EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter is to provide counseling students with a framework that will allow them to broach gender with male clients and to navigate conversations that may elicit anxiety for beginning counselors. This will be done through the case example of Whitney, a graduate student who just started internship. Her client is Rick, a client in his 50s, who is coming to services because of receiving a DUI and needing to complete counseling for his diversion mandate. Whitney is younger than Rick and has the experience of having some discomforting exchanges with him, such as remarks on how “bright” she is and a passing comment about her outfit. The strategies proposed in this case study are grounded in the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies and in Relational Cultural Theory and will give students a framework for understanding clients who may respond like Rick.
INTRODUCTION

To see problematic examples of patriarchy in our culture, one doesn’t have to look far. Recent headlines have highlighted our society’s growing awareness of patriarchy’s impact. The multiple cases of sexual assault and misconduct brought against Harvey Weinstein spurred by the Me Too movement (Frye, 2018; Serres, 2017), and the sexual assault allegation hearings of Justice Brett Kavanaugh as brought against him by Dr. Christine Blasey Ford (Brown, 2018), serve as clear examples of how divided our nation is when it looks at patriarchy, and of its continued impact on those who experience it. Some can see the oppressive force clearly, and indeed, may have suffered from it, while others would dismiss such claims, discredit those who speak out against patriarchy, or worse yet, justify oppressive acts simply as “boys being boys.”

In learning about toxic masculinity, it may be helpful to be reminded of the parable of the fish who lives its entire life within its modest fishbowl. After months of neglect in which grime can be seen, when asked of the condition of the water, the fish replies, “What’s water?”

Patriarchy is everywhere in our world and – much like the parable – since we live our day-to-day in this environment, the grime often goes unnoticed. It can be helpful to understand this when faced with a client who, because of their positionality of privilege, is not only unable to acknowledge how their rigid conformity to gender norms may adversely affect themselves and others, but may have even internalized these scripts to a point of valuing it as an aspect of their identity.

To understand toxic masculinity, it is necessary to know the concept of hegemonic masculinity, which is a strict adherence to gender roles by enforcing restrictions of behaviors that fall outside gender norms and support the existing systemic socio-political factors that favor men (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Toxic masculinity is a subset of hegemonic masculinity and can be defined as a drive to dominate and endorse misogynistic and homophobic views and is characterized by employing socially destructive behaviors to do so (Parent, Gobble, & Rochlen, 2018).

Holding a place of compassion for those who exhibit maladaptive and rigid gender norms may be difficult for some beginning clinicians, especially those who have been on the receiving end of toxic masculinity. This may involve having the lived experience of physical and psychological harm, anger, sadness, and fear from sexual objectification, bullying and its lasting effects, and the many other ways that this form of oppression can negatively impact individuals (Baugher & Gazmararian, 2015). It is with some humility that the authors, who have varied privileges and positionalities themselves, attempt to write about this very complex issue and to do so in a way that can serve beginning clinicians in a way that is both empowering to their personhood.