

Sexual Values and Behaviors Discrepancy Model

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Abstract

Sexuality is an integrated component of healthy development across the lifespan (Mosher, 2017). As such, counselors are charged with promoting healthy development and holistic wellness in their work with clients, including the domain of sexuality (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2016, Standard 5.F.2.e). Indeed, the helping professions call for the promotion of sex positivity (Burnes, Singh, & Witherspoon, 2017) and sexual wellness (Iantaffi, 2016) to meet the needs of clients who are presenting to counseling for issues related to their sexuality (Reissing & Giulio, 2010). Yet, CACREP does not require counselor education programs to provide courses related to human sexuality, and some counselors report feeling undertrained and/or uncomfortable working with clients with sexual concerns (Harris & Hays, 2008).

Scholars have noted the evolution of clients' counseling needs as society moves further from the early and mid 20th century when the majority of traditional counseling models originated (e.g., Adlerian therapy, Bloom & Dillman Taylor, 2015). A primary concern is that clients are presenting to counseling with contemporary issues related to intimacy and sexuality (Hertlein & Stevenson, 2010) that are made more prevalent by the accessibility, affordability, and availability of the Internet (Cooper, 1998). Within the last decade, researchers have identified clinical issues related to adverse experiences with online dating (Bloom & Ali, in press), online sexual solicitation (Rice et al., 2015), addiction to cybersex (Goldberg, Peterson, Rosen, & Sara, 2008), complications associated with client pornography use (Ayres & Haddock, 2009; Bloom & Hagedorn, 2015), and an array of other clinical issues (Reissing & Giulio, 2010). Consequently, there is a call for counselors to address their personal and professional limitations when working with clients regarding sexual issues and for counselor education programs to

“increase opportunities for counselors-in-training to receive formal sex education” (Bloom, Gutierrez, Lambie & Ali, 2016, p. 340).

When working with clients with issues related to their sexuality, it is important for counselors to remember to work within their boundaries of competence (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014), as sexual issues can contain nuances that require additional training or referral to therapists who specialize in working with clients with sexual concerns (Yarber, Sayad, & Strong, 2013). However, despite the gradations of more contemporary sexual issues and the continued evolution of society, theory remains an essential component (Corey, 2015) of ethical practice (ACA, 2014). In light of the effectiveness of the therapeutic relationship in creating positive client outcomes (Norcross, 2011), and the essential role of differentiation in working with clients with issues related to sexuality (Schnarch, 1991), this presentation will offer a model for counselors to work with clients who present with sexual issues that is founded in theory and best practices.

Founded in theory and empirical research, the Sexual Values and Behaviors Discrepancy (SVBD) Model as a reflective model for counselors to use when assisting their clients in safely reducing discrepancies between their ideal and practiced sexual values and behaviors. The SVBD Model is comprised of three steps: Identification and Operationalization of Potential Sexual Issues, Counselor’s Self-Assessment, and Reducing Discrepancies and Maintaining Safety. Implications and potential limitations of this model will be reviewed.