Will to Masculinity:
An Existential Examination
of Men's Issues

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The will to meaning can be frustrated by supplanting meaning with its consequence (e.g., will to power). The present treatise suggests that dominant male culture has supplanted meaning with masculinity, thus creating a will to masculinity. This work seeks to conceptualize the issues of modern masculinity through an existential-humanist lens.

Keywords: counseling, existential humanism, meaning, men's issues, masculinity

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For over 3 decades, the literature on men and masculinity has reported on a *crisis of masculinity* (Kimmel, 2012; Levant, 2011; Nahon & Lander, 2014; Rochlen, 2005). What it means to be a man has not evolved with larger social movements, thus engendering feelings of disconnection and confusion for many men (Wexler, 2009). Traditional depictions of masculinity value power and influence in society, which results in men either struggling to express or not acknowledging their more vulnerable selves (e.g., emotions, relationships; Elder, Brooks, & Morrow, 2012). Rather than creating a fulfilling and meaningful existence, traditional masculine norms create a hypervigilant experience in which men are compelled to compensate for violations of the masculine norm (Vandello & Bosson, 2013). As will be explored herein, many men are supplanting meaning with masculinity, which leaves them feeling anxious, depressed, and isolated. Therefore, the present work proposes that the true crisis of modern men and masculinity is an existential crisis (i.e., the existential frustration resultant from meaninglessness; Frankl, 1984). In the present context, this crisis is the result of

men being bound by social pressures to historic roles that do not facilitate a meaningful life. Existentialism is an approach to counseling that allows men to explore how they are connected to these roles, which do not typically allow them to live a deep emotional and holistic life as human beings. This appreciation of the personhood of individuals is a hallmark of a humanistic orientation to counseling, of which existentialism is a part, and it honors the ability of individuals to actualize their unique potential (Scholl, Ray, & Brady-Amoon, 2014).

It is common practice in science to break down and examine a problem in its discrete parts. Such a method provides scholars with a detailed understanding of the nuances involved in a particular issue. This has been the approach that many researchers have taken in the study of men and masculinity (for an overview, see Levant, 2011). Rather than viewing men as complex meaning-seeking human beings, science has relegated men to a collection of senseless parts (e.g., gender role conflict). As Dewell and Foose (2017) noted, "the current mental health culture finds itself in the midst of a protracted tilt toward the objectifiable, that is, toward perspectives that seek to quantify, define, and act upon human behavior" (p. 111). This is in juxtaposition to the antireductionist foundation of humanism, which values the subjective experiences of individuals (Scholl et al., 2014).

The present work seeks to humanize men by taking commonly occurring challenges of masculinity (i.e., the masculine crisis) and philosophically reconceptualizing them as symptoms of existential issues related to meaning. This is particularly apropos given that the present climate of reductionism in men's issues is akin to the conditions under which existentialism initially emerged—that is, a time when science parceled people into parts, rather than viewing them as a whole (Bauman & Waldo, 1998). Science and philosophy work in tandem, as Jaspers (1971) noted; science cannot provide meaning, and philosophy cannot provide knowledge of the world. Therefore, taking both science and philosophy in relation to each other imbues knowledge with meaning, which may be what is required to work through the present crisis of masculinity.

EXISTENTIAL THEORY

While existentialism is not a gender-dependent approach, situating masculinity within particular counseling theories has been identified as a best practice when working with men (Mahalik, Good, Tager, Levant, & Mackowiak, 2012). Additionally, the present work is not the first example of theorists applying an existential-humanist lens to working with particular populations (e.g., Barker, 2011; Basma & Gibbons, 2016; Bellin, 2017; Vereen et al., 2017). Existentialism is considered to be an aspect of the larger humanistic approach to counseling, largely because of the shared emphases on both the value and the irreducibility of human beings (Basma & Gibbons, 2016;

Scholl et al., 2014). The goal of existential counseling is an authentic being in the world, which requires that people become aware of themselves and the responsibility they have for their choices (Bauman & Waldo, 1998; Miars, 2002). This orientation toward working with clients is not reliant on particular techniques, but is more focused on how the counselor engages with the client and the concerns they focus upon (Yalom, 1980).

Traditional European existential thought has been drawn from the work of both philosophers (e.g., Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre) and counseling theorists (e.g., Viktor Frankl, Emmy van Deurzen, Irvin Yalom). The existential orientation asserts that humans need to become aware of their own responsibility in the world and then actively decide to whom and for what they take responsibility (Frankl, 1984; Sartre, 1997). This is reflective of the existential assertion that humans are free to choose (Yalom, 1980), which bestows them with said responsibility for those choices and the subsequent outcomes. When humans are in full awareness of the possibilities that are afforded by being in the present for these choices and of the uncertainty of those outcomes, they become anxious about what may result (van Deurzen, 2009). Counselors are tasked to work through these challenges with clients by assisting them in finding meaning in their lives to inform and guide their choices (Frankl, 1984). Frankl (1969) asserted that pleasure and happiness are not the end goals of human action, but are the products of a will toward meaning (i.e., a striving or pursuit of meaning). If humans strive for pleasure or happiness, they will do more to distance themselves from those ends, thus increasing what he termed a *noogenic neurosis* (i.e., a sickness of the soul that can present as sadness and worry). The will to meaning can be frustrated by external and internal forces, which can take the form of social pressures or internalized concerns about consequences for noncompliance to norms (Bellin, 2017).

Recent work by Vereen et al. (2017) furthered an emerging discourse on Black existentialism, which highlights how traditional European existentialism has not fully accounted for the marginalization or systematic oppression impacting people of color. The authors observed that in order for "humanists to see the uniqueness of the Black individual, they must first confront the lack of universality in the meaning of existence and how the social construction of race has affected that process of individuation and meaning" (p. 82). Black existentialism is also a departure from the individualistic perspective of European existentialism in that it incorporates more of a collectivist vantage point for conceptualizing the individual. This was reflected in Vereen et al.'s adjustment of René Descartes' *cogito ergo sum* to "I am, so we are" (p. 75) for Black existentialism. While existentialism has always concerned itself with attending to the psychological, biological, sociopolitical, spiritual, and uniquely personal attributes of an experience (van Deurzen, 2009), this enhancement of the existential dialogue depicts

the need to flexibly apply these concepts with particular consideration to race and systemic pressures.

The preceding introduction to existentialism does not provide a full explication of the theory, which is beyond the scope of the present article. Therefore, for those readers wishing to learn more about this approach to counseling, we suggest exploring the foundational resources by van Deurzen (2002) or Yalom (1980). What follows will situate the masculine crisis in a historical context, connect elements of traditional masculinity to existential issues, and provide a brief case scenario that links conceptualization to practice.

FACTORS THAT CATALYZED THE MASCULINE CRISIS

The present crisis of men and masculinity may have been catalyzed by multiple, large cultural shifts occurring over the past several centuries. Existentialism is typically focused on the present and oriented toward the future (van Deurzen, 2009); however, situating the crisis in a historical context deepens the overall conceptualization of men's concerns. Each of the factors implicated in causing the crisis reflects the loss of something within masculine culture. These losses have changed the context in which men and masculinity presently exist, but they have opened new opportunities for men to break from these roles.

The poet/scholar Robert Bly (2004) pointed to the Industrial Revolution as a significant shift for men and masculinity. This cultural upheaval required men to leave their homes and spend significant portions of their days in factories or shops. In essence, it took male role models (e.g., fathers, uncles, grandfathers) out of the home and thus out of the everyday lives of their sons. As a result, boys were disconnected from manhood, and the traditional male rites of passage went by the wayside. Mothers took on the challenge of rearing their sons from boyhood to manhood. While well intentioned, women could not replace the role of older men, nor could they help boys understand what it meant to be a man. Bly highlighted the loss of these male figures as central to the loss of men's grounding in a meaningful masculine culture. The disconnection between men and boys disrupted the evolution of masculinity, which may account for the stagnation that occurred for centuries around what it means to be a man.

In contrast, other scholars have focused on more recent political shifts—most notably, the impact of second-wave feminism (e.g., Levant, 1996; Wexler, 2009). This movement challenged the patriarchal structure of Western society and took men out of the central role of privilege over women. The feminist political shifts created greater access to opportunities and benefits that were once afforded only to men. As a result, women were able to take on new roles and identities in and across different societal domains. This

changing political landscape, moving toward greater gender equality, was not necessarily reflected in corresponding shifts in masculine identities. Men traditionally stuck to old ways of being, even as the society around them was evolving. Therefore, this loss is not one of the roles taken on by men, but rather of what those roles afforded men (i.e., political capital/power). As a result, men may have found themselves enacting roles and behaviors that are incongruent with the world around them.

The final catalyst was postulated by Frosh (2002), who attributed the crisis to a rise of postmodern philosophies across Western society. He noted that postmodernism validates multiple ways of knowing and multiple truths, both of which are culturally situated and reflect an undoing of traditional hierarchical power structures. Of interest to Frosh was how postmodernism honored knowing through emotions, which modernism traditionally associated with femininity. These types of subjectivity are in direct conflict with the philosophy of rationalism, which was associated with traditional masculinity. Rationalism prized the removal of emotion from thinking and the pursuit of an objective or observable truth. The philosophies of postmodernism and rationalism stand in direct opposition to one another and, according to Frosh, have confounded traditional masculine ways of being. In essence, the privileging of one philosophical lens is no longer tenable in modern society. The loss of rationality destabilized the privileged foundation upon which men and masculinity were situated.

Each of these causes has challenged what it means to be a man and the context in which men exist. No one of these theories has precluded the others, even though they were presented as discrete concepts. Therefore, it seems plausible and quite likely that a confluence of these issues has catalyzed the present crisis. As such, men have lost their stable masculine community, their political location in society, and their privileged philosophical positioning. The shifts result in an incongruence between present conditions and historical masculine roles. While men still experience the unearned benefits of a patriarchal society, there are cracks in the metaphorical wall. Through these cracks new ways of being are emerging and with them new opportunities to reinterpret traditional expectations (e.g., "caring masculinities"; Elliott, 2015, p. 240). Therefore, the enactment of traditional masculine roles may be placing the achievement of masculinity above meaning for some men, resulting in a *will to masculinity* (i.e., pursuing masculinity as an end goal in itself, akin to a will to meaning).

WILL TO MASCULINITY

Traditional masculine roles are social norms and customs to which men are expected to adhere (Kilmartin, 2000). These roles typically entail men being independent, emotionless, strong, and in control (Kimmel, 2012). Men have been taking on similar masculine roles for several generations,

and these roles have remained largely stagnant (Kimmel, 2012). They may have been more relevant in the lives of men and the larger society prior to the current crisis, but they are outdated in the present landscape (Elliott, 2015; Levant, 1995; Silverberg, 1986). The manner in which men enact these qualities may vary, but if not expressed, men may be ridiculed or shamed for nonadherence (Moss-Racusin, Phelan, & Rudman, 2010; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). Therefore, many men will embody these characteristics more as a way to avoid shame than as an outcome of the pursuit of meaning. The link between these roles and existentialism has received little examination but has great clinical utility in the treatment of men (Thompson, 2001). Frankl (1984) asserted that the primary force in people's lives is meaning, the pursuit of which he termed the *will to meaning*. Pleasurable and rewarding things may be produced from this pursuit, such as money, power, and sex. However, when people supplant meaning with another goal, which is typically one of the products of the will to meaning (e.g., pleasure), existential problems can result. When men enact traditional masculine roles in order to avert shame or embody an ideal, they are placing masculinity as the goal, thereby supplanting meaning and creating a will to masculinity.

Gender Role Strain and Existentialism

The will to masculinity not only is void of meaning but can be harmful, as reflected in gender role strain. The latter is the strain that men experience from adhering, or attempting to adhere, to traditional masculine roles (Kilmartin, 2000). This adherence can lead to four areas of strain for men: (a) success, power, and competition; (b) restrictive emotionality; (c) restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior between men; and (d) conflict between work and family. These strains isolate men and limit their ability to fully express their potential (O'Neil, Good, & Holmes, 1995). Therefore, a more existential perspective might assist in enhancing men's human potential.

Success, power, and competition. Throughout history, masculinity has held the element of expressing power and control (Cochran & Rabinowitz, 2000). This need for power is expressed through aggressive and power-dominating behaviors (Rabinowitz & Cochran, 2002; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016; Vandello & Bosson, 2013). Men have been encouraged to compete with others in order to achieve power and success; however, these behaviors have been linked with feelings of distress and/or anxiety (Blazina & Watkins, 1996; Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Hayes & Mahalik, 2000). While the enactment of this way of being is a trapping of traditional masculine roles, it may reflect a pursuit or will to power as a goal. This process by which meaning is supplanted by the consequences of meaning, in this case power, has been cited as a source of existential frustration (Frankl, 1984). Men have traditionally exerted control through emotional restriction, dominance at work, and intellectual reasoning (Silverberg, 1986).

These challenges are also reflected in the existential literature, which depicts power and control as helpful in only temporarily pacifying feelings of anxiety (Yalom, 1980). Additionally, these behaviors have been used to control partners in relationships, but this does more harm than good in facilitating those connections (Silverberg, 1986). Therefore, men who attempt to attain success through power may ultimately end up anxious and isolated.

Restrictive emotionality. Traditional masculine roles assert that vulnerable emotions, such as sadness or fear, can be a threat to a man's ability to be successful. Expressing emotion has traditionally been considered more feminine, which is to be avoided by men; emotional men are ridiculed for being weak and powerless (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). Emotions can often cloud judgment and distract from decisiveness, elements that are central to masculinity (Frosh, 2002). However, this restriction has been linked with a decreased sense of well-being and self-worth (Blazina & Watkins, 1996; Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995) and with feelings of failure (Shepard, 2002). Alexithymia, or the inability to experience emotions, has been linked to poor relationships, poor communication, and fear of intimacy (Karakis & Levant, 2012). May (1969) addressed what he termed the "schizoid world" (p. 16), which consisted of a society out of touch with feelings and genuine connections. Laing's (1990) description of this term was similar, emphasizing the isolation that results from this state of being. Additionally, being out of touch with emotions can lead to a lack of direction and meaning in life, given that emotions can often provide such guidance to individuals (May, 1969; van Deurzen, 2002).

Restrictive sexual and affectionate behavior between men. Boys are socialized at a very young age to compete with others through games that force a win–lose relationship to establish power (Pasick, 1990; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). This scenario pits boys against other boys with winning being conditional on someone else losing, which is in contrast to more relational or cooperative styles of play and competition. Therefore, men are quickly taught to restrict their affection toward other men (i.e., their competitors). This way of relating to other men can be very difficult for men, who may desire having more genuine connections but have been policed to restrict that expression (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). It is expected that men will be independent from others, be self-sufficient (Kilmartin, 2000), and solve their own problems (Wexler, 2009). All of this disconnection between men can lead to a greater sense of isolation, which is not uncommon when confronting existential issues (Yalom, 1980). By committing to a way of being that isolates, men are further engendering the existential crisis that is facing men and masculinity.

Conflict between work and family. Traditional masculine roles require men to fully invest themselves in their work, to the point of excluding family, and to view themselves as the primary breadwinner (Thébaud, 2010). Many

men experience the conflict between work and family as a double bind. If a man works hard to support the financial and social stability of his family, he needs to invest his time and energy into areas outside of his family. However, if he were to invest the same time and energy into his family, he might fear that the financial and social stability of the family would suffer. Immersing in this identity over family connections can lead to obsessive compulsivity, depression, and psychoticism (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens, & Bartels, 1996). Within the existential literature, there is certainly an emphasis on the meaning that is derived from what humans create in the world (Frankl, 1984), with work being one potential avenue for this creation. When the pursuit of work or financial gain is focused on as the end goal, as noted previously, the result can lead to existential emptiness. This is particularly relevant when the goal is pursued at the expense of rich and meaningful connections with family and friends.

Filling the Void With Nonrestorative Behaviors

This perversion of the will to meaning can result in an existential vacuum (i.e., emptiness and lack of meaning), which might present as an ennui or sadness (Frankl, 1969). When a vacuum is created, whether in nature or in the individual, there is pressure to fill the emptiness with surrounding matter (Sartre, 1997). When this emptiness is experienced within the individual, it amounts to a drawing in of surrounding available matter (e.g., people, consumable goods, activities). Men may fill this void with the meaningless forms of traditional masculinity; thus, they do not create something new, but instead perpetuate a shallow insubstantial form. The meaningless masculinity may initially sate the hunger for fulfillment but ultimately leave men feeling ravenous for something more.

Men may attempt to fill their void in ways that are not necessarily meaningful but may approximate meaning. This would involve approximations of meaningful production, emotion, and connection. While these behaviors can provide short-term fulfillment, they do not restore the individual in the same manner as actions catalyzed by meaning. These behaviors are nonrestorative and promote a man's sense of control over his environment, but as do all traditional masculine expressions (e.g., aggression, dominance, power), these require constant refreshing or reestablishing (Bosson, Vandello, Burnaford, Weaver, & Wasti, 2009).

Many men will use work to fill the vacuum, which can provide an opportunity for people to express their unique gifts and to contribute to society (Frankl, 1973). Whether someone is a physician or a dishwasher, it is the attitude that he or she takes to work that imbues it with meaning. Even the works created in recreation or free time can be the medium for a meaningful life. If it is in the pursuit of meaning, work can be fulfilling no matter

what form it takes. However, it is not uncommon for men to view work through a different lens, one that places less emphasis on meaning. Boys learn at a young age that to be considered a man they must have employment, which is the testing ground of masculine qualities (e.g., competition, independence, strength; Kilmartin, 2000). Axelrod (2001) observed that work is often the environment in which men balance their own self-worth against the worth of others. He concluded that men frequently equate accomplishments at work with their overall sense of identity. The sense of identity and self-worth that can emerge from work also resembles meaning in a man's life. As such, a work-derived self-concept can pacify his desire to find meaning. However, it is not as stable as the pursuit of meaning and is often fleeting, and as Kilmartin (2000) noted, a shift in the markets can eviscerate a man's sense of self.

Inebriation can be an escape for men, providing a reprieve from the struggles of the crisis they face, and replicating feelings of increased awareness (May, 1962). It can also be grounds for asserting masculinity, wherein men prove they are masculine through their consumption of alcohol or drugs (Capraro, 2000; Kimmel, 2008). Additionally, the euphoric feeling of intoxication can be a way for men to escape from uncomfortable feelings, such as shame, that they might experience (Krugman, 1995). Inebriation also facilitates other seemingly meaningful activities, like social connection and emotional expression. Alcohol consumption has been cited as a way of mitigating feelings of isolation (Yalom, 1980) and allaying feelings of fear or anxiety (May, 1977). While men may cite a variety of reasons for alcohol consumption across the life span, most commonly alcohol is consumed in order to facilitate social interactions (Mullen, Watson, Swift, & Black, 2007). When considered in the context of emotional restriction and restricted affection between men, drug and alcohol use might provide a window of time for that expression to occur.

Sex can be a life-affirming act, which can help people feel more connected and less isolated (Yalom, 1980). Pearce (2011) observed that humans submit themselves to the other through this act, to the point of losing themselves, in hopes of creating a connection. This losing of oneself, he asserted, was a way to also affirm one's identity. In that way, sex might be a way of trying to join with another, of being known in a more fully and complete manner. It is an act that is experienced in relationship and affirms both life and connection. Similarly, sex can be a way that many men attempt to express care for another person (Elder et al., 2012; Meth, 1990). However, in its absence, men might approximate this meaningful connection and affirmation through the consumption of pornography. Men in pornography are depicted like machines that operate without emotions, always sexually aroused and always in control (Garlick, 2010). This is central to a traditional masculine way of being that is regularly depicted in pornography: The man is in control of himself and his partner. As such, consuming pornography may

help men feel confident, accepted, and comfortable (Klein, 2006). This will typically objectify the sexual partners' bodies (i.e., physical attractiveness is emphasized in relationship to sexual satisfaction) and result in a view that a sexual partner is merely a collection of sexualized parts (Elder et al., 2012). Laing (1962) suggested that ontological insecurity involves a fear of being engulfed by another person (i.e., to be consumed). The emotional distance afforded by pornography may serve to protect a man's identity but still allow him to engage in some form of connection. Furthermore, sex can be a way for people to avoid anxiety or deal with discomfort, using the experience as a distraction (May, 1977). While the sexualized aspect of pornography can approximate a meaningful connection, it does more to isolate and distance men from genuine connection.

FREEDOM TO MASCULINITIES AND EXISTENTIAL ENGAGEMENT

Every person is faced with the freedom to make choices, no matter what the conditions. As Frankl (1984) noted, at the very least, humans can choose how they approach the unavoidable (e.g., a health diagnosis, imprisonment). However, in that freedom lies a challenge to take responsibility for the state of oneself and society. As Sartre (1966) asserted, "it is therefore senseless to think of complaining since nothing foreign has decided what we feel, what we live, or what we are" (p. 94). Rather, it is the individual who has chosen this current state and therefore is responsible for its existence. So too do men have the freedom to choose what masculinity means for them, rather than taking on the traditional socially prescribed roles. As such, men need to be held responsible for enacting whatever type of masculinity they evidence. There is no particular way to be a man, even though men may be socialized to believe as much (Wexler, 2009). Rather, there are a multitude of ways of embodying one's unique identity as a man, which requires courage to explore and express.

Men are free to make this choice about masculinity, which can entail choosing to relinquish their choice to someone or something else (Van Dusen, 1962). If a man enacts these traditional masculine roles, swallowing them whole and abiding without question, he is willingly giving his freedom to the power or coercion of the social forces that impose them. Freedom to choose does not free people from the realities of living. There are difficult realities of the lived experience that are inescapable, such as death, isolation, and meaninglessness (Yalom, 1980). May (1962) suggested that by choosing to become more fully aware of these realities we become better prepared to deal with them. A culturally located social reality for men is that noncompliance to traditional masculine roles will likely lead to some form of negative evaluation from others (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010). However, it is always a choice about how men confront this difficulty. As

May suggested, men need to come into greater contact with this reality, and so too do they need to follow Frankl's (1984) suggestion that they choose how to face this challenge.

The remainder of this treatise will focus on the application of these concepts to a fictitious case that is the amalgam of several different clients. This case scenario represents an attempt to educate the reader on potential ways to move from the existential conceptualization into an existential discourse with male clients. Existentialism is a perspective more than a technique and does not require any particular interventions (May, 1962). Therefore, the following case scenario depicts how this approach opens up different types of conversations with male clients, in particular, focusing on issues of meaning.

The Case of David

David is a 45-year-old bisexual, Caucasian man who identifies as a non-practicing Catholic. He is not out about his sexuality with his friends or his family because he worries about how it might change how they view him. David has grown up in a household with five brothers, who were taught to never express their emotions in conversation. He also states that his father raised his brothers to be "men who never complained about anything." He is currently employed as a first-shift, midlevel manager in a manufacturing company. After completing college in his hometown, he moved out of state for 20 years and returned to his hometown 3 years ago in order to be closer to his parents, who are in poor physical health. David reports that he has been romantically involved with a woman for the past 2.5 years. He indicates that he is uncertain whether he loves her and says that he feels guilty for not marrying her. He reports feeling trapped in this relationship by his indecision about what to do next.

David presents with these life concerns, many of which can be viewed as pathology. Specifically, some aspects of his report can be conceptualized as symptoms of a mood or anxiety disorder. However, these symptoms are reflective of a sickness of the soul; therefore, David needs to be considered existentially and not diagnostically. The goals for David are to become more acceptant of the different types of information he has in his life (e.g., his feelings), to be more transparent about his identity with both himself and others, and to take ownership of the choices he is making that shape his present. While each client will be unique, these types of issues are not uncommon for men, and by using an existential lens, counselors are able to help make sense of these concerns and, ultimately, more fully humanize the clients they serve.

Suggestions for Engaging David

An existential approach to counseling David might involve several concepts; however, there are no particular techniques that are required (Yalom,

1980). To start, counselors need to consider what a client wants to achieve in counseling. The focus of the present treatise has been on meaning in the face of meaningless roles, but it is unlikely that this is where David wants to begin counseling. Allowing space for the dialogue to grow is necessary to empowering the client to guide the process of counseling, which is one way to honor the personhood and agency of the client (Scholl et al., 2014). Goals can shift over the course of existential treatment, potentially starting with symptom reduction and ending with the pursuit of the client's greater purpose (Miars, 2002; van Deurzen, 2009). As such, work with David might start with a focus on weighing options in order to make decisions (e.g., with his girlfriend) but could ultimately lead to deeper issues of meaning as questions arise about the values he bases the decisions upon.

The relationship between the counselor and David will be central in the overall process of treatment. Relationships with others and with their surroundings can lend a presence or realness to the lived experience (van Deurzen, 2009). As such, by being in contact with the counselor, David will increase his awareness of his life and the choices that he is making. The counseling relationship is vital to this change process, but it is the client who needs to take responsibility to create that change (Miars, 2002). The responsibility to choose is central to the existential approach (Yalom, 1980), and when counselors honor a client's agency, they are living out a commitment to humanist values (Scholl et al., 2014). Within that relationship, counselors must work to create a "container of safety" (Bellin, 2017, p. 222), which facilitates a space where the client can feel comfortable sharing experiences. This requires the validation of feelings as being real and honoring that these are occurring in relation to the client's interactions with social systems. In addition to respecting David's emotional experiences, the counselor might help him to see how these might be influenced by his community standards for masculinity (e.g., influences from parents, peer groups, media).

The need for counselors to focus on emotions, normalizing them and exploring the messages men receive about being emotional, is important (Mahalik et al., 2012). This may be particularly difficult because males tend to be shamed for expression of feelings (Moss-Racusin et al., 2010; Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). Emotions are of unique utility. As May (1969) indicated, there are two aspects to the feelings: (a) the reason, which emerges from the past, and (b) the purpose, which is situated in the present. While David may experience feelings in the present that are pushed from the past, he can exercise responsibility around their expression by exploring their purpose in the present—that is, by asking, "What is the purpose of these feelings?" and "How do they shape the present experience and give direction for future action?" These questions can serve as guide rails leading David further along his present path.

As alternative ways of being emerge for David, notably through emotional expression, the counselor might move into a discussion about sex

roles and gendered expectations. There are models of how men can express their masculinity in unique ways. Elliott (2015) proposed a reworking of masculinity that embraces a more emotive "caring masculinity" (p. 240). Men who embrace a caring masculinity tend to (a) reject dominance over others, (b) embrace emotional and relational connections, and (c) reframe traditional masculine norms into relational practices. An example of the latter is the quality of *strength*, which might be put into the service of caring for others. Similarly, it might be beneficial to explore the ways that traditional masculine roles fill the emptiness, as discussed previously (in the section on Will to Masculinity). This would include concerns such as overinvolvement in work, close relationships with other men, pursuits of power or control, drug or alcohol use, and pornography. While there can be a tendency to overgeneralize the masculine experience, counselors need to honor that each person has a unique experience. As Miars (2002) noted, "in order for the counseling process to reflect these value stances, the counselor must regard the client as thinking, feeling, acting, being—not an object to be explained" (p. 224). Therefore, when working with David, counselors need to ensure they are not classifying his masculinity, but rather letting him actualize his personalized form of expression.

Some clients experience a greater sense of comfort engaging in counseling with someone who has had similar struggles, particularly if marginalization has occurred (Bellin, 2017). While men are not a marginalized group, but rather are in a position of social power, there is nevertheless a policing of masculinity that occurs about what are acceptable forms of masculinity (Reigeluth & Addis, 2016). There is a social pressure to conform to traditional norms and to enact them for the evaluation of others (Kilmartin, 2000). As such, counselors need to have explored their own gendered identities and how they have challenged or faced societal norms around gender expression. Furthermore, it is important for counselors to be in contact with their own identities in order to wade into existential questioning with a client (Eliason, Samide, Williams, & Lepore, 2010). Similarly, David will require a counselor who is acceptant of both his or her own gender identity and the identities of others. To that end, David does not require a male counselor, but rather a counselor who is acutely aware of the ways in which counselors may perpetuate or arrest gender norms through their interactions with others.

These suggestions are in line with best practices for working with male clients, as suggested by Mahalik et al. (2012). First, counselors need to ensure that they do not impose their stereotypes about men upon their clients. By using this framework, counselors can assist men in freely establishing their unique identities. Second, counselors need to view men through a gendered lens that explores the impact that gender role socialization has had upon them. This approach has examined the existential issues that men face as being largely a result of gender role socialization, which assists in fully conceptualizing and humanizing male clients' issues. Third, counselors

should focus on the role of emotions, sex, and close relationships in male clients' lives. Whether men are detaching from these aspects of their lives, using them to gain power, or struggling with feelings of isolation, these issues are central to the existential perspective. Finally, counselors need to ensure that they are working from a male-friendly perspective, which might require rethinking traditional counseling terms and practices. The latter point is the function of the present piece, which has outlined how the lens through which counselors view men and masculinity can shift when using an existential approach.

CONCLUSION

This article presents an attempt to integrate issues related to masculinity into an existential perspective, thereby creating a more male-specific and male-friendly approach to counseling. Ultimately, existential-humanist counselors want to reassemble the fractured image of men and more fully humanize their lived experiences. By reconceptualizing the traditional concerns that men face to be ontological in nature, counselors can better understand the existential challenges present in men's lives.

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