Chapter 9
Positive Psychology and Gender

Matt Englar-Carlson and Rebekah Smart

The promise of positive psychology in many ways should appeal to those interested in the psychology of gender. After all, a psychology focused on the conditions and processes that promote optimal functioning in people and institutions (Gable and Haidt 2005) serves as a significant counter to pathology-based psychology, and thus could advance a more meaningful understanding of all genders. Most psychological scholars of gender, like those in multicultural psychology, take a sociopolitical view of psychology, mental health, and social change, and this is not often seen in positive psychology. Heavily influenced by feminist psychology (both psychology of women and men; Brown 2010), a focused analysis of gender by means of examining power and privilege in any given society would need to be incorporated into a positive psychology perspective in order to be relevant. Whereas the end goal of the elevation of strengths and optimal health for all genders in pursuit of happiness and the "good life" is a goal shared by many, how the scholarly field of positive psychology has conceptualized, accounted for, and addressed gender is still a cause for discussion.

This chapter will review the different discussions and debate about the utility of positive psychology for work within the psychology of gender. For us, a deeper examination raises a series of questions about how positive psychology and gendered concerns intersect, and impact people of all genders. Further, the very nature of the historical relationship of power, privilege, and gender creates vastly different conditions for the connection of positive psychology to ideas around masculinity and femininity. This chapter will survey the existing research and critiques of positive psychology and gender with a goal of identifying future areas of scholarly

M. Englar-Carlson, Ph.D. (✉) • R. Smart
Department of Counseling, California State University, Fullerton,
Fullerton, CA 92834-6868, USA
e-mail: mattec@fullerton.edu; rsmart@fullerton.edu

inquiry and investigation. In line with Levant and Silverstein's (2005) observation, it is critical to note that it is problematic to only discuss one aspect of diversity (e.g., gender) without full consideration of the impact of other identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.). We wanted to acknowledge this upfront, as we do not want to repeat oversights previously contained in the feminist and multicultural literature (Reid 2002).

9.1   An Initial Examination of Positive Psychology and Gender

One of the greatest shifts in psychology has been the increased sensitivity and awareness given to cultural diversity issues, including the influence of gender roles (American Psychological Association 2003). Among other identity factors, sex and gender are recognized as powerful organizing variables in peoples' lives and experiences (Brown 2010). From a social constructivist view, notions of femininity and masculinity, and thus the lived lives of any individual are defined by cultural, historical, socioeconomic, and institutional forces (Smiler 2004). Based on the sociopolitical reality of privilege and power, men, women, and transgender individuals have different experiences. Whereas understanding the positive and healthy aspects of these cultural influences and identity has promise, positive psychology risks overlooking and dismissing real societal, structural and lived reality when it does not incorporate a contextual view (McNulty and Fincham 2012). In addition, Gable and Haidt (2005) note that for some in positive psychology, "the aim is to build up what we know about *human* resilience, strength, and growth to integrate and complement the existing knowledge base" (p. 107). This statement indicates that for some researchers, the emphasis in positive psychology has been on universal, or "human" findings that are by definition devoid of cultured multiple identities that include gender. This is problematic as gender, as well as other cultural facets, are seemingly taken out of the equation and not considered complex and influential determinants in people's lives (Eagly and Diekman 2003). A key principle of feminist therapy is that people's experiences are honored for what they are with an emphasis on gender-based phenomenon (Brown 2010); therefore, the lack of specific attention to gendered/cultured experiences is concerning.

Another concern about focusing on "positive" gendered traits (either "feminine" or "masculine") is that it essentializes those traits as belonging exclusively to a gender and reinforces stereotypes. For example, scholarly work on "positive masculinity" has been criticized as promoting essentialism in that it inhibits the deconstruction of gender roles and limits social change (Addis et al. 2010). Further, it is erroneous to assume that there is only one perspective of a "positive trait" for different genders, as different cultures have varying ideas of what is "positive" for each respective gender (Pedrotti 2011). Traits are not universally positive across the globe, as a multitude of contextual cultural factors influence how traits are perceived and performed (Pedrotti et al. 2009). Transgender individuals may also be able to

incorporate aspects of masculinity and femininity into their identity in ways that are positive for them (Riggle et al. 2011).

However, there are differing perspectives on the role of culture in evaluating and examining strengths. Pedrotti (2011) described the emergence of two camps within positive psychology: the "culture-free" camp and the more recent "culturally embedded" camp. Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) exemplify the culture-free perspective, which holds that universal strengths exist, and that empirical science is objective enough to determine universal strengths. This view of positive psychology has been criticized as ethnocentric, overly individualistic, and prescriptive in its values (Becker and Marecek 2008). The culturally-embedded approach to positive psychology instead incorporates culture and context (including facets such as gender) into positive psychology and takes the position that one must consider culture when interpreting any type of behavior (Pedrotti and Edwards 2009). Findings from positive psychology can be used to encourage people to adopt behavior, attitudes, and beliefs that are helpful to them (Gable and Haidt 2005), but cultural context must play a role in determining which traits are "most helpful."

As the social change of institutions and the redefinition of gender roles is a core focus in the psychology of gender (Brown 2010; Levant and Pollack 1995), the historical absence of an activist or contextual focus positions positive psychology as a more traditional approach to psychology. In that sense, for many feminist thinkers positive psychology as presented thus far has not been able to address many fundamental concerns. Further, an understanding of the psychology of gender suggests that what is good for people is reducing sexism, discrimination, and other institutionalized forms of oppression that restrict people's lives. Thus positive psychology research could look at successful ways to examine the impact the pursuit of social change has on happiness and well-being.

9.2   Women, "Femininity," and Positive Psychology

A brief review of some of the feminist history is worth noting before examining positive psychology and women's gender, as feminist theories and therapies have utilized the concepts of *empowerment* and *strength-based approaches* for some time.

9.2.1   Feminist Therapy's History of Strength-Based Work and Empowerment

Prior to the 1970s, the field of psychology paid little attention to the social and gendered contexts of women's lives. The Women's Movement in the U.S. and consciousness-raising groups that examined rape and domestic violence in the context of women's oppression were essential to the critique of psychology and the

subsequent changes in the field (Evans et al. 2005). Among the criticisms of mainstream psychology were bias in diagnosis, the pathologizing of traits that women had been socialized to adopt (e.g., nurturing seen as overly dependent); viewing so-called "healthy" women as dependent, passive, and highly emotional (from the famous study by Broverman et al. 1970); pathologizing women who defied traditional female traits; and failing to consider the impact of women's social context (e.g., gender, poverty, inequality) on their mental health (Worell and Johnson 2001). An overarching theme in the feminist critique was countering the dominant narrative that male (White male) was the "norm" and those who did not conform to a White male worldview were deviant. However, as groundbreaking as this critique was, it was still linked almost entirely to a White, middle-class, heterosexual perspective; the experiences of women of color, women living in poverty, and women who were not exclusively heterosexual were largely ignored until much later (Evans et al. 2005).

One of the hallmarks of emerging feminist therapies was a revaluing of so-called feminine traits. Worell and Johnson's (2001) integrative model of feminist practice includes the principle *Female Perspectives Are Valued*: "Goals reflecting this principle include helping the client to identify her personal strengths, trusting her own experience, translating perceived weakness into strengths, and bonding with other women" (p. 323). As the authors pointed out, this principle is grounded in cultural feminism, a branch of feminism that re-values previously disparaged traits associated with women. An influential example of this kind of revaluing was Gilligan's work in the 1980s on moral development, in which she challenged prevailing theory with research that suggested that girls and women were not less moral than boys or men but that they had an equally important but different kind of morality, one based on *care* rather than on *justice* (Sherblom 2008). In the context of the times, the notion that women's morality was equally valuable to men's and possibly superior, was inspiring for many. The problem with this approach, as many have noted, is that it essentializes "women's nature," insinuating that a trait common to some women in some circumstances is inherent to all women in all circumstances; this in turn is enormously problematic, both theoretically and practically (Grant 1993). Grant contended that the "revalorization of the feminine" (p. 10) should be understood as an important strategy for its time but that suggesting that the newly valued traits are inherent to all people of one gender is untenable.

Further, as important as the work of Gilligan was, she was criticized by many for grounding her research and theory in the experience of small samples of presumably middle class White girls, and so not only did many interpret her work as "the truth" about women, but they failed to consider that "women" in this context meant only one subset of women. Indeed, what are considered traditionally feminine traits (e.g., nice, non-dominant, nurturing, and fragile) derive from stereotypes across many cultures (Goodwin and Fiske 2001), but not all. For example, "women" should not show anger or pride from this viewpoint; however, given the historical context of work outside the home, this gender norm is less common in African American culture (Durik et al. 2006). Because the dominant culture's views prevail, African American women have been pathologized as "less feminine" as compared to White

women throughout history (Collins 1997), even perhaps with regard to distinctions drawn from times of slavery.

Many feminist therapists resist essentializing so-called feminine traits, but do seek to validate all women's experiences and empower them. For example, Lenore Walker, the early leading advocate of women in battering relationships shifted the focus from "victim" to "survivor," explored women's strengths, and worked on empowering them (Choate 2008). The focus on strengths has been used in many areas of work with girls and women and in 1997 the feminist national conference identified strength-based approaches as key to feminist therapy (Johnson 2003).

Brown (2010) asserted that analysis of external contributors to distress and analysis of privilege and patriarchy (power) are essential to feminist therapy; any therapy that does not do that simply serves the status quo. Indeed, one of the central historical feminist criticisms was that established therapies could passively reinforce gendered power differentials (Worell and Johnson 2001); for example, by being "neutral" and not attending to power dynamics between partners in a heterosexual relationship or by being "colorblind" and not attending to cultural influences in the potentially different power dynamics of a Latino couple versus a White couple.

9.2.2 Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Women

There is little explicit consideration of women's gender (in a sociocultural or sociopolitical context) in the positive psychology literature. However, there are aspects of overlap and compatibility between psychology of women/feminist psychology and positive psychology. In a comprehensive text on women by feminist editors, O'Leary and Bhaju (2006) wrote about *resilience* and *empowerment*, stating: "Paralleling the positive psychology movement, but not well integrated into it, have been theories advanced by feminist psychologists who actively rejected many of the traditional assumptions of the male dominated medical model of psychology with its emphasis on pathology" (pp. 157–158). However, they make little other reference to positive psychology. Similarly, Choate (2008) and Johnson (2003) indicated a benign compatibility between positive psychology and feminist therapy, but with little detail about positive psychology. Both authors only noted that the two perspectives share a focus on empowerment and using strengths, and a reduced focus on pathology.

Numerous works (Burns 2010; Elston and Boniwell 2011) using the umbrella of positive psychology have focused on utilizing strengths in women clients but with no real reference to gender per se, and no examination of their sociocultural or sociopolitical contexts. Becker and Marecek (2008) expressed concern that when Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) wrote their foundational article on positive psychology at the start of Seligman's presidency of the American Psychological Association (APA), they did not include any kind of social analysis—no "interrogation of power, privilege, and social hierarchy" (p. 596). The culturally embedded

camp of positive psychology, as described earlier, attempts to broaden the focus of Seligman and others on universal strengths to a viewpoint that asserts that while strengths are rightly acknowledged and valued, the contexts in which these qualities emerge influence their utility and consequences (Pedrotti 2011). There appears to be room for social analysis in this perspective, although it is not emphasized.

Building on the culturally embedded perspective and adding emphases from feminist theory and the APA's 2007 psychological guidelines, we suggest that a positive psychology approach to working with girls and women from all backgrounds should include the following: (a) exploring previously disparaged traits or identities in new ways and helping clients, when appropriate, to identify positive aspects within them; (b) helping clients to draw more positive conclusions about themselves by viewing their behaviors within their sociocultural-political contexts; (c) understanding symptoms as a means of coping rather than as inherent pathology; (d) exploring personal qualities through the client's worldview and intersecting identities; (e) exploring gender role conflict within a client's culture and subcultures; and (f) recognizing the positive and innovative ways in which girls and women navigate multiple and conflicting gendered demands within societies that are often rapidly changing.

A few authors have illustrated some or all of these points. Using the example of working with biracial girls and women, Edwards and Pedrotti (2004) acknowledged the very real experiences of stereotype threat, prejudice specifically directed at biracial women (rather than men), and identity struggles that can happen; however, they also suggested that historically disparaged traits associated with being biracial, such as being hopelessly "marginalized" and stuck between cultures, should be reconsidered to include potentially positive aspects, such as having the ability to navigate two cultures, being able to draw from a rich heritage, and developing coping skills. Johnson (2003) wrote a case study of a teenage girl who was acting out at home and at school. Utilizing positive psychology, feminist therapy, and strengths-based interventions, she worked with both daughter and parents on identifying their own strengths (through specifically developed questionnaires as well as in therapy) as a way of building rapport and setting the stage for positive action. She also helped the parents to recognize how their own cultural and gender biases had prevented them from recognizing their daughter's strengths. In the end, the parents were better able to accept what they perceived as more typically masculine qualities (seeking independence) in their daughter, and in this case, Johnson helped the daughter and parents come to terms with gender non-conforming behavior.

Tzou et al. (2012) used "Positive Feminist Therapy" (PFT) to work with Chinese women going through divorce. They integrated empowerment feminist therapy, positive psychology's emphasis on strengths and resilience, and systems theory. In the case example of a woman who struggled greatly with the decision to leave her marriage, the therapist worked to acknowledge both internal and external strengths, such as loyalty to family, various positive relationships, and education. Tzou et al. (2012) maintained that the following techniques were critical to the therapy: *power-, gender role-, and social location analysis*, as well as *reframing* and *active problem-solving skills*. Although the authors stressed that work with

every client must be individualized and cultural norms respected, clearly this approach holds the possibility for encouraging clients to analyze oppressive forces (familial, institutional, cultural) in their lives. The therapist never pushes for particular action, but may help clients weigh risks and benefits of acting on their insight, given the cultural backdrop.

Aspects of positive psychology are consistent with the long-held feminist strategies of empowerment and strength-based approaches, but without the inclusion of a social and power analysis positive psychology has potential to harm women by maintaining the status quo and reinforcing essentialist notions. Taking a culturally embedded approach within positive psychology might be able to make it more relevant for women in all their diversity. However, we emphasize that without using the lens of power and privilege, even culturally embedded positive psychology runs the risk of sanctioning or promoting traits simply because they are valued within a cultural context. This presents complex and difficult issues with regard to perceptions of "women's traits," particularly those traits that were forged, at least in part, within the context of oppression. For example, Rudman and Glick (2001) described how the idea of women's "communal" nature and "niceness" developed within the context of subordination to men. Niceness and communality can be viewed as desirable traits and normative for many women, but if researchers and therapists are not aware of the historical context and the price paid by women, they may support these traits without question and inadvertently support a troubling status quo. More pointedly, Lamb (2005) questioned the emphasis used by some in positive psychology for cultivating the trait of "forgiveness." Her concern is that forgiveness therapy often revolves around women's issues (victims of violence, infidelity, abandonment), and that women have historically had to develop traits like forgiveness in order to survive even though it was not always optimal for their well-being. Qualities that tend to be highly valued in the abstract and from a particular vantage point (i.e., people in power) may harm people (in this case, women) who have less privilege and power. Finally, the willingness to view psychological traits not as innately positive or negative (McNulty and Fincham 2012), but rather as dependent on the context in which they emerge, could spur future research to focus on the complexities of gender with other intersecting identities, such as culture, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, and physical and mental ability/disability.

9.3   Men, Masculinity, and Positive Psychology

The past 30 years have seen a flurry of scholarly activity focused on understanding the psychology of men and masculinity (see Brooks and Good 2005; Englar-Carlson 2006; O'Neil 2012). One shift was recognizing the wide variation within male cultures when multiple identities are considered (Smiler 2004). It is common to use the term "masculinities" rather than "masculinity" to acknowledge the various conceptions of male gender roles associated with an intersection of multiple identities (e.g., rural, working class adult White masculinities may take a different form than

urban teenage Mexican American masculinities; Kimmel and Messner 2012). There is also the understanding that certain forms of masculinities are more socially central and associated with authority, social power, and influence (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). In Western society, the dominant ideal of masculinity has moved from an upper-class aristocratic image to a more rugged and self-sufficient ideal (Kimmel 2011). Thus traditional masculinity can be viewed as the dominant (referred to as "hegemonic" masculinity) form of masculinity and thus highly influential of what members of a culture take to be normative.

Drawing on the Feminist Movement in larger society and the psychology of women, the psychology of men brought attention to the gendered identity of men and questions of how sexist norms within Western contexts have impacted men (O'Neil 2012). Though men had developed much of psychology, it had not focused on men as gendered individuals. A new framework titled the new psychology of men questioned "traditional [Western] norms for the male role, such as the emphases on competition, status, toughness, and emotional stoicism," (Levant and Pollack 1995, p. 1) and framed many of the problems associated with men (aggression and violence, homophobia, misogyny, detached fathering, and neglect of health) as resulting from the male socialization process in which rigid forms of masculinity are emphasized. A driving factor behind this model was the compiling of male-specific data and examining the underlying causes of the ever-growing physical and mental health disparities across every racial group between men and women (see Courtenay 2011; O'Neil 2012).

In a substantial literature review on the psychology of men, O'Neil (2012) noted the collected data on the lives of boys and men are sobering. In the United States, despite having greater socioeconomic advantages than women, in every ethnic group the age-adjusted death rate has been found to at least 50 % higher for men than women (Department of Health and Human Services as cited in Courtenay et al. 2011). Courtenay et al. noted the health disparities that exist between men of various ethnic and racial backgrounds (e.g., African American men die 6 years younger than European American men) and how that is associated with distinctions between the leading causes of death (e.g., the death rate of HIV is among the five leading causes highest for African America and Latinos but not among the leading causes for any other group of men) and specific health risk behaviors (Asian American men report riskier habits than other groups of men for behavior related to preventative health). An observation of the existing research on the psychology of men led Brooks and Silverstein (1995) to the conclusion that there was a "dark" or "toxic" side to traditional conceptualizations of masculinity, and that a masculinity crisis exists with men of all racial groups (Levant 1997). Isacco et al. (2012) noted that based on the entirety of this research it is easy to take an essentialist perspective and conclude that traditional masculinity, or masculinity as a whole is always negative. However, they added the critical distinction that traditional masculinity *per se* is not associated with negative outcomes, but rather the rigid, restrictive, sexist enactment of one idea of "traditional" male roles. Similar to positive psychology's assertion that the field of psychology had neglected examining strengths, assets, and well-being (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000), there is a growing awareness that the

psychology of men and masculinity has primarily explored the "toxic" side of men's lives with little examination of healthy masculinity and how that is enacted for men of different racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds.

9.3.1 Positive Masculinity

Before examining the application of positive psychology, it is important to note the shift toward the positive, health, or strengths of men entered the scholarly discourse with a fair amount of critique and feedback (Addis et al. 2010; Levant 2008). With feminist roots, and many scholars identifying as feminist or profeminist (Szymanski et al. 2002), the field is aligned with a strong activist stance of reducing patriarchal power, male dominance, male sexism, and the restructuring of masculinity itself (Baird et al. 2007; Levant 1997). Further, much of the scholarly work in the new psychology of men focuses on the myriad problems associated with men or acted out by men on women and society (interpersonal violence, anger, aggression, etc.); and men themselves were rarely conceptualized as a marginalized group. The whole idea of empowering men or identifying "strengths" would seem foreign, or downright antithetical to someone working to reduce male power and sexism.

One question is why there might be a shift now toward looking at strengths and positive aspects of men. O'Neil (2012) noted the study of men and masculinity has a short history in psychology, and that only in the past 30 years have men's psychological processes been studied. There is now a firm understanding in Western societies how restricted gender roles affect men and women to the point where the damaging effects of patriarchal sexism on men is slowly emerging as a social justice issue (Englar-Carlson 2009; Kiselica and Woodford 2007). 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. O'Neil (2012) summarized this, stating the psychology of men needs to emphasize more healthy criteria for being male.

Clearly, the new psychology of men provided a much needed gender-sensitive lens through which to view boys and men, however, the model largely emphasized deficit models of male development and a remedial helping approach designed to help men recover from the damaging effects of constricted masculinity on themselves and others (Kiselica 2011; Kiselica and Englar-Carlson 2010; Kiselica et al. 2008; O'Neil and Lujan 2009). Some in the field of psychology of men and masculinity have questioned if something else about men was missing in the scholarly literature, namely that not all men experience gender role conflict or maintain rigid masculine roles, but these men were seldom studied or referenced. Further, some questioned if everything about traditional masculinity was necessarily bad, and if there were contextualized settings where aspects of traditional masculinity could be adaptive and prosocial. When the existing research in the field was rigidly applied to men in clinical settings without an assessment of one's gender role and cultural context, it was easy to overlook the actual experiences of male clients and the man

himself (Stevens and Englar-Carlson 2010). If the majority of scholarly work seemed to focus on the dark, or negative masculinity, it is not surprising that "positive masculinity" was the term used to refer to qualities of traditional masculine roles that are more positive, strength-based, and potentially used to better the lives of men and those around them (Isacco et al. 2012). For the most part, a focus on male strengths, empowerment, and even social justice are largely absent in the psychology of men literature (O'Neil 2012). The past few years have seen the emergence of more comprehensive research that explores how men of various cultural identities navigate their own traditional masculinity in adaptive ways.

Drawing upon theoretical traditions in psychotherapy that have elevated the role of client strengths and available resources as a focal point of intervention (see Duncan et al. 2004), Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) proposed the Positive Psychology/Positive Masculinity (PPPM) model as a strength-based complement to the existing new psychology of men. A goal of this framework is to help boys and men distinguish and embrace healthy and constructive aspects of masculinity, noting that aspects of traditional male norms such as self-reliance, risk-taking behaviors, and a male relational style can also be viewed from a positive and adaptive lens. These male strengths are reported as social constructions, noting they are neither male-specific (e.g., women show courage, are heroic, and use humor) nor based on biologically-determined sex differences between men and women, and therefore can be considered *universal* strengths across genders from a Western perspective (Kiselica et al. 2008). However, within one's cultural context, boys and men are often socialized to develop and demonstrate these positive qualities and behaviors, which are then modeled for others and passed down in male-particular ways (Pleban and 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 work on generative fatherhood, which accentuates how fathers and grandfathers from a broad range of cultural backgrounds often care for the next generation (Hawkins and Dollahite 1996). Further, Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) cautioned how cultural and contextual factors may influence the definition, development, and expression of male strengths. For example, a man raised in Caucasian American culture may view male self-reliance and autonomy as a strength, whereas a man raised in a more collectivist environment may see self-reliance as undermining of the community, and therefore place more value in fulfilling family or community obligations. In addition, Kiselica et al. (2008) cautioned that these strengths are not universally positive; rather they are adaptive in some settings and maladaptive in others. It is the ability to be flexible in the enactment of these norms and the knowledge to know when it is adaptive that is critical.

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). That study examined the relationship between traditional Western conceptualizations of masculine norms, positive psychology strengths and psychological well-being. They found endorsement of some masculine norms (risk-taking, dominance, primacy of work, and pursuit of status) to be associated with positive psychology constructs of personal courage, autonomy, endurance, and resilience. Other Western masculine

norms such as winning, emotional control, self-reliance, and pursuit of status were associated with lower levels of positive psychology constructs. This study provided empirical evidence of the existence of strengths associated with traditional ways of enacting masculinity in the Western context. The authors suggested future research could examine these relations within specific groups of men (e.g., men of color, gay and bisexual men, working class men), and explore the attributes that each context views as being strengths for men. Positive masculinity is clearly in the beginning stages of development, and further empirical investigation is needed.

9.3.2 Clinical Applications

Davies et al. (2010) worked with similar ideas in a clinical setting and coined the term "possible masculinities," as a way for men of varying backgrounds to examine a positive view of attitudes, norms, and behaviors. Many clinicians adopt a deficit model with men, asking "What brought you here? and What can you do differently?" Possible masculinity focuses more on an aspiration approach, asking "What kind of man do you want to be in the future? and What's stopping you from being that man?" Possible masculinity incorporates the range of masculinities as the goal of a man's aspirational self is driven individually by each man and connected to his cultural context (Isacco et al. 2012).

Many in the field of the psychology of men have focused specifically on emotional expression. Males tend to be capable of recognizing and expressing a wide range of emotions, yet observed differences in emotional expression for males tend to be influenced by social contexts and the willingness to express emotions, not ability (Wong and Rochlen 2005). In a chapter in *Positive Psychology: Exploring the Best in People,* Wong and Rochlen (2008) examined three perspectives on men's emotional lives: essentialism, gender role socialization, and social constructionism. They stated that social constructionism is a more complex and nuanced approach to understanding masculinities as it is more of a positive, strengths-based way of seeing the emotional lives of men. They use the example of solution-focused therapy's use of "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 (2008) approach focuses on looking for ways in which men *are* expressive and in which context so that a more comprehensive and hopeful view is taken, thus an individual man is not reduced to a non-emotional male stereotype.

9.3.3 Additional Areas of Inquiry

There are many other areas where positive psychology and the psychology of men may overlap in meaningful ways. Certainly, scholars and health practitioners are merging different areas of scholarship by recognizing the negative outcomes

associated with the restrictive and rigid enactment of masculinity and acknowledging how many men live their lives in an adaptive, pro-social manner. This often necessitates a broader, deeper contextual understanding of men and their cultural context. For example, many men in the United States are choosing to be "stay-at-home dads" at an increasing rate and finding satisfaction with this historically non-traditional role in their families (Rochlen et al. 2008). The assumption is that many men may improve their health and the health of their families and communities if they adhere less rigidly to traditional masculinity norms and are free to assume non-traditional roles and identities.

Another example is examining fathers of Latino origin. *Machismo* is a popular cultural stereotype of Latino men thought to have only negative connotations of aggression and chauvinistic behavior (Arciniega et al. 2008). Thus Latino fathers are portrayed as dominant, withdrawn, and harsh disciplinarians. However, there is little data to support this image (Saracho and Spodek 2008). Recent research has stressed *caballerismo* (the positive side of machismo; Glass and Owen 2010), 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 endorse positive machismo are more like to be involved and have positive relationships with their children. This is one of many recent studies that emphasizes both quantity and quality as the dimensions that capture positive father involvement (Pleck 2010).

Further, there is a growing collection of work capturing the experiences of men who are not succumbing to traditional male stereotypes. 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. These stories highlighted the resilience of these young men as they embraced responsibility and parenthood. Exploring the narratives of 20 African American men from a wide range of family backgrounds, ages, geographical locations, sexualities, and occupations, White (2008) 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 et al. (2008) studied the many positive aspects of being a gay man. All of this research is notable for providing a broader understanding of men and masculinities that is tied to societal and cultural context.

It appears in many ways that research on positive psychology and men and masculinity parallels the evolution in positive psychology from the "culture-free" perspective to culturally "embedded" (Pedrotti and Edwards 2009). For many years the psychology of men generated important, however, often unidirectional research that highlighted the hazards of being male. Though primarily theoretical, initial efforts (Davies et al. 2010; Kiselica et al. 2008; Kiselica and Englar-Carlson 2010) helped establish that a "positive psychology of men" existed and had value. Future research can examine how men from the full range of masculinities lead healthy lives and how so-called positive and negative traits are contextualized.

9.4 Transgender Individuals and Positive Psychology

Although enormous gender variancy has existed throughout human history, the binary gender system of only male and female continues to dominate as normative (Goldner 2011). The binary system and homophobia also serve to promote and enforce the notions that masculinity belongs to men and femininity belongs to women; those who do not conform (e.g., "effeminate" men, masculine women) are pathologized (Goldner 2011). Kitzinger (2001) pointed out that transsexuals (original authors' wording) could be seen as maintaining the binary system when they are conceptualized within it, as in "women in men's bodies (or vice verse)" (p. 283), but transsexuality has increasingly come to mean gender variation outside the binary system. For example, someone may choose to keep a penis *and* have breast implants; others may reject both male and female labels; and some construct their trans, queer, or other identities with no surgery at all (Kitzinger 2001).

In spite of the long human history of gender variance, people who do not conform to conventional identities have rarely been free to express themselves. Singh et al. (2011) outline the persecution and oppression of transgender people. Even as much of U.S. society becomes more tolerant of non-heterosexual sexual orientation, it is not tolerant of people who seem to violate the "rules" of gender. There is scant literature within positive psychology that has addressed transgender issues; however, there is potential within the field using the culturally embedded framework, to make important contributions. Singh et al. (2011) used a phenomenological qualitative approach to examining resilience strategies in 21 transgender people, identifying significant strengths in a group that endures considerable adversity. Newfield et al. (2006) examined health-related quality of life in female-to-male (FTM) transgender individuals. Though finding this population reported significant mental health needs, those receiving hormones treatment had a significantly higher quality of life. Riggle et al. (2011) examined the self-reported positive aspects of a transgender identity and identified eight positive identity themes that could be used to develop strength-based therapeutic approaches.

This is an area with which positive psychology is familiar and can do more work: drawing out the positive. Like the work of cultural feminists, this is an important step in changing the overly negative and pathologizing dialogues, not only in the broader society but within the helping professions as well (e.g., the diagnostic system). However, as has been discussed, to stop there runs the risk of essentializing traits in a very diverse group of people, not to mention the problematic issue of valorizing traits forged under oppression.

Perhaps one of the greatest gifts of the tremendous variability and fluidity in gender identities is that the binary system and the linkage between men and masculinity and women and femininity can be truly challenged if people are free to express who they are. All people, not just transgender people, would benefit from this. Positive psychologists could approach every individual with the awareness that given their biological sex, sexual orientation, levels of perceived masculinity and femininity, and current gender identity, there is a host of qualities and experiences,

many of them positive. For example, working with the person's unique expressions of masculinity and femininity, cultural contexts, and sexual orientation, the positives and negatives of having both male and female biology can be explored.

9.5   Conclusion

This chapter has focused on developing an understanding about the connections and disconnections between positive psychology and the psychology of gender. One commonality between positive psychology and the psychology of men and women and transgender people is that they are all relatively new areas of inquiry and focus, thus they are dynamic fields that are rapidly growing in complexity. These four areas share the aspirational goal of the betterment of society, yet the psychology of gender reminds positive psychology that gender and other salient cultural identities have sociopolitical consequences for individuals and societies that should not be ignored. We recommend a continued exploration of and focus on viewing traits as neither innately positive nor negative, but rather as dependent on context, and viewing positive and negative as potentially interrelated. In addition, we believe that positive psychology would do well to articulate its relationship to feminist and multicultural theory, and that it has the potential to be a leader in gender freedom.

References

Addis, M., Mansfield, A., & Syzdek, M. (2010). Is "masculinity" a problem?: Framing the effects of gendered social learning in men. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 11*, 77–90.

American Psychological Association. (2003). Guidelines on multicultural education, training, research, practice and organizational change for psychologists. *American Psychologist, 58*, 377–402.

American Psychological Association. (2007). Guidelines for psychological practice with girls and women. *American Psychologist, 62*, 949–979.

Arciniega, G. M., Anderson, T. C., Tovar-Blank, Z. G., & Tracey, T. J. G. (2008). Toward a fuller conception of machismo: Development of a traditional machismo and caballerismo scale. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 55*, 19–33.

Baird, M., Szymanski, D., & Ruebelt, S. (2007). Feminist identity development and practice among male therapists. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 8*, 67–78.

Becker, D., & Marecek, J. (2008). Positive psychology: History in the remaking? *Theory and Psychology, 18*, 591–604.

Brooks, G. R., & Good, G. E. (Eds.). (2005). *The new handbook of psychotherapy & counseling with men: A comprehensive guide to settings, problems, & treatment approaches* (Rev. ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brooks, G. R., & Silverstein, L. B. (1995). Understanding the dark side of masculinity: An interactive systems model. In R. F. Levant & W. S. Pollack (Eds.), *A new psychology of men* (pp. 280–336). New York: Basic Books.

Broverman, I. K., Broverman, D. M., Clarkson, F. E., Rosenkrantz, P. S., & Vogel, S. R. (1970). Sex-role stereotypes and clinical judgments of mental health. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology, 34*, 1–7.

Brown, L. S. (2010). Feminist therapy. In J. Carlson & M. Englar-Carlson (Eds.), *Theories of psychotherapy series*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Burns, G. W. (Ed.). (2010). *Happiness, healing, enhancement: Your casebook collection for applying positive psychology in therapy*. Hoboken: Wiley.

Choate, L. H. (2008). *Girls' and women's wellness: Contemporary counseling issues and interventions*. Alexandria: American Counseling Association.

Collins, P. H. (1997). The meaning of motherhood in black culture and black mother/daughter relationships. In M. M. Gergen & S. N. Davis (Eds.), *Toward a new psychology of gender: A reader* (pp. 325–340). New York: Routledge.

Connell, R. W., & Messerschmidt, J. W. (2005). Hegemonic masculinity: Rethinking the concept. *Gender and Society, 19*, 829–885.

Courtenay, W. H. (2011). *Dying to be men*. New York: Routledge.

Courtenay, W. H., McCreary, D. R., & Merighi, J. R. (2011). Gender and ethnic differences in health beliefs and behaviors. In W. H. Courtenay (Ed.), *Dying to be men* (pp. 241–250). New York: Routledge.

Cruz, R., King, K., Widaman, K., Leu, J., Cauce, A., & Conger, R. (2011). Cultural influences on positive father involvement in two-parent Mexican-origin families. *Journal of Family Psychology, 25*, 731–740.

Davies, J., Shen-Miller, D., & Isacco, A. (2010). The men's center approach to addressing the health crisis of college men. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 41*, 347–354.

Duncan, B. L., Miller, S. D., & Sparks, J. A. (2004). *The heroic client: A revolutionary way to improve effectiveness through client-directed, outcome-informed therapy*. San Francisco: Jossey Bass.

Durik, A. M., Hyde, S. J., Marks, A. C., Roy, A. L., Anaya, D., & Schultz, G. (2006). Ethnicity and gender stereotypes of emotion. *Sex Roles, 54*, 429–445.

Eagly, A. H., & Diekman, A. B. (2003). The malleability of sex differences in response to changing social roles. In L. G. Aspinwall & U. M. Staudinger (Eds.), *A psychology of human strengths: Fundamental questions and future directions for a positive psychology* (pp. 103–115). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Edwards, L., & Pedrotti, J. (2004). Utilizing the strengths of our cultures: Therapy with biracial women and girls. *Women & Therapy, 27*(1/2), 33–43.

Elston, F., & Boniwell, I. (2011). A grounded theory study of the value derived by women in financial services through a coaching intervention to help them identify their strengths and practice using them in the workplace. *International Coaching Psychological Review, 6*, 16–32.

Englar-Carlson, M. (2006). Masculine norms and the therapy process. In M. Englar-Carlson & M. A. Stevens (Eds.), *In the room with men: A casebook of therapeutic change* (pp. 13–48). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Englar-Carlson, M. (2009). Men and masculinity: Cultural, contextual, and clinical considerations. In C. Ellis & J. Carlson (Eds.), *Cross cultural awareness and social justice in counseling* (pp. 89–120). New York: Routledge.

Evans, K. M., Kincade, E. A., Marbley, A. F., & Seem, S. R. (2005). Feminism and feminist therapy: Lessons from the past and hopes for the future. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 83*, 269–277.

Falicov, C. J. (2010). Changing constructions of machismo for Latino men in therapy: "The devil never sleeps". *Family Process, 49*, 309–329.

Gable, S. L., & Haidt, J. (2005). What (and why) is positive psychology. *Review of General Psychology, 9*, 103–110.

Glass, J., & Owen, J. (2010). Latino fathers: The relationship among machismo, acculturation, ethnic identity, and paternal involvement. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 11*, 251–261.

Goldner, V. (2011). Trans: Gender in free fall. *Psychoanalytic Dialogues, 21*, 159–171.

Goodwin, S. A., & Fiske, S. T. (2001). Power and gender: The double-edged sword of ambivalence. In R. K. Unger (Ed.), *Handbook of the psychology of women and gender* (pp. 358–366). New York: Wiley.

Grant, J. (1993). *Fundamental feminism: Contesting the core concepts of feminist theory*. New York: Routledge.

Gutmann, M. C. (2007). *The meanings of macho: Being a man in Mexico City*. Berkley: University of California Press.

Hammer, J., & Good, G. (2010). Positive psychology: An empirical examination of beneficial aspects of endorsement of masculine norms. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 11*, 303–318.

Hawkins, A. J., & Dollahite, D. C. (Eds.). (1996). *Generative fathering: Beyond deficit perspectives*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Hernandez, R. (2002). *Fatherwork in the crossfire: Chicano teen fathers struggling to take care of business* (Report No. JSRI-WP-58). East Lansing: Michigan State University, Julian Samora Research Institute (ERIC Document Reproduction Services No. ED 471 926).

Isacco, A., Talovic, E., Chromik, L., & Yallum, N. (2012). Addressing men's mental health through a strength-based approach. In J. M. Rippe (Ed.), *Lifestyle medicine* (2nd ed., pp. 369–381). Boca Raton: CRC Press.

Johnson, N. G. (2003). On treating adolescent girls: Focus on strengths and resiliency in psychotherapy. *Journal of Clinical Psychology/In Session, 59*, 1193–1203.

Kimmel, M. (2011). *Manhood in America: A cultural history* (3rd ed.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Kimmel, M., & Messner, M. (Eds.). (2012). *Men's lives* (9th ed.). New York: Prentice Hall.

Kiselica, M. S. (2011). Promoting positive masculinity while addressing gender role conflicts: A balanced theoretical approach to clinical work with boys and men. In C. Blazina & D. Shen-Miller (Eds.), *An international psychology of men: Theoretical advances, case studies, and clinical innovations* (pp. 127–156). New York: Routledge.

Kiselica, M. S., & Englar-Carlson, M. (2010). Identifying, affirming, and building upon male strengths: The positive psychology/positive masculinity model of psychotherapy with boys and men. *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training, 47*, 276–287.

Kiselica, M. S., & Woodford, M. S. (2007). Promoting healthy male development: A social justice perspective. In C. Lee (Ed.), *Counseling for social justice* (pp. 111–135). Alexandria: American Counseling Association.

Kiselica, M. S., Englar-Carlson, M., Horne, A., & Fisher, M. (2008). A positive psychology perspective on helping boys. In M. S. Kiselica, M. Englar-Carlson, & A. Horne (Eds.), *Counseling troubled boys: A guidebook for professionals* (pp. 31–48). New York: Routledge.

Kitzinger, C. (2001). Sexualities. In R. K. Unger (Ed.), *Handbook of the psychology of women and gender* (pp. 272–285). New York: Wiley.

Lamb, S. (2005). Forgiveness therapy: The context and conflict. *Journal of Theoretical and Philosophical Psychology, 25*, 61–80.

Levant, R. F. (1997). The masculinity crises. *The Journal of Men's Studies, 5*, 221–231.

Levant, R. F. (2008). How do we understand masculinity? An editorial. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 9*, 1–4.

Levant, R. F., & Pollack, W. S. (Eds.). (1995). *The new psychology of men*. New York: Basic Books.

Levant, R. F., & Silverstein, L. S. (2005). Gender is neglected in both evidence based practices and "treatment as usual". In J. C. Norcross, L. E. Beutler, & R. F. Levant (Eds.), *Evidence-based practice in mental health: Debate and dialogue on the fundamental questions* (pp. 338–345). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

McNulty, J. K., & Fincham, F. D. (2012). Beyond positive psychology? Toward a contextual view of psychological process and well-being. *American Psychologist, 67*, 101–110.

Newfield, E., Hart, S., Dibble, S., & Kohler, L. (2006). Female-to-male transgender quality of life. *Quality of Life Research, 15*, 1447–1457.

O'Leary, V. E., & Bhaju, J. (2006). Resilience and empowerment. In J. Worell & C. D. Goodheart (Eds.), *Handbook of girls' and women's psychological health* (pp. 157–165). New York: Oxford University Press.

O'Neil, J. M. (2012). The psychology of men and boys in the year 2010: Theory, research, clinical knowledge, and future directions. In E. Altmaier & J. Hansen (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of counseling psychology* (pp. 375–408). New York: Oxford University Press.

O'Neil, J. M., & Lujan, M. L. (2009). Preventing boy's problems in schools through psychoeducational programming: A call to action. *Psychology in the Schools, 46*, 257–266.

Pedrotti, J. (2011). Broadening perspectives: Strategies to infuse multiculturalism into a positive psychology course. *Journal of Positive Psychology, 6*, 506–513.

Pedrotti, J. T., & Edwards, L. M. (2009). The intersection of positive psychology and multiculturalism in counseling. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, & C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling* (3rd ed., pp. 165–174). Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Pedrotti, J., Edwards, L., & Lopez, S. (2009). Positive psychology within a cultural context. In S. Lopez & C. Snyder (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (2nd ed., pp. 49–57). New York: Oxford University Press.

Pleban, F. T., & Diez, K. S. (2007). Fathers as mentors: Bridging the gap between generations. In S. E. Brotherson & J. M. White (Eds.), *Why fathers count: The importance of fathers and their involvement with children* (pp. 307–318). Harriman: Men's Studies Press.

Pleck, J. H. (2010). Paternal involvement: A revised conceptualization and theoretical linkages with child outcomes. In M. E. Lamb (Ed.), *The role of the father in child development* (5th ed., pp. 58–93). Hoboken: Wiley.

Reid, P. T. (2002). Multicultural psychology: Bringing together gender and ethnicity. *Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, 8*, 103–114.

Riggle, E., Whitman, J., Olson, A., Rostosky, S., & Strong, S. (2008). The positive aspects of being a lesbian or gay man. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 39*, 210–217.

Riggle, E., Rostosky, S., McCants, L., & Pascule-Hague, D. (2011). The positive aspects of a transgendered self-identification. *Psychology & Sexuality, 2*, 147–158.

Rochlen, A., Suizzo, M., McKelley, R., & Scaringi, V. (2008). "I'm just providing for my family": A qualitative study of stay-at-home fathers. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 9*, 193–206.

Rudman, L. A., & Glick, P. (2001). Prescriptive gender stereotypes and backlash toward agentic women. *Journal of Social Issues, 57*, 743–762.

Saracho, O. N., & Spodek, B. (2008). Demythologizing the Mexican American father. *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education, 7*, 79–96.

Seligman, M., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). Positive psychology: An introduction. *American Psychologist, 55*, 5–14.

Sherblom, S. (2008). The legacy of the 'care challenge': Re-envisioning the outcome of the justice-care debate. *Journal of Moral Education, 37*, 81–89.

Singh, A. A., Hayes, D. G., & Watson, L. S. (2011). Strength in the face of adversity: Resilience strategies of transgender individuals. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 89*, 20–27.

Smiler, A. P. (2004). Thirty years after the discovery of gender: Psychological concepts and measures of masculinity. *Sex Roles, 50*, 15–26.

Stevens, M. A., & Englar-Carlson, M. (2010). Counseling men. In J. A. Erickson-Cornish, B. A. Schreier, L. I. Nadkarni, L. H. Metzger, & E. R. Rodolfa (Eds.), *Handbook of multicultural counseling competencies* (pp. 195–230). New York: Wiley.

Szymanski, D. M., Baird, M. K., & Kornman, C. (2002). The feminist male therapist: Attitudes and practices for the 21st century. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 3*, 22–27.

Tzou, J. Y., Kim, E., & Waldheim, K. (2012). Theory and practice of positive feminist therapy: A culturally responsive approach to divorce therapy with Chinese women. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 34*, 143–158.

White, A. (2008). *Ain't I a feminist, too? African American men speak out fatherhood, friendship, forgiveness, and freedom*. New York: State University of New York Press.

Wong, Y. J., & Rochlen, A. (2005). Demystifying men's emotional behavior: New directions and implications for counseling and research. *Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 6*, 62–72.

Wong, Y. J., & Rochlen, A. (2008). Re-envisioning men's emotional lives: Stereotypes, struggles, and strengths. In S. J. Lopez (Ed.), *Positive psychology: Exploring the best in people* (pp. 149–165). Westport: Greenwood Publishing Company.

Worell, J., & Johnson, D. (2001). Therapy with women: Feminist frameworks. In R. K. Unger (Ed.), *Handbook of the psychology of women and gender* (pp. 317–329). New York: Wiley.