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Affirming the Strengths in Men: A Positive Masculinity Approach to Assisting Male Clients

Matt Englar-Carlson and Mark S. Kiselica

Scholarship on men and masculinity has greatly informed the mental health field about the experiences of men. Despite this growth in information, there is limited exploration of understanding the healthy and adaptive experiences of men. The authors examine the emerging area of positive masculinity with a focus on applying a strength-based approach to counseling men.

Keywords: men, masculinity, strength based, positive masculinity, mental health

Although there has been increased attention on understanding the lives of men and working with them in a clinical setting, some researchers (O'Neil, 2012; Smiler, 2004; Wong et al., 2011) have critiqued the existing knowledge base as being overly problem focused, primarily detailing the deficits of and the difficulties created by men. There is, therefore, a knowledge gap around understanding the actual healthy lives of men and how counselors can promote wellness with male clients. In response, several scholars have advocated for greater research and clinical attention to be given to positive dimensions of masculinity (Hammer & Good, 2010; Kiselica, 2006, 2011; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010; O'Neil, 2012). Wong (2006) encouraged counselors to respect their healing traditions and to move beyond "business as usual" therapeutic approaches (i.e., eradicating "the bad") toward developing strategies that capitalize on strengths and virtues (i.e., promoting "the good"). In a sense, this can result in crafting a counseling setting wherein the focus is on what the client *does* as opposed to what the client does not do. In this article, we present a rationale for applying strength-based approaches for working with male clients. We examine the concept of positive masculinity and note the influence of context and cultural forces in defining strength-based ways of understanding and working with male clients.

Conceptualizing Strength-Based Approaches

In recent years, there has been a growing focus on applying strength-based approaches to counseling (Chapin & Boykin, 2010; Kosine, Steger, & Duncan, 2008; Smith, 2006). The traditional foundation of counseling emphasizes normal human development, wellness, and prevention rather than amelioration of psychopathology (Grothaus, McAuliffe, & Craigen, 2012), but recent efforts to develop strength-based approaches have been further bolstered by the emergence of the field of positive psychology (Joseph & Linley, 2006). Although positive psychology is in its infancy, it has grown rapidly and influenced the helping professions (Azar, 2011). Counselor educators have expressed a deep interest in integrating aspects of positive psychology into counselor training (Kolondinsky, Englar-Carlson, Montopoli, & Edgerly, 2011). Both positive psychology and counseling share the basic assumptions that human goodness, growth, development, and excellence are as authentic and deserving of attention as disease, disorder, and distress are. Furthermore, counseling is a learning activity in which the client is educated about herself or himself, with an emphasis on personal growth, wellness, prevention, and the enhancement of optimal health (Kottler & Shepard, 2010; Sweeney, 2001). Thus, researchers have begun to examine the intersection of positive psychology and strength-based counseling (Harris, Thoresen, & Lopez, 2007), school counseling (Park & Peterson, 2008), career counseling (Zikic & Franklin, 2010), and rehabilitation counseling (Chapin & Boykin, 2010).

Others have moved beyond specific settings and explored cultural components and influences in forming and defining strengths (Grothaus et al., 2012). This is a way to develop a culturally embedded understanding of what is considered "positive" or a "strength" (Pedrotti, 2011; Pedrotti, Edwards, & Lopez, 2009). McNulty and Fincham (2012) noted that psychological traits and processes are not inherently positive or negative; instead, whether psychological characteristics promote or undermine well-being depends on the context in which they operate.

Sex and gender, like other identity factors, are recognized as powerful organizing principles in peoples' lives and experiences (Kimmel, 2013). Although the concept of cultural competence has been addressed in the counseling field, the notion of gender competence has often been overlooked

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(Owen, Wong, & Rodolfa, 2009; Sinclair & Taylor, 2004). Haen (2011) noted that because gender is often viewed from a binary point of view—male and female—there does not seem to be much to know in terms of competency. From a social constructivist view, notions of femininity and masculinity, and thus the lived experiences of any individual, are defined by cultural, historical, socioeconomic, and institutional forces (Smiler, 2004). The sociopolitical reality of privilege, power, and gender in any given society reveals that men and women will have different experiences. Pedrotti (2011) noted that it would be erroneous to assume that there is only one perspective of a positive trait for different genders, because different cultures have varying ideas of what is positive for each gender. Traits are not universally positive because a multitude of contextual cultural factors influence what might be considered positive. Therefore, a culturally embedded perspective on strength-based work with men incorporates culture and context, including facets such as gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and other identity variables.

When such a perspective is taken, culture must be considered when interpreting any type of behavior (Pedrotti & Edwards, 2009). Scholarly work can be used to encourage men to adopt and consolidate behavior, attitudes, and beliefs that are helpful to them (Gable & Haidt, 2005), but cultural context plays a role in determining which traits are most helpful.

The Rationale for Using Strength-Based Approaches With Male Clients

As other researchers have noted (see Brooks & Good, 2005; Englar-Carlson, 2006; O'Neil, 2012), there has been a flurry of scholarly activity during the past 30 years that has been focused on understanding the psychology of men and masculinity. Building on the social and cultural critique of the feminist movement in the larger society and the feminist approach in the helping professions in which women deconstructed their gender roles, the psychology of men and masculinity centered on men as gendered individuals and questioned the impact of sexist social norms on men (O'Neil, 2012). The prevailing framework, called "a new psychology of men" (Levant & Pollack, 1995), questioned traditional Western norms for men that rigidly endorsed emotional stoicism, competition, status, and toughness. Furthermore, a large body of empirical research (see Englar-Carlson, Stevens, & Scholz, 2010; O'Neil, 2012) framed many of the problems associated with men, such as aggression and violence, homophobia, misogyny, detached fathering, the overall neglect of physical and mental health resulting from the traditional Western male socialization process, and the rigid enactment of the accompanying social norms. A driving factor behind the growth of the new psychology of men has been the compiling of male-specific data that examined the underlying causes of the ever-growing physical and mental health disparities between men and women across all racial and ethnic groups (see Courtenay, 2011; O'Neil, 2012).

Much of the theorizing about the nature of these disparities noted that being socialized to conform to Western norms of traditional masculinity may limit men's psychological development, constrain their behavior, and result in gender role strain, stress, and conflict (Levant, 1996; O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995; Pleck, 1995). A consistent finding has been a strong association between rigid and restrictive adherence to traditional masculinity and negative health outcomes among men, such as a decreased ability to express emotions and to seek help for both physical and mental health concerns (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; Englar-Carlson, 2006). In a comprehensive literature review on the psychology of men, O'Neil (2012) noted that the collected data on the lives of Western men reflected significant distress that cannot be denied easily. Brooks and Silverstein (1995) concluded that there was a "dark side" (p. 281) to traditional masculinity, and Levant (1997) argued that a masculinity crisis exists with men that requires a redefinition and reconsideration of masculinity.

When taken as a whole, it would be hard to say that the wealth of data on the lived experiences of men is inaccurate. There is now a firm understanding of how restricted gender roles affect men and women, such that the damaging effects of patriarchal sexism on men are slowly emerging as a social justice issue (Englar-Carlson, 2009; Kiselica & Woodford, 2007; O'Neil, 2012). As such, this body of data has certainly raised awareness among mental health professionals about specific ways of working with men in terms of the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of a range of health concerns. However, though illustrative, the emerging picture about men is incomplete. To date, the bulk of the extant literature on the psychology of boys, men, and masculinity has been primarily focused on the important challenges of (a) creating an awareness about the detrimental effects of constricted forms of masculinity on boys and men and their relationships with others and (b) developing remedial approaches to counseling that are designed to help boys and men recover from dysfunctional masculinity (Kiselica, 2006, 2011; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010; Kiselica, Englar-Carlson, Horne & Fisher, 2008; O'Neil & Lujan, 2009). Kiselica (2011) and O'Neil and Lujan (2009) observed that the new psychology of men, although impressive and certainly beneficial, was overly focused on male pathology and identifying men's problems; it neglected any discussion of male strengths, adaptive behavior, and positive aspects of being a man. Isacco, Talovic, Chromik, and Yallum (2012) added, on the basis of the entirety of this research, that it is easy to take an essentialist perspective and conclude that traditional masculinity, or masculinity as a whole, is always negative. They added the critical distinction, however, that traditional masculinity per se is not associated with negative outcomes, but rather with the rigid, restrictive, sexist enactment of traditional male roles.

Kiselica (2011), in looking at the shortcomings of current information on males, noted that what is lacking is a framework for studying and using the strengths and adaptive qualities of men and boys. Furthermore, many of the central assumptions advanced by existing research on men and masculinity support the notion that males are defective and damaged, need to be fixed, and are at fault for the problems they bring to counseling. Within Western societies, these ideas already have some traction and do not need a further push to be accepted. Existing research suggests that people already associate more positive attributions to women than to men (Whitley & Kite, 2010). Both men and women assign more positive traits to the female gender (Eagly & Mladinic, 1994), and men and women alike have more favorable views of women (Rudman & Goodwin, 2004). Yet, in the counseling room, these notions can become potentially harmful because they may support preconceived ideas or biases that work against the growth of men or the creation of a nonjudgmental therapeutic space (Ali, Caplan, & Fagnant, 2010; Heesacker et al., 1999). Few models exist that portray men as healthy individuals or examine the adaptive qualities or behavior of men. For the most part, a focus on male strengths, empowerment, and even social justice are largely absent in the literature on the psychology of men (O'Neil, 2012). Overall, the field has identified what is not working with men, yet it seems to struggle with advancing a model of how to make life better or even what *better* might be for men.

Positive Masculinity

If the majority of scholarly work seems to focus on dark or negative masculinity, it is not surprising that *positive masculinity* is the term used to refer to qualities of traditional masculine roles that are more positive, strength-based, and potentially used to improve the lives of men and those around them (Isacco et al., 2012). Positive masculinity emphasizes the adaptive character strengths, emotions, and virtues of men that promote well-being and resiliency in self and others (Isacco et al., 2012). Working from a positive masculinity framework includes an emphasis on recognizing existing strengths; capacities and skills present in men; the encouragement of the potential in men; and the ability to see men for who they are, rather than who they are not. Positive masculinity moves away from addressing solely what is wrong with men to identifying the qualities that empower men to improve themselves and society. It is characterized by highlighting the hope and expectancy associated with the positive contribution that men make and will continue to maintain. By accentuating the positive, counselors can help men shift their attention and memory to the parts of themselves that are good, creative, successful, kind, and capable, not being limited by societal stereotypes. O'Neil (2010) noted the potential of positive masculinity.

> Positive masculinity is about changing the dialogue to what men can strive for that transcends the sexist socialization they have experienced. Many men remain confused about who they are or who they should become in terms of gender roles. Therefore, positive-healthy masculinity can be a vehicle to mediate the essentialist and destructive stereotypes that cause much unnecessary suffering for men, women, and children. (p. 105)

It is important to note that work in positive masculinity is primarily theoretical, with the exception of one known research article by Hammer and Good (2010), who examined the relationship between masculine norms, positive psychology strengths, and psychological well-being. They found that endorsement of some traditional Western masculine norms (e.g., risk taking, dominance, primacy of work, and pursuit of status) were associated with positive psychology constructs of personal courage, autonomy, endurance, and resilience. Conformity to other traditional Western masculine norms (e.g., winning, emotional control, self-reliance, and pursuit of status) were associated with lower levels of positive psychology constructs of grit, personal control, autonomy, and resilience. The importance of flexible enactment of one's masculinity was noted, illustrated by the finding that pursuit of status was associated with both positive strengths (e.g., courage) and negative outcomes (e.g., lack of grit, defined as perseverance for long-term goals). Nonetheless, this study offered empirical evidence supporting the connection between some traditional Western masculine norms and strengths.

Before examining the application of positive masculinity, it is important to note how the shift toward the health and strengths of men entered the scholarly discourse with a fair amount of critique and feedback (Addis, Mansfield, & Syzdek, 2010; Levant, 2008). With many scholars in the field identifying as feminist or profeminist (Szymanski, Baird, & Kornman, 2002), the study of the psychology of men and masculinity is aligned with a strong activist stance of reducing patriarchal power, male dominance, male sexism, and the restructuring of masculinity itself (Baird, Szymanski, & Ruebelt, 2007; Levant, 1997). In addition, much of the scholarly work in the new psychology of men is focused on the myriad of problems that men have experienced or presented to society (e.g., interpersonal violence, anger, aggression); and men themselves were rarely conceptualized as a marginalized group (O'Neil & Renzulli, in press). For many individuals, the idea of empowering men or identifying strengths may seem foreign or downright antithetical to someone who is working to reduce male power, privilege, and sexism. A central concern could be that advocating for a positive psychology of men, or positive masculinity, may gloss over the dark side of masculinity and may be associated with supporting patriarchal structures.

Another concern about focusing on positive gendered traits (either feminine or masculine) is that this leads to essentializing those traits as belonging exclusively to a gender and reinforces stereotypes (Englar-Carlson & Smart, in press). Positive masculinity has been criticized as promoting essentialism because it inhibits the deconstruction of gender

roles, limits social change, and detracts from emphasizing human qualities in men (Addis et al., 2010). We address these critiques later in the article.

The Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity Model

Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) presented the positive psychology/positive masculinity (PPPM) model as a strength-based approach to working with men. The model integrates the concept of positive masculinity with a theoretical approach to counseling that elevates the role of client strengths and available resources as the focal point of intervention (see Duncan, Miller, & Sparks, 2004). Although many individuals are familiar with the maladaptive aspects commonly associated with masculinity (e.g., need for power and control, aggression and violence, competition, restriction of emotion) and many men may feel stigmatized by being associated with these norms, it is important to realize that not all males embody those traits. Rather, men also display healthy and admirable qualities that model their notions of masculinity as adaptive and prosocial among their friends, families, and communities. Their enactment of traditional masculine norms is not, by definition, restricting, maladaptive, or harmful.

A goal of the PPPM approach, therefore, is to help male clients distinguish and embrace healthy and adaptive aspects of their own masculinity. Kiselica, Englar-Carlson, and their colleagues (Kiselica et al., 2008; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010) offered the approach primarily as a clinical tool for developing rapport and framing interventions with male clients. They outlined 10 traditionally oriented strengths of men: male relational style, male ways of caring, self-reliance, generative fathering, fraternal organizations of service, worker-provider tradition, male courage, daring and risk taking, humor, and heroism (for more details, see Kiselica et al., 2008; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). These 10 strengths are a representative rather than an exhaustive inventory of male assets, and they overlap to some degree. Additional strengths could be other themes such as responsibility, altruism, resiliency, protection of others, loyalty, perseverance, and nonviolent problem solving. For new male clients, assessing and focusing on strengths may offer a familiar starting point for further discussion about difficulties (Hammer & Good, 2010).

The aforementioned male strengths, addressing some of the criticisms of positive masculinity (e.g., Addis et al., 2010), are presented as social constructions; they are seen as neither necessarily male specific (e.g., women show courage, are heroic, and use humor) nor are they based on biologically determined sex differences between men and women. Thus, they can can be considered to be human strengths (Kiselica et al., 2008), although the expression by each man will be embedded within a cultural context (Pedrotti & Edwards, 2009). Boys and men, however, are socialized to develop and demonstrate these positive qualities and behaviors, which are then modeled for others and passed down in male-particular ways (Pleban & Diez, 2007). This positive male socialization process is rarely discussed in the psychological literature on boys, men, and masculinity, with the possible exception of the generative fatherhood work, which accentuates how fathers and grandfathers care for the next generation (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1996). Importantly, Kiselica et al. (2008) cautioned that male strengths are not universally positive; rather, they are adaptive in some settings and maladaptive in others. For example, many men take pride in their role as a worker and their ability to provide for others (Heppner & Heppner, 2009); however, this can become problematic if rigidly enacted and dominant at the expense of other important needs, such as assisting with child care and housework or attending to one's physical and mental health (Brooks & Silverstein, 1995; Levant, 1995). Additionally, loyalty is commonly identified among men as a desirable trait because it can strengthen relationships, build trust, and show support of others. However, when used in a rigid manner, loyalty has the potential to reinforce traditional positions of male privilege (e.g., protecting other men at the expense of truth and justice) and mask independent thinking. It is the ability to be flexible in the enactment of male strengths and knowing when it is adaptive that is critical (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010).

Broadening the PPPM Approach

In their original description of the PPPM model, Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) noted how cultural and contextual factors influence the definition, development, and expression of male strengths. However, in an effort to develop a stronger, culturally embedded perspective (see Englar-Carlson & Smart, in press; Grothaus et al., 2012; McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Pedrotti & Edwards, 2009), more discussion of cultural influences within the PPPM model is necessary. In particular, it is critical to recognize that a man's social identities are not separate categories that can be examined in isolation, but rather constructed through the intersection of multiple influences. A man's identity and expression of masculinity is connected to his social class, race, sexual orientation, ability status, religion, and other salient identities and roles (Shields, 2008). Therefore, any conversation about male strengths and positive masculinity would need to be conducted within a framework that embraces the context of one's identity. The PPPM model presents general notions or themes around traditional male strengths. Cultural and contextual factors influence the definition, development, and expression of male strengths, because men will contribute to others in reference to the cultural expectations around them. For example, qualitative research has indicated that family is a salient feature of what it means to be a man for Latino (Hurtado & Sinha, 2008) and African American men (Hammond & Mattis, 2005), yet it is often not identified as a major dimension of masculinity in mainstream research (Wong et al, 2011).

Some areas for deepening the contextual connection of the PPPM model can be found in emerging scholarship that moves beyond outcomes associated with the restrictive and rigid enactment of masculinity and acknowledges how many men live their lives in a more adaptive, prosocial manner. For example, at an increasing rate, more men in the United States are becoming stay-at-home dads and finding satisfaction with this historically nontraditional role in their families (Rochlen, Suizzo, McKelley, & Scaringi, 2008). In their qualitative study, Rochlen et al. (2008) found that stay-at-home fathers were mostly confident and self-assured in their masculinity, even noting that some men take pride in being able to provide for their families beyond financial support. In addition, Rochlen et al. reported that although these men adopted many traditional Western masculine hobbies and behaviors, they could also navigate both traditional masculine norms and nontraditional roles and identities in a manner that was supportive of their health and the health of their families.

Fathers of Latino origin are another example. *Machismo* is a popular cultural stereotype that is believed to have only negative connotations of aggression and chauvinistic behavior in Latino men (Arciniega, Anderson, Tovar-Blank, & Tracey, 2008). Latino fathers are often portrayed as dominant, withdrawn, and harsh disciplinarians. Saracho and Spodek (2008) noted, however, that there is little data to support this image. Other scholarly research has stressed *caballerismo* (Glass & Owen, 2010), the positive side of machismo, which includes dignity, honor, respect, familial responsibility, and a father's role as a provider (Arciniega et al., 2008; Falicov, 2010). This conceptualization draws together changing gender role expectations for fathers and men of Latino heritage (Gutmann, 2007). Research by Cruz et al. (2011) found that fathers of Mexican origin who endorsed positive machismo were more likely to be involved and have positive relationships with their children. Counselors working with Latino fathers can look for caballerismo or explore it further as a tangible and culturally relevant aspect of one's identity. When counselors assess male strengths in a cultural context, they can find qualities that also may have more personal and cultural meaning.

There is other growing scholarship exploring the experiences of men who are enacting their own masculinity in proactive ways. In a qualitative study, Hernandez (2002) chronicled the efforts of inner-city, Chicano, adolescent fathers who were model sons, brothers, and fathers in the face of grinding poverty, crime, and limited life options. The stories of these young men highlighted their resilience as they embraced responsibility and parenthood. White (2008), in exploring the narrative of 20 African American men from a wide range of family backgrounds, ages, geographical locations, sexualities, and occupations, focused on the creative agency to redefine the assumptions and practices of manhood, create social change, and establish egalitarian relationships with women, children, and other men. Riggle and Rostosky (2011) documented the many positive aspects of being a gay man, noting the importance of creating communities, role modeling for others, and living authentically. This body of this research is notable for providing a broader understanding of men and masculinities that is tied to societal and cultural context. These ideas also represent some of the strengths within the PPPM model that can be highlighted and reinforced.

Additional Aspects of Strength-Based Work With Men

There are other conceptual ideas and thinking about developing positive, strength-based approaches with male clients. Davies, Shen-Miller, and Isacco (2010) proposed *possible masculinities* as a way of developing a positive view on men's attitudes, norms, and behaviors. The concept of possible masculinities is focused on inspirational and future goals for identities and behavior based on what men need in order to be healthy, responsible, and nurturing of themselves and others. This approach aligns men's behaviors to what society currently needs from men to promote healthy communities (e.g., nonviolent conflict resolution, appropriate emotional expression, fostering egalitarian relationships; Isacco et al., 2012). This model was developed with awareness that many clinical interventions adopt a deficit model with men, wherein they are encouraged about what not to do rather than teaching them healthy behavior, attitudes, and goals. The developers noted that the common counselor approach of asking new male clients "what brought you here; what can you do differently?" often brought resistance and defensiveness. Men often responded, "It is not my fault; I don't need to do anything differently." When that question was changed to "What kind of man do you want to be in the future, and what's stopping you from being that man?" men tended to drop their defenses and say, "I want to be a great man, and I'm holding myself back right now" (A. Isacco, personal communication, November 11, 2011). Specifically, possible masculinities can be a way to challenge men with a lack of purpose or direction in their lives. Davies et al. (2010) noted that this future focus was unique when compared with other models of positive masculinity. The future focus of goal setting for aspirational transformation also helps men "identify barriers to reaching those goals, assume responsibility, and engage in problem solving about addressing barriers" (Davies et al., p. 348). In addition, the possible masculinities concept incorporates both traditional and nontraditional aspects of masculinity in a man's aspirational self; the goal itself is driven individually by each man (Isacco et al., 2012) and, as such, can be closely tied to his cultural context and identity. College men using the possible masculinities paradigm reported being better prepared to identify obstacles to their goals and having a better idea of what could be done to overcome these obstacles (Davies et al., 2010).

Emotional Expression

The area of emotional expression has received considerable attention in the literature on the psychology of men. In Western societies, there appears to be pressure and social expectations that males constrict emotional expression despite considerable evidence that boys and men are more like, rather than different from, girls and women in their emotional make up (Hyde, 2005; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Men tend to be capable of recognizing and expressing a wide range of emotions, yet observed differences in emotional expression for men tend to be influenced by social contexts and the willingness to express emotions, not the ability to express emotions (Wester, Vogel, Pressly & Heesacker, 2002; Wong & Rochlen, 2005). Thus, a challenge is to understand the contexts that are conducive to emotion expression (Kiselica, 2003) and cultural influences that dictate how a man expresses his affect. In addition, men may not always choose the privileged form (e.g., verbal expression) of emotional expression, preferring nonverbal (writing), linguistic (using language), or physiological means (e.g., facial expression, body movement). Wong and Rochlen (2008) noted how solution-focused therapists use "exceptions" to explore men's difficulty with expressing emotion to "construct a more affirming picture of men's emotional life" (p. 159). Wong and Rochlen's approach focuses on looking for ways and experiences in which men *are* expressive so that a more comprehensive and hopeful view is taken, thereby ensuring that an individual man is not reduced to a nonemotional male stereotype.

Help-Seeking Behavior

Another way of developing strength-based approaches with men is to challenge the social norms about men's help-seeking behavior and to practice male-friendly outreach with men. Two well-known reviews of the help-seeking literature indicated that men have been reluctant to seek assistance for mental and physical health care, and it has been hypothesized that traditional male ideology contributes to this reluctance (Addis & Mahalik, 2003; O'Neil, 2012). Consequently, one of the major focuses of the new psychology of men has been to help men recognize that the pressures they experience to be self-reliant and to avoid expressing vulnerability can have an adverse effect on their help-seeking behavior (Levant, 1995). These efforts must be balanced with a recognition that many men do seek help each year, a reality that is supported by recent research. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2012), the number of men receiving mental health services and counseling has been increasing in the last 10 years, with nearly 9.3% of men reporting that they had received treatment in the past year. Other researchers have reported no differences between men and women in service utilization. For example, in a study of 283 midwestern adults, gender did not significantly predict mental health service use (Nour, Elhai, Ford, & Frueh, 2009), and a survey of 5,877 individuals in the United States and Canada revealed that gender was not a significant predictor of mental health treatment dropout (Edlund et al., 2002). In addition, several statewide and national male-sensitive demonstration projects have been effective in recruiting populations of adolescent and young adult men who were historically resistant to counseling to participate in male-only psychoeducational support groups (Achatz & MacAllum, 1994; Brown, 1990; Romo, Bellamy, & Coleman, 2004). The lesson learned from these projects is that boys and men will use social and mental health services when those services address issues that are salient to males and are delivered by professionals who practice male-friendly approaches to helping (Kiselica, 2008).

Thus, the issue of men and help-seeking is a complicated matter with implications for how counselors discuss the topic with men in counseling and with other members of the profession. For male clients who are in counseling, it can be facilitative to commend them for coming (e.g., note the courage it takes, the importance of being responsible), but also to recognize that they are not an outlier. As a profession, if counselors only repeat, remember, and reinforce that men do not seek help, this can distort their perceptions about what is normal for males in terms of help seeking. More importantly, these beliefs also influence men's behavior, because it is what men believe other men think they should do as men. Social norms theory (Bicchieri, 2006) suggests that educating men about the large number of men who seek help is the best way to encourage men to ask for help. This is especially important for men, because it is common to underestimate the extent to which peers are accepting of seeking psychological help (Conley, 2012). This misperception can influence personal willingness to seek help. Finally, although men may experience some self-stigma about seeking psychological help (Vogel, Heimerdinger-Edwards, Hammer, & Hubbard, 2011), others may view seeking help as a personal strength rather than a personal weakness. Boman and Walker (2010) found that men who strongly believed in their ability to overcome obstacles and achieve outcomes saw fewer barriers to health care. Counselors can validate the courage it takes to seek help and note that by taking care of himself, the male client retains the ability to look out for others.

Translating Positive Masculinity Into Strength-Based Action

Working from a strength-based/ positive masculinity perspective focuses on building and strengthening assets that enable men to grow and flourish throughout life. What then does strength-based counseling using positive masculinity look like? In their original description of the PPPM model, Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) suggested that such counseling consists of identifying, affirming, and building upon the following male strengths that are passed down from men to boys across generations:

1. *Male ways of relating.* Recognize that boys and men, especially traditional males, tend to form friendships by engaging in activities that have a high action orientation, such as playing a game of basketball or working on a project together. Counselors can tap into men's relational style by encouraging clients to take action to solve their problems and by talking to male clients about their concerns while participating in action-oriented activities.
2. *Generative fatherhood.* This refers to the way adult men care for the next generation by responding in a consistent way to the needs of children over time (Dollahite & Hawkins, 1998). For example, loving fathers stimulate the physical development of their children through rigorous play, promote the autonomy and socialized behavior of their children through the teaching of values and rules and the application of consistent authoritative discipline, and foster their children's cognitive development through various forms of intellectual stimulation. Older men, especially when they are in the role of grandfather, express their love by offering their wisdom and support to younger generations. Counselors should affirm generative fathering in men and teach generative fathering skills as preparation for positive parenthood experiences.
3. *Male ways of caring.* Many men are socialized to protect their loved ones, to fix things around the house, and to offer solutions to others when they are faced with a problem. Counselors can help men have fulfilling lives by recognizing and promoting the ways that men express caring for their fellow human beings.
4. *Male self-reliance*. Western male socialization often teaches boys and men to use their own resources to solve problems and handle difficult situations. Psychologically healthy men enhance the expectation to be self-reliant with a consideration of the advice and assistance of others to address life's challenges. Counselors can promote the well-being of men by recognizing, teaching, and fostering healthy male self-reliance.
5. *The worker–provider tradition.* Being a worker and a provider is often a cultural expectation and a source of pride and fulfillment for many men. Counselors can support this orientation by letting male clients know that "we have a job to do" and that "we will work together." Counselors can also acknowledge male clients for the effort and hours they devote to their jobs, while assisting them with their career dilemmas.
6. *Male daring, courage, and risk taking.* Healthy men express their courage by taking risks without being reckless. At times, they may be called upon to face peril for the sake of completing a task or protecting a loved one. Counselors can show their appreciation to men who demonstrate such courage, while helping male clients to distinguish acceptable and necessary acts of daring (e.g., working on a job that has hazardous conditions to earn the income that will help him support his family) from acts of recklessness (e.g., drinking and driving).
7. *The group orientation of men.* Many men, across cultural groups, have learned to socialize and work in groups, such as athletic teams, fraternities, and military units. Counselors can capitalize on this tradition by developing and offering gender-sensitive groups consisting of all-male clients and encouraging men to join existing men's groups.
8. *Male humanitarian service organizations.* Throughout the history of the United States, numerous humanitarian organizations began as organizations of men dedicated to serving others, such as the Loyal Order of the Moose and the Lions Club International. Counselors should honor their male clients who participate in such organizations and help other male clients who are seeking positive companionship in their lives to explore and join male humanitarian groups.
9. *Male humor.* Men tend to use humor as a way to diffuse tension, express affection, and find escape from their worries. Counselors can enhance their relationships with male clients by helping them to loosen up when times are tough by injecting some well-timed jokes or good-natured ribbing into the counseling process.
10. *Male heroism.* Men look for and learn from their heroes, who represent a broad spectrum, from some of the great figures in history, to athletic stars, to everyday decent men. Counselors can explore with male clients the heroes in their lives and what can be learned from those individuals. Counselors can also steer troubled men to heroic role models who can demonstrate, by example, healthy patterns of being male.

We emphasize that practicing a strength-based approach to counseling with men does not mean that counselors should ignore the constricted notions of masculinity and the dysfunctional behavior of men. Instead, we concur with the position of Aspinwall and Staudinger (2003), who recommended that mental health professionals combine "the traditional focus on understanding, preventing, and curing negative psychological states" (p. 5) with "gaining a better understanding of human strengths and how to facilitate them" (p. 7). Consistent with this perspective, we endorse an approach to counseling that combines the PPPM, strength-based model with one that addresses the maladaptive aspects of masculinity. Specifically, we view a focus on male strengths as the starting point for counseling men. The early stages of counseling should be focused on identifying, affirming, and promoting male strengths

that are aligned with a client's cultural identity. By doing so, counselors can help men feel valued, thereby enhancing the odds of establishing a strong, therapeutic relationship with the client. This may reduce defensiveness and set the stage for an exploration of, and work on, issues that tend to be common among many men, such as an obsessive drive for success and power, hypercompetitiveness, restrictive emotionality, restrictive affectionate behavior between men, and conflicts between work and family relations (O'Neil, 2008). These gender role conflicts have been linked to numerous problems for men and the significant people in their lives. These problems include interpersonal restrictions (e.g., attempts by men to dominate and control others); attachment problems; marital dissatisfaction; negative attitudes toward women, gays, and racial minorities; rape myths; hostile sexism; sexual and dating violence toward women; and positive attitudes toward sexual harassment (O'Neil, 2008). Counselors can help troubled men replace these dysfunctional male attitudes and behaviors with noble notions of masculinity and their associated prosocial behaviors.

The PPPM model can be blended with other theoretical approaches to assist men with their development. Because the PPPM approach involves teaching men about positive masculinity, it fits well with psychoeducational and cognitive behavior models, which also emphasize instruction and homework assignments with clients. Men can be taught positive masculinity skills, such as generative fatherhood and male humanitarian service, through direct instruction by caring role models; they can also be taught how to use cognitive behavior techniques (e.g., affirming self-statements and self-reinforcement) as tools to prompt, guide, and increase their repertoire of positive male behaviors and attitudes (Kiselica, 2011). Certain practices from family systems counseling also can be incorporated into PPPM with men. For example, the strategy of examining transgenerational family patterns can be used to help men identify noble traditions of masculinity expressed across generations of their family that can be continued and dysfunctional ones that should be abandoned (Kiselica, 2011).

In conclusion, the counseling profession can make important contributions in helping men by studying, understanding, and promoting positive masculinity with male clients. The philosophical roots of counseling are grounded in the idea that change does not result from focusing on problems or dysfunction, but from attention on resources, creativity, and building relational support networks (Kottler & Shepard, 2010). Specifically, it is the resources (e.g., faith, optimism, persistence, or membership in supportive peer networks) that men bring into the counseling setting that serve as the greatest contributor to positive outcomes. A counseling approach that emphasizes positive masculinity, rather than one that is focused solely on individual strengths, allows the focus on the noble, adaptive, and enhancing aspects of masculinity as a whole to serve as a model that encourages men in the counseling process. The meaning that men attach to their life experiences is associated and forged by the influences that direct their lives. It is reasonable to expect that positive masculinity can be one of those influences. We invite you to join in the fulfilling work of using the characteristics of positive masculinity as building blocks for "promoting wellness and honorable manhood" in men (Kiselica et al., 2008, p. 32).

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