risks. Boys are educated towards whom, when, and why they should use physical force (Rubenser, 2007). Fighting has been culturally and socially endorsed for males in many cultures and is seen to be tied to their masculine identity (Kimmel, 2004a).

The idea that gender roles are socially constructed is generally accepted among the researchers. More recent research has proposed that masculinity is a vital component when considering why people exhibit violent tendencies (Messerschmidt, 1993). Toughness, dominance, and readiness to settle conflicts through violence are therefore the central tenets in the production of the masculine identity (Krienert, 2003).

In the light of the review of some of the literature on violence perpetrated by males the following hypotheses of this research will be explored:

- H1) Men endorse violence more than women.
- H2) Masculinity is positively related with violence endorsement.
- H3) Femininity is negatively related with violence endorsement.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Quantitative data

The data for this study was collected from students in a Turkish university. The samples were selected randomly and the survey carried out in classrooms by research assistants and academics. Five hundred and sixteen students (N=516) enrolled in music, art history, sport/training participated voluntarily in the survey, which was administered by the researchers.

All participants completed a two part questionnaire as well as additional questions relating to demographic variables such as age, gender, family income and personal expenditure etc.:

1. *The Bem Sex-Role Inventory* : This inventory (BSRI) is an extensively employed scale in assessing gender role perceptions. Latest interests considering the validity of the attributes have evolved by considering changes to gender roles after the 1970s (Holt and Ellis, 1998). As previously mentioned, gender roles are rapidly changing and closely related with culture. Therefore, in the analysis of this paper we used a shortened version of this scale, which was created by exploratory factor analysis.

2. *The Violence Culture Scale*: Due to the limited research on the culture of violence in Turkey, a 9-item scale was developed by the authors to measure the culture of violence among the research cohort. This scale has two subscales which are violence endorsement (6 items) and violence exposure (3 items). The Violence Culture Scale consisted of a 5-rank response from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5).

### 3.2. Qualitative data

The secondary source of data collected was through the use of informal discussion groups and focus group interviews. Initially the research team conducted informal anecdotal information sessions with one hundred students enrolled in an undergraduate course at the faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences in a Turkish University. These discussions examined notions of masculinity and violence. The second form of qualitative research consisted of two focus groups consisting of 8 students. These interviews were of approximately 1.5 hours in duration. The questions were semi-structured and focused on the students’ perceptions about the characteristics of males and females in Turkish society.

## 4. Results

In this study the data was analyzed to provide an understanding of Masculinity and Violence Culture among young college students. In the factor analysis, the BEM Sex Role Index and Violence Culture Scale data was subjected to a principal-components factor analysis with varimax rotation.

Gender roles are closely related with culture. In the analysis, a shortened version of the BEM scale which was created using factor analysis was used.

The reliability of the scales was at an acceptable level when referring to Cronbach's alpha coefficient reliability which was 0.79 for Masculinity, 0.80 for Femininity, 0.80 for Violence Endorsement and 0.79 for Violence exposure sub-scale.

Table.1. The results of Factor Analysis for BEM Sex-Roles Inventory (a)

	Component	
	Femininity	Masculinity
Tender	.683	
Understanding	.664	
Affectionate	.629	
Sensitive to the needs of others	.624	
Compassionate	.620	
Eager to soothe hurt feeling	.614	
Gentle	.602	
Loves children	.592	
Loyal	.573	
Has leadership abilities		.768
Dominant		.727
Acts as a leader		.687
Assertive		.666
Self-reliant		.639
Willing to take a stand		.579
Willing to take risks		.568

Total Variance Explained Cumulative 42%, Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a Rotation converged in 3 iterations

The two dimensions were yielded in the factor analysis for Violence Culture Scale. These two dimensions accounted for 58% of the variance. Factor analysis also yielded two factors in the Violence culture scale. Like the BEM Scale, the items were selected with factor loadings of .39 or greater with the criterion of an Eigen value greater

than one in the Violence Culture Scale as well.

Table.2. . The results of Factor Analysis for Violence Culture Scale (a)

	Component	
	1	2
	Violence endorsement	Violence Exposure
If necessary, violence can be used to resolve disputes	.840	
To exert violence is sometimes normal	.789	
Fighting and/or self defence sports should be taught to children from an early age.	.632	
Knives and guns have always attracted me	.616	
I am against all kinds/types of violence <b>R</b>	.578	
I enjoyed interacting with violent games and movies when I was a child	.572	
When I was child, violence was seen as punishment from heaven		.838
When I was child, I never knew when my parents would reward me or punished me for my behaviors		.823
I was exposed to violence when I was a child		.785

Total Variance Explained Cumulative 58.43%, Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.  
 Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. a Rotation converged in 3 iterations.

**Independent T Test** showed that there is a significant difference between the genders. With regards to gender, the results confirm hypothesis (H1) that men endorse violence more than women (Violence endorsement  $t = -10.6163$  ;  $p < .001$ ).

Table.3. Correlations

		Gender	Femininity	Masculinity	Violence endorsement	Violence exposure
Gender	Pearson Correlation	-				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N	502				
Femininity	Pearson Correlation	-.165(**)	.80			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000				
	N	502	516			
Masculinity	Pearson Correlation	.212(**)	.215(**)	.79		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000			
	N	502	516	516		
Violence endorsement	Pearson Correlation	.441(**)	-.304(**)	.121(**)	.80	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.006		
	N	501	515	515	515	
Violence exposure	Pearson Correlation	.242(**)	-.150(**)	.100(*)	.477(**)	.79
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.023	.000	
	N	500	514	514	514	514

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

We hypothesized (H2) that “*Masculinity is positively related with violence endorsement*”. The data endorsed the significant correlations between masculinity and violence endorsement ( $r=-.121$ ,  $p < .006$ ). Moreover, ‘*Femininity is negatively related with violence endorsement*’ (H3) hypothesis was also confirmed ( $r=-.304$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

Table.4. Multiple Regression Coefficients(a)

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta	B	Std. Error
1	(Constant)	2264	.293		7726	.000
	Femininity	-.268	.043	-.254	-6241	.000
	Masculinity	.088	.038	.097	2355	.019
	Gender					
	1 Female	.693	.074	.379	9316	.000
	2 Male					

**R Square : 0.25** , a Dependent Variable: Violence endorsement

A multiple regression analysis was computed for Violence endorsement. The independent variables related to the research respondents gender, femininity and masculinity. Gender plays a significant role in violence (Seymour, 2009: 40). The **most important indicator** in the model is *gender*. Also, **femininity** as a social role is a *second important indicator* and **masculinity** is another *significant indicator of violence endorsement*.

## 5. Conclusion & Discussion

To conclude the three research hypotheses, which were based on the academic literature discussed previously were endorsed in this paper. The results of the qualitative/focus group interviews concurred with the outcomes of the quantitative data. Students defined males as having traits such as being self-reliant, forceful, analytical, protective of his family, hard-working, being assertive, active, dominant, a bread-winner, a decision maker, aggressive, fearless, respected and a risk taker. They mentioned that a man must protect his family. If necessary, he should fight to protect his family.

In the early years of socialization young people become exposed to violence in its various forms. From an early age, most families buy toy guns for their sons. Kimmel mentions that violence is created by the media as a fun activity in the form on interactive computer games or through the glorification of violence through countless Hollywood movies. Young people have easy access to video games in which they kill other people as fun and entertainment. In some games the player is rewarded for killing people which reinforces the notion that violent behavior is tolerated in society.

As a result of the dominant culture in this study, males declared that they enjoyed interacting with violent games and movies more than females. Moreover, the data showed that males had consciously exercised violence towards others in the past and they were exposed to violence more than females from early childhood. The traits of women were identified as being maternal, tender, gentle, home-maker, yielding, affectionate, sensitive to the needs of others, emotional and insecure.

Unlike girls, boys are encouraged to use violence. If a boy is beaten by another boy, his father generally accuses him of being passive and encourages his son to fight to be a (masculine) ‘*real man*’ who can defend himself better than ‘*sissy boys*’. Furthermore, families think that passive boys will not be successful in surviving life if they do not exhibit aggressive behavior. Male violence can therefore be seen as expression of power which reinforces a persons’ masculinity (Holt and Ellis 1998). ‘Men are expected to be tough’ (Lewis, G., 1983) and violence is an *accepted part of masculinity* in Turkish culture as well.

The focus group interviews showed that the majority of women prefer a man who exhibits power and could potentially protect her if she is threatened. Most females in the qualitative interview said that a man should demonstrate his power (violence) if required but he should not be involved in unnecessary aggressive behavior. Females believed that a masculine (violent) man would be more equipped to protect his woman/family compared to a more than affectionate and sensitive man. In conclusion, the results of this research confirmed that sex,

masculinity and violence are very closely related.

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