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Megan Speciale
Palo Alto University

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Negotiating Sexual Values in Counselor Education: A Qualitative Case Exploration

Megan Speciale
Palo Alto University

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine the ways in which counselor educators acknowledge and negotiate their personal sexological worldviews in the teaching of sexuality counseling classes. Analysis of interview material, data mining, and member theorization of six participants (n=6) yielded four overarching themes: 1) centering self-awareness, 2) managing ethical bracketing, 3) affirming sexual diversity, and 4) teaching as a conduit for personal growth. Implications for educators and future recommendations for research are explored.

Keywords: sexuality, values, counselor education, counseling, case study

Introduction

Sexual values play a significant role in a counselor's ability to comfortably and competently treat clients' sexual issues (Bidell, 2014; Miller & Byers, 2010; Russell, 2012; Wieck Cupit, 2010). Values are critical to the counseling process, as both client and counselor possess unique worldviews that shape their understanding and experiencing of all sexual issues (Sitron & Dyson, 2012). A person's sexological worldview is constituted by personal beliefs, attitudes, and biases about sexuality, and is developed over the course of the lifespan and shaped by social, cultural, and political systems (Buehler, 2017). Sexological worldviews serve as the lens through which individuals develop sexual ethics, which determine what sexual behaviors a person believes to be healthy or unhealthy, appropriate or inappropriate, and ethical or shameful. These beliefs transform and evolve throughout the lifespan in tandem with changing individual experiences and social dynamics.

Due to the variability of beliefs and attitudes about sexuality among individuals, self-awareness of one's sexological worldview is an essential component to sexuality counseling competence (Buehler, 2017; Murray, Pope, & Willis, 2017). Self-awareness is achieved by the counselor's ongoing evaluation of their personal beliefs and attitudes, particularly in relation to clients and the therapeutic relationship, via critical self-reflection and external consultation, supervision, and education (Murray et al., 2017). Values clarification, or the process of gaining awareness of personal values, beliefs, and attitudes, is a practice aligned with the ACA Code of Ethics (2014), which charges counselors to become "aware of—and avoid imposing—their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors" onto clients during the therapeutic process and to "seek training in areas in which they are at risk of imposing their values onto clients, especially when the counselor's values are inconsistent with the client's goals or are discrim-

inatory in nature" (p. 5). Thus, counselor educators who teach sexuality topics are tasked with facilitating students' continued discovery of personal belief systems and encouraging awareness of how these beliefs may hinder or support the counseling process.

Sexuality education in the health professions is guided by the assumption that "attitudes and values regarding personal sexuality and the patient's sexuality are likely to affect every patient encounter" (Weerakoon & Stiernborg, 1996, p. 185). Research examining the relationship between personal values and clinical competence has provided evidence that sexual health beliefs, attitudes, and values can have a significant impact on counselors' comfort (Anderson, 2002; Russell, 2012; Wieck Cupit, 2010) and willingness to (Juergens, Miller Smedema, & Berven, 2009) address clients' sexual concerns. Cultural competence is also affected by personal values, as demonstrated in Bidell's (2014) survey of 228 counseling students, supervisors, and educators that found that religious and political values were strongly related to sexual orientation competence. Specifically, participants with more conservative religious and political values demonstrated significantly lower scores of sexual orientation competence. Similar results were found in Satcher and Schumacker's (2009) examination of homonegativity in a sam-

Corresponding Author

Megan Speciale
Palo Alto University
1791 Arastradero Rd.
Palo Alto, CA 94304
E: mspecial@paloalto.edu
P: (650)316-6064

ple of professional counselors (n=1,687), which indicated that participants reporting higher frequencies of church attendance and conservative political affiliation had significantly higher scores of homonegativity. This research supports the notion that personal values influence clinical comfort and competence in the treatment of diverse populations.

Purpose of the Study

In her book *What Every Mental Health Professional Needs to Know About Sex*, Stephanie Buehler (2017) described that prior sex education, values exploration, and exposure to sex-specific counseling supervision enhances counselors' abilities to discuss sexual issues with clients from a non-judgmental, normalizing, and affirming stance. Less known is how these factors may also have an impact on counselor educators' abilities to competently teach sexual topics to counselors-in-training. Given the link between counselor values and clinical practice (Bidell, 2014; Russell, 2012), there is evidence to suggest that educators' values may also have an impact on the teaching process. Feminist scholar and educator bell hooks (1994) described that educators often unwittingly allow their values and opinions to guide their pedagogical decision making, as demonstrated by the selection of textbooks/readings, the exclusion/inclusion of certain learning outcomes, the measures of assessing learning outcomes, and the use of specific teaching interventions. O'Brien and Howard (1996, p. 327-328) further illustrated this relationship:

Our values and judgments are intractably interwoven into the choices we make about our particular pedagogical position, the assumptions we make about who we are teaching and why, and the decisions we make about what materials to use and how to frame the content of our courses. To the extent that we are aware of the values and intentions, we can account for our decisions and actions as teachings. This critical reflective posture is the basis of responsible authority and passion for teaching and learning.

With little data regarding counselor educators' own values clarification and negotiation processes, there is a significant lack of evidence to indicate best practices in culturally responsive sexuality education for professional counselors-in-training.

With little information available regarding the role of educator values in the teaching of human sexuality, the current research study aimed to address this gap by exploring counselor educators' experiences navigating and negotiating values in the human sexuality classroom. Specifically, qualitative case study methodology was utilized to examine the question: How do counselor educators understand and negotiate the role of their personal sexological worldviews in the

instruction of sexuality coursework in counselor education? In other words, the research explored how educators think about their personal values with respect to teaching sexuality material, as well as how they understand the impact of these values on their sexuality pedagogy and curriculum development.

Researcher Positionality

Creswell (2013) posited that "all writing is 'positioned' and within a stance. All researchers shape the writing that emerges, and qualitative researchers need to accept this interpretation and be open about it in their writing" (p. 215). As a researcher, my sexological worldview is grounded in my experiences as a White, queer, and able-bodied ciswoman, as well as my upbringing in a conservative region of the Southern United States. As is commonly encountered across the U.S., I grew up in a home and community that was generally silent about the topic of sex. One assumption of this study was that participants and their students may also have limited previous exposure to sexuality education and thus may come to this topic with some discomfort or shame. Furthermore, in the few instances I was exposed to sexuality topics as a child, they were framed in line with heteronormative gender and sexual stereotypes, which had an impact on my early beliefs on the purpose and function of sex. This guided the second assumption of this study, that participants' cultural backgrounds and geographic regions would factor into the formation of their sexual politics, worldviews, and pedagogy. The third assumption was that participants' sexological worldviews are fluid and ever-evolving throughout the lifespan and thus subject to change throughout the research. Hence, the focus of this study was to understand the process by which counselor educators negotiated their values systems in and outside the classroom, rather than examine educators' specific value systems.

Theoretical Framework

My own sexological worldview has evolved to align closely with the theoretical framework for this study, which includes intersectional feminism, queer theory, and sex-positivity. This framework includes the following central tenets: (a) sexuality is a normal and natural aspect of human existence and is "benign or positive in its ability to provide pleasure and contribute to self-fulfillment and psychological adjustment" (McKay, 1998, p. 52), (b) sexual orientation and gender identity are biopsychosocially constructed and flexible, nuanced, and mutable throughout the lifespan, (c) common sexual norms are influenced by prevailing socio-cultural norms (i.e., white heteropatriarchy) and thereby may reinforce oppressive conditions for non-dominant groups, (d) sexual experiencing is unique and subjective, and (e) while informed consent is an ethical sexual imperative, the morality of sexuality is not fixed as individuals create their own un-

derstandings of sexual values (Jones, 2011; McKay, 1998). This theoretical framework guided the methodology of the current study, specifically regarding data collection and analysis methods, as well as reporting and interpretation of the findings.

Methodology

For this study, I utilized qualitative case study methodology to gain increased insight into the role of educators' value systems in their teaching of sexuality. Yin (2014) defined case study research as an investigation of a "contemporary phenomenon (the 'case') in its real-world context," which is distinguished by its emphasis on triangulation, or multi-dimensional data collection from several data sources and types (p. 2). Popularized by scholars in educational research as a tool to examine best practices in curriculum design and implementation, case study research was selected as the ideal methodology for this study due to its focus on "inductive exploration, discovery, and holistic analysis...presented in thick descriptions" (Harrison, Birks, Franklin, & Mills, 2017, p. 3). The purpose of case study research is to examine a complex phenomenon where the boundary between the issue and the context in which it occurs is not clear or easily delimited (Harrison et al., 2017). In this study, the negotiation of values was selected as the phenomenon of study (case), which is delimited to sexuality-focused counselor education settings (bounded system); thus, the primary goal for this study was to understand how the bounded system (i.e., sexuality classroom) shapes the case, or participants' processes of values negotiation.

Sampling Procedures

Case study sampling procedures advise researchers to first identify a case, then purposively determine multiple sources of data within the case (e.g., individuals, documents, artifacts) that provide a multilayered understanding of the case (Merriam, 2009). As case study research is commonly conducted with a sample of one, the sample size of this study (n=6) was consistent with case study sampling guidelines, which stipulate that the sample include participants with access to rich and sustained experience with the case (Merriam, 2009). Upon approval from the institutional review board, participants were recruited through professional counseling networks (i.e., CESNET and ACAConnect listservs) and were purposively selected based on the criteria that they were adult counselor educators with recent (within the past two years) experience teaching a human sexuality course in a counseling graduate program. Recruitment materials indicated prioritization of counselor educators from non-dominant group backgrounds (e.g., people of color, LGBTQ+ individuals, people with disabilities, etc.) in attempts to capture a diverse array of cultural values within the sample.

Participant Profiles

Participants in this study were six counselor educators (n=6; see Table 1) ranging in cultural identities, religious affiliations, and geographic locations. Pseudonyms were utilized upon completing informed consent to protect participant confidentiality.

Rachel. Rachel was an early-career counselor educator teaching human sexuality at a counseling program in the southern region of the United States. She self-identified as a Caucasian, heterosexual cisfemale in her early 40s. She had experience teaching, researching, and presenting on sexual topics.

Nancy. Nancy was a senior counselor educator teaching human sexuality at a counseling program in the southern region of the United States. She self-identified as a White, heterosexual cisfemale in her late 60s. She specialized in human sexuality throughout her career as a counselor and educator.

Quinn. Quinn was a mid-career counselor educator teaching human sexuality at a counseling program in the eastern region of the United States. She was a White, cisfemale in her early 40s and self-identified as bisexual. She specialized as a counselor and researcher in human sexuality, LGBTQ+ issues, and multicultural issues in counseling.

Maurice. Maurice was an early-career counselor educator teaching human sexuality at a counseling program in the central region of the United States. He was in his late 40s and self-identified as Latino, cis male, and gay. He shared that his passion for human sexuality stems in part from his desire to serve and advocate for LGBTQ+ populations.

Evan. Evan was an early-career counselor educator teaching human sexuality at a counseling program in the central region of the United States. He was in his late 30s and self-identified as a White, heterosexual cis male. He described that his passion for teaching human sexuality stemmed from his professional specialization in sexual abuse and his desire to advocate for survivors.

Sebastian. Sebastian was a senior counselor educator teaching human sexuality at a counseling program in the eastern region of the United States. He was in his early 50s and self-identified as a White, gay, gender-variant male. Sebastian specialized in LGBTQ+ issues and human sexuality throughout his career as a counselor and educator.

Data Collection

A primary feature of case study data collection is to triangulate multiple sources of data to achieve a holistic and contextual understanding of the research phenomenon (Yin, 2014). In this study, I sought three sources of triangulation: 1) the collection of data from multiple participants; 2) the collection of multiple data types, including two 60-75 minute interviews and public (i.e., syllabi, course handouts/notes, grading rubrics) and private (i.e., including curriculum vi-

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Name	Gender Identity	Sexual Identity	Racial/Ethnic Identity	Age	Geographic Region
Rachel	Cisfemale	Heterosexual	White	40s	Southern
Nancy	Cisfemale	Heterosexual	White	60s	Southern
Quinn	Cisfemale	Bisexual	White	40s	Eastern
Maurice	Cismale	Gay	Latino	40s	Central
Evan	Cismale	Heterosexual	White	30s	Central
Sebastian	Gender variant male	Gay	White	40s	Eastern

tae and teaching philosophy statements) document mining; and 3) the collection of data from active participant theorizing, or member-checking (Yin, 2014). Two semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participant (with approximately one month between interviews) to answer the research question: How do counselor educators understand and negotiate the role of their personal sexological worldviews in the instruction of human sexuality? The first interview was aimed toward exploring the participants' 1) pedagogy and instruction of sexuality and 2) personal understanding of the role and impact of their values on the teaching process. Sample questions from the first interview include 1) How do you describe your philosophy of teaching, or pedagogy, of human sexuality? 2) What personal or professional values have contributed toward your pedagogy? and 3) How do your values inform which teaching interventions/strategies you use? The second interview centered on the specific strategies used by participants to integrate, negotiate, and/or mitigate the impact of their values throughout the course. Sample questions from the second interview include 1) How have you come to understand your values as they relate to human sexuality? 2) How have you come to understand the impact of your values on the teaching process? and 3) How have you managed a previous value conflict with a student? Each interview was de-identified and transcribed by an outside, HIPPA-compliant transcription agency and then sent to participants for member-checking within two weeks of the interview. Transcripts were approximately 25 double-spaced pages per interview.

Data Analysis

Scholars have recommended that, because case study methodology does not prescribe a specific set of analytic methods, researchers must select an independent analytic framework that aligns with the specific needs of the study (Merriam, 2009; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2014). As the current study was exploratory in nature, Saldaña's (2016) framework for qualitative coding was utilized to analyze, uncover, and triangulate emergent patterns and themes across participants' data sources. Consistent with Saldaña's framework, data analysis occurred in three phases. The first phase involved the use of analytic memos to track emergent findings

during data collection. The analytic memos served to document "how the process of inquiry is taking shape," as well as instances of potential researcher bias (Saldaña, 2016, p. 44). The second phase, or first cycle coding, began upon transcription and included initial and holistic coding. Initial codes are described as a "microanalysis" of the data, which were developed through line-by-line analysis of transcripts and curricular documents. Holistic or "macro-level" coding was then used to achieve a global understanding of the data. Upon completion of the first coding cycle, I provided to participants summaries of the emergent codes and invited their feedback. Four participants confirmed that the codes were appropriate, and two participants responded with additional insight, which was then synthesized into the initial coding. The final phase, or second cycle coding, involves the "reorganizing and reanalyzing" of data coded in earlier phases of analysis (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234). In this stage, I identified thematic codes across participants and data sources, which were formulated by examining the initial codes for patterns and discrepancies. Pattern codes were then used to describe the major themes observed within the case, which were shared with participants upon completion of analysis. Participants confirmed that the themes were appropriate and reflective of their intended meanings.

Efforts to Increase Trustworthiness

Several strategies were utilized to establish trustworthiness and credibility throughout the study. In line with Morrow (2005) and Saldaña (2016), I maintained a researcher journal to keep a detailed record of research events, participant communication, analytic memos, and personal reflections about the data collection and analysis process in an effort to critically examine and bracket biases pertaining to the research. To enhance the credibility of the research findings and minimize researcher bias, participants were provided with and invited to reflect upon research notes, transcripts, and data analysis notes throughout the research study (Morrow, 2005). All participant comments were then added to the total data analysis. To ensure the adequacy and credibility of the data, I also pursued sustained engagement with the participants by interviewing over the course of three months and communicated frequently with multiple rounds

of member-checking (Morrow, 2005). I also utilized triangulation across multiple data sources and multiple participants, with existing literature to further minimize researcher bias and ensure a thorough and credible analysis of the findings (Morrow, 2005; Saldaña, 2016).

Results

The participants in this study discussed their experiences of negotiating personal value systems in the classroom in line with four overarching themes: 1) centering self-awareness, 2) implementing ethical bracketing, 3) affirming sexual diversity, and 4) teaching as a conduit for personal growth. Recognizing that values are an inherent part of teaching, participants described the importance of examining one's own biases and the potential impact of one's values on the teaching process. Participants also acknowledged that because sexual education is not and cannot be value-neutral, it was important to expose students to a wide array of sexual perspectives and value systems throughout the course as a method of encouraging discussion, introspection, and values clarification. Lastly, participants described the dynamic relationship between their teaching and their values, including the ways in which teaching sexuality coursework has prompted evolution in their sexological worldviews. Each of these themes will be discussed in depth in the following sections.

Centering Self-Awareness

The first theme to emerge in the data was the identification of self-reflection as the primary strategy for negotiating one's values in the classroom. Participants emphasized the importance of sexual values in both the teaching and practice of sexuality-focused counseling, which was iterated across all data sources, including interviews, syllabi, assignment descriptions, and teaching philosophy statements. Participants recognized that their own value systems played a major role in pedagogical decision-making and from this awareness, emphasized self-reflection as both a prerequisite for educators and students alike.

Self-awareness and counseling competence. All participants indicated that sexuality competence can only be cultivated to the extent to which students become aware of internal sexual value systems and understand the potential impact of these values on the therapeutic relationship. For instance, Rachel, who was teaching in a master's counseling program in a conservative area in the southern United States, indicated in her syllabus:

This class involves student self-reflection related to examining one's personal values, beliefs, and biases surrounding human sexuality issues. . . The purpose of this self-reflection is to prepare students for managing their reactions,

value conflicts, and biases that may arise when working with clients with sexuality issues that may negatively impact their clinical effectiveness with these individuals.

This link between self-awareness, clinical effectiveness, and cultural competence was commonly expressed by the participants, who frequently referenced the multicultural counseling and social justice competencies (MCSJC; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016) as rationale for centering values clarification in curriculum. An example of this is found in Maurice's description of his pedagogy:

My belief is, if students address [sexuality] personally, and they are willing to bring to the surface their baggage, their values, their wounded experiences around sexuality. . . If they can engage and do their work now, when this comes up in the therapeutic relationship, it's not so much about having an advanced skillset. It's just being prepared to take it in and work with that person in an unbiased, non-oppressive way.

Evan echoed this sentiment, stating that "It's just like if you teach a multicultural class, students have to recognize their own biases, their own values, and how those will play out and especially as it relates to sexuality."

Self-awareness and teaching competence. Participants also recognized the significance of their own positionality, sociocultural background, history, values, and experiences in the teaching process. Specifically, participants were aware that their own hidden and/or unchecked biases could negatively impact students' learning experiences and therefore emphasized self-awareness as a key aspect to their class preparation. For instance, Quinn gave the following description:

It's really important for individuals who are going to teach this kind of thing to inventory their own experiences. If you're wanting to teach something like [the sexuality class], there has to be something motivating you to do that. I would encourage [people teaching this course] to think, "What are your experiences? What are the things that you feel are easier for you, and the things you were given less information about?"

Maurice echoed this concept by stating, "The first thing I would tell [someone teaching the sexuality course] is don't even attempt to teach it if you have not done your own work around your sexuality or are not continuing to do so." Similarly, Evan shared, "You just gotta be aware of your own stuff—really know your own stuff—and be fine with it." Participants noted that their previous experiences played a role

in the teaching process and that due to the sensitive nature of the material, it was imperative to understand the connection of these experiences with the topics they were teaching.

Participants also acknowledged that because the class could not be value-neutral, transparency with students about their own process of self-reflection was an effective method for illustrating the impact of value systems on therapeutic competence. Sebastian described how he conveys this to students:

Counseling is value-laden. Although, we still have professors, we still have students, and we still have textbooks that talk about, somehow, that we can be value-neutral. And it's impossible... We are all value-driven creatures, whether we want to admit to it or not...Everybody's biased, including me.

By acknowledging that counseling is not value-free, Sebastian sought to model to his students that self-reflection is a universal task for all students, teachers, and counselors. Maurice echoed this notion, which he framed as “practicing what you preach”:

My motto is, if one of my students ever asks me point blank in front of my class, “[Professor], have you done your own work on these?” I don't even wanna have to stutter. I don't wanna have to break eye contact with them. I don't need to tell them the details of what my process is, but I wanna be able to look them in the eye and say, “Yes, I have. Yes, I am. Yes, I will.” Basically, as a general rule, I didn't ask my students to do anything I wasn't willing to do myself, either in the classroom, preparing for the materials, or processing the personal ramifications of what we were doing.

Participants recognized, in addition to the instruction of other counseling skills, the benefits of modeling self-awareness strategies to students throughout the class.

Barriers to modeling self-awareness. Participants also described challenges to modeling self-awareness strategies with students. Rachel and Nancy described that they were more hesitant to disclose their personal values because they feared that it could hinder students' own process of self-reflection and interrupt the learning process. For example, Rachel described an exchange with a student who was struggling to reconcile her religious beliefs with providing care to LGBTQ+ clients:

There was just part of me that really wanted to be like, “No, wait. Don't let [your beliefs] get in the way. I know, I was raised that way, too, but there are other ways to see it.” I really had to

find a balance of not pushing her just because of what my values are.

Nancy was concerned that because her sexual values were likely different than her students, disclosing her personal views may either inadvertently signal to students that she expected them to believe what she believed, or run the risk of silencing those students with different value systems. Evan also shared that he tries to normalize the fact that values differences will occur within the class:

At the very start of the class, I say, “Hey, I am a heterosexual male, and that's my experience. I recognize that you all are going to have different experiences and opinions than me.” My goal is to try and make it a safe place for people to express different opinions than me, but also to be respectful in the way we talk about differences.

The participants offered solutions to these challenges, which are discussed in the next theme.

Ethical Bracketing

The second theme to emerge from data analysis was the identification of ethical bracketing as a tool to negotiate one's values when teaching and practicing sexuality-focused counseling. Participants described bracketing as a way to separate their personal values from the students' learning space, recognizing that disclosing their own values may sway students into concealing or modifying conflicting values or pressure students to adopt their beliefs. While the participants recognized that teaching could not be value-neutral, they also discussed that ethical bracketing was critical to allowing students space to recognize their own belief systems. For instance, Rachel shared, “The purpose is never to change their beliefs, for them to think like me, or to change their value systems. That's up to them. My job is to present them with information and knowledge, to increase their awareness.” When asked about how she describes this process to students, she went on to say,

Well, I validate them—any students, wherever they are—and I encourage them to consider other people's perspectives. We talk about how we leave ourselves out of the room, and how we bracket our beliefs and put them to the side, so they don't get in the way of us not being able to help somebody else.

Nancy also echoed this sentiment, stating, “It's not just the way one person thinks about sexuality, because we're all different. When we think [about ethical bracketing], we must think about unconditional acceptance and our ethical guidelines.”

Ethical bracketing was also cited as a tool to mitigate the impact of power differentials between the educator and their students. Participants acknowledged that due to their inherent power as educators, ethical bracketing was useful in giving students space to explore their own values without adding pressure for students assimilate or justify their different beliefs. This was illustrated by Evan's comment: "I really don't want to impose [my beliefs] on students—it's something I hold dear to my heart. I don't want to impose on students my own kind of values/belief system because of the hierarchy between us." Ethical bracketing was thus described as both a pedagogical tool and a therapeutic strategy which participants taught and then modeled to students.

Participants also described that recognizing the impact of their beliefs on students urged changes in their pedagogical framework. Evan described a specific incident with a student to illustrate how teaching, for him, involves active humility, which he described as a pivotal characteristic of his values clarification process.

I told a story one time, and [a female student] commented, "Well, that was heteronormative." My story was coming from me, a heterosexual, kind-of-traditional guy. You know, I'm married. My wife stays at home and raises the girls... So, it was good that she brought it up. When I tell client stories that I don't see as heteronormative—when I speak from my own experience—covert communication to the students definitely comes across. And she called me on that, and we talked about how some of my stories reinforce gender norms and things like that. We had that discussion right then in class and I just used it as a teaching moment.

This process was also illustrated by Maurice, who recognized that his identity as a male in a mostly female classroom may limit his understanding of his students' experiences, stating, "I'm very well aware of male privilege and that's something I always try to keep in mind as best as I can." He noted that he initiated a discussion at the start of each class with the purpose of invoking students' different value systems and giving the opportunity for students to comment or critique his teaching approach. A key feature of this theme was participants' descriptions of re-evaluating their pedagogy in response to student feedback; another feature was the acknowledgment that bracketing does not infallibly remove the classroom from the educators' beliefs.

Affirming Sexual Diversity

The third theme yielded from data analysis was the use of diverse outside resources to provide students with an opportunity to discover and reflect on multiple sexual value systems. In line with ethical bracketing, participants were mind-

ful not to endorse their own personal values with students, but to introduce a variety of perspectives intended to trigger students' self-awareness of possible value conflicts. By integrating book chapters, journal articles, videos, podcasts, memoirs, and other resources throughout the class, participants demonstrated a variety of viewpoints and thus decentralized their own personal worldview in the curriculum. The participants utilized this strategy with the intention of giving students the opportunity to practice navigating value conflicts and cultivating students' empathy for underrepresented groups and topics that were unfamiliar or taboo.

All of the participants in this study emphasized the importance of incorporating diverse learning materials in the teaching of the sexuality class. Rachel described her rationale for this diversity:

It's important to highlight and embrace different sexual experiences [through film] as a way to bring awareness to the actual issues faced by these populations. So, I'm not saying to students "These are my beliefs," but rather, "Here is a broad spectrum of different sexuality values and no one is better than the other."

Quinn also described that the use of personal narratives from LGBTQ+ individuals helped students recognize their value conflicts, while also providing them with an opportunity to "witness their humanity" and ultimately form greater empathy for the population. She described that the most important step in developing cultural competence was the ability for students to recognize those topics and identities that triggered discomfort; she commented, "There were students who realized they felt uncomfortable with a particular identity only after being exposed to the person. I alone could not have shown that to them." Nancy similarly commented that exposure to gender and sexual diversity helped inform students from more conservative backgrounds or with limited exposure to LGBTQ+ individuals; this exposure proved to be a helpful tool for Nancy in developing cultural competence. She described,

One of my main goals is for students to understand the range of sexual behaviors and orientations and just how long that continuum is. We spend a lot of time talking about the students' own value systems and how these might impact how they think about an LGBTQ client. They learn ways to self-evaluate and make sure they're not talking their clients into having the same views as them.

Central to this theme was recognition of the parallel process between learning sexuality competence and gaining self-awareness of one's own beliefs. Quinn illustrated this notion by commenting,

What type of things do I need to do to help them cultivate self-awareness? Basically, I was looking at providing them with stimuli. And the stimuli were meant to engage them, introduce that population, introduce to them the relevant issues. And so, at the same time as providing them knowledge, I was providing them with the stimulus through which they could reflect on their self-awareness.

Specifically, Quinn discussed the importance of fostering a learning environment that gave students the opportunity to understand, reflect on, and learn to affirm sexual and gender diversity; she described this environment as an essential tenet of multicultural counseling competence. To accomplish this task, she exposed students to a wide array of LGBTQ+ information, including personal stories and poetry, films, journal articles, and other academic sources.

Maurice and Sebastian also relied on films and other resources (e.g., guest speakers, panel discussions, memoirs, poetry, and news articles) to highlight non-dominant voices throughout the curricula. Maurice connected this to social justice pedagogy, stating, “[Educators] have an obligation to incorporate the issues faced by clients into curriculum, in their own voices. We have an obligation to have a historical understanding of what these folks face, and to bring it into the room.” Sebastian also emphasized the importance of bringing in guest speakers to highlight “unheard, marginalized voices” and to “give students an opportunity to see the person first, and the identity, diagnosis, or behavior second.”

Teaching as a Conduit for Personal Growth

The final theme to emerge in data analysis was that teaching served as a conduit for personal growth for the participants. When describing how they acknowledged, negotiated, and managed the role and impact of their values in the teaching process, all participants emphasized the numerous ways in which their own worldviews had evolved throughout their teaching of the sexuality class specifically, and in counselor education in general. In essence, the classroom served as a place of learning for both educators and students in intentional and unexpected ways. This finding was captured by Maurice in the following reflection:

The only way I knew how to teach this class, consistent with my philosophy, was to embrace the angst and all the stuff that it brought up in me. I thought, “Okay, if all this is coming up in me, then it’s gonna be in the classroom as well, and I sure as hell can’t hide behind a lectern and some prefab lectures.” So, I thought, “We’re going to sit in all of our angst and triggers together and we’re gonna talk about ‘em, as they come up, together.”

The recursive nature of teaching and learning was illustrated in three notable ways: 1) as participants’ knowledge of sexual topics increased, their worldviews expanded; 2) participants became more aware of cultural blind spots through student interactions; and 3) participants’ internalized shame and bias were uncovered through their teaching of acceptance for marginalized groups. Participants described this process as ongoing throughout their careers.

For the three participants who were members of the LGBTQ+ community, counselor education gave them opportunities to analyze and process their experiences of discrimination and marginalization related to their LGBTQ+ identities. Sebastian, who identified as a gender variant gay male, shared how entering into the counseling profession prompted his own healing process: “Part of getting my master’s degree was very important because I started my first journey in terms of my own personal counseling, trying to reconcile my sexuality and spirituality.” In collaborative theorizing, he expanded,

I am the counselor educator and sexuality counseling educator today based on my values and beliefs and how they have changed over time. I can only educate and affirm my future school counselor candidates as far as I have done my own work personally and professionally around the full range of sexuality counseling issues in educational settings.

Similarly, Maurice described his history of discrimination as a gay Latino growing up in an evangelical religious community and the large impact teaching had in his own discovery of internalized heterosexism. He commented,

I was on my own crusade to say, “Look, I’m not only a sexual minority. I’m a persecuted sexual minority, and if I have had to go through this shit with my sexuality, I can only imagine what other people have had to go through. So, let’s learn together. Let’s talk about it.”

Quinn, a bisexual woman, explained that in the early years of her teaching, she realized she could share her experiences as a member of the LGBTQ+ community with her students, which resulted in more comfort and openness about herself and her identities in her work environment. She recalled:

I started to learn that being really open about who you are—unabashedly who you are—is an intervention in itself. That’s one of the joys of having the power to conduct these classes...I get to create a space that is queer-positive, queer-inhabited. I get to help other people learn how valuable creating that space can be.

These three participants revealed a clear link between their experiences as counselor educators and their experiences as members of the LGBTQ+ community.

Participants with heterosexual identities also described how counselor education supported their personal healing processes. Rachel, a heterosexual woman raised in a conservative Christian home, first began to question her internalized norms on gender and sexuality when she entered the counseling field. She recalled telling her students about an early experience with a lesbian client that prompted her to re-evaluate some of her assumptions about sexual orientation, which she now shares in class to demonstrate and normalize the ongoing nature of discovering hidden biases. She additionally commented that her awareness is furthered by her interactions with students of different backgrounds and that “in addition to providing lessons to students, I must remain open to the lessons received from students.”

In prepping for and teaching the sexuality course, Evan reflected on how previous life experiences might play a role in how he broached certain topics to students. He expressed, “I’m much more open to sexuality issues now because I’ve done a lot of personal exploration, dealt with my own conflicts or challenges, and done a lot of study research about my own personal journey.” Like Quinn, he described feeling empowered by teaching about societally stigmatized issues that had impacted him personally, and by advocating for those “whose voices are seldom heard.”

Discussion

The findings from this study confirm the significant role of educators’ values in the teaching of human sexuality, namely by demonstrating the complex and iterative values negotiation strategies adopted by counselor educators in the pursuit of effective and multiculturally-competent teaching. The themes identified in this study—the significance of self-awareness, the use of ethical bracketing, the integration of diverse viewpoints, and the recursive nature of teaching and learning—illustrate how values are interwoven into the pedagogy of sexuality education, as well as how values may impact the training of counselors and thus, the students’ practice of sexuality-focused counseling. The findings of this study build upon previous research that has articulated the importance of self-reflection in the development of culturally competent care and ethical clinical decision making (Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009; Bidell, 2014; Russell, 2012; Wieck Cupit, 2010), as well as the role of values in pedagogy and curriculum design and implementation (Jones, 2011; Vavrus, 2009). The findings outlined in this study provide additional data to support best practices in teaching sexuality competence and to broadly further the understanding of the significance of values in counselor education.

Self-awareness of one’s sexual values proved to be central to the participants’ understanding of competence in both the

pedagogy and the practice of sexuality-focused counseling. Participants viewed self-awareness as a significant factor in students’ abilities to address clients’ sexual concerns comfortably and competently; they also viewed self-awareness as a key aspect of the effective and competent teaching of sexual issues. Intentional self-reflection and values clarification were at the crux of both assertions, paralleling research suggesting that personal value systems have major impacts on the therapeutic relationship (Bidell, 2014; Fyfe, 1980; McGlasson et al., 2013; Weerakoon & Stiernborg, 1996). This is important to note, as the literature suggests that more restrictive and rigid beliefs about sexuality and sexual orientation may have a negative impact on clinicians’ ability to treat clients’ sexual concerns (Long, Burnett, & Thomas, 2005; Wieck Cupit, 2010; Weerakoon & Stiernborg, 1996), which may also be true for educators with similarly restrictive belief systems. With this assumption in mind, it would appear that the foremost objective in sexuality pedagogy is self-awareness of one’s own value systems and of the impact those systems have on both students and clients; such self-awareness may serve to minimize the potential to invalidate, oppress, or silence students’ identities and experiences, as well to develop a solid understanding of one’s own blind spots and potential growth areas (hooks, 1994; Weerakoon & Stiernborg, 1996).

Participants emphasized that self-awareness must be ongoing and reflexive, and that the act of teaching in and of itself should urge the continued assessment of one’s values. The findings suggested that increased sexual knowledge, openness to student feedback, and commitment to self-examination were pivotal to the participants’ strategies of developing self-awareness. For example, Evan recognized that when he began teaching this course, he had a lot more to learn about sexuality, and also saw the potential for his religious beliefs to be potentially restricting or non-affirming for LGBTQ+ students. He shared that this awareness was made possible through consultation with colleagues, student feedback, and his own intentional reflection of how his values shape his behaviors. Multicultural education scholars have noted that internal self-examination should be combined and juxtaposed with external support and appraisal; as noted by Marbley, Steele, and McAuliffe (2010), “like fish in water, we, including counselors, are often unaware of the surround that envelops us” (p. 165).

The results of this study also demonstrate the significance of ethical bracketing in the navigation of values conflicts in the classroom. Kocet and Herlihy (2014) defined ethical bracketing as the purposeful separation of one’s personal and professional values; participants described ethical bracketing as a useful tool to navigate values conflicts with students and in instances when the course content lay outside of their personal experiences, value systems, and/or preferences. Several participants articulated an important caveat

to the practice of bracketing: namely, that even with intentional bracketing, students could sometimes interpret or perceive the participants' underlying values. In some cases, students would give feedback to the instructors about their value systems—such as in the case of Evan, when a student commented on his “heteronormativity”—although participants recognized that students were less likely to give this feedback due to classroom power differentials. This finding suggests that, while bracketing may be a useful way to manage value conflict with students, it is an imperfect tool and must be utilized with the acknowledgement that educators' values will still be ever present in their teaching practices and in the curriculum.

Participants also acknowledged that due to the variability in sexual values in the classroom and across society, the teaching of ethical bracketing skills hinged upon the introduction of a diverse range of sexual beliefs, practices, and identities within the curriculum. In this study, participants utilized varied learning materials (i.e., textbooks, articles, podcasts, videos, and personal essays) to introduce new and diverse perspectives as a means to stimulate students' self-appraisal of internal responses to such stimuli, and to develop strategies to bracket the emergent thoughts, emotions, and judgments from the potential client. The use of multiple viewpoints also allowed the participants to keep their own personal values and practices separate from the learning space, while also emphasizing the professional values of nonjudgment and acceptance. Feminist education scholars have recommended the incorporation of diverse perspectives into the classroom as a tool to provoke self-reflection, as well as to increase representation of marginalized voices and experiences (hooks, 1994; Smith-Adcock, Ropers-Huilman, & Choate, 2004). Regarding the topic of sexuality, the ongoing stigmatization, pathologization, and discrimination against certain sexual identities and practices further illustrates the need for increased representation in counseling curricula.

This study also illustrated the ways in which the teaching of sexuality content may significantly impact educators' personal value systems. These results were consistent with previous findings in multicultural education (see Freire, 1968) regarding the role of teaching in educators' own internal value systems, as well as in their healing processes related to lived discrimination. The participants' various identities and backgrounds shaped their understanding of sexuality and their teaching; however, the act of teaching also impacted their personal meaning-making, which included their processes of acknowledging and unlearning harmful messages associated with their gender, sexual orientation, and religious identity. The results indicated that this process is expedited by multicultural and feminist pedagogies; hence, as educators urge their students to develop compassion and empathy for their clients, they are confronted with their own internalized shame resultant from discrimination and bias. This

finding is supported by the research of Speciale, Gess, and Speedlin (2015), which also demonstrated that counselor educators negotiate their marginalized identities in the classroom, specifically by incorporating their personal experiences of discrimination into the formation of inclusive pedagogies. With this finding in mind, there is a clear imperative for sexuality educators to deeply reflect on and seek therapy for their own personal wounds related to sexuality (such as sexual trauma, homophobia, misogyny, and sexual shame) and to intentionally examine how these wounds may impact their ability to teach the course competently and with cultural responsiveness.

Implications for Educators

It can be concluded from these findings that counselor educators must acknowledge that teaching and counseling are value-based pursuits and must take the necessary steps to increase awareness about personal value systems and the impact of these values on the learning environment. These steps may involve consultation with colleagues or supervisors, reflexive journaling, personal therapy, and continuing multicultural education (Ratts et al., 2016; Smith-Adcock et al., 2004). The findings also support the use of a social justice-oriented pedagogical framework in the teaching of sexuality, specifically the use of self-reflective practices, the integration of diverse, historically marginalized, and underrepresented lived experiences, and the attention to power differentials within the classroom (Haskins & Singh, 2015). Collaborative teaching can aid in decentering inherent power differential between teacher and learner, while still maintaining clear expectations of both teacher and learner so that classroom participants are permitted to be vulnerable, authentic, and reflective (Smith-Adcock et al., 2004).

Limitations and Recommendations for Future Research

There are notable limitations to the generalizability and interpretation of qualitative case study research broadly, and to this study specifically. The intention of case study research is to provide an in-depth exploration of a single bounded case; thus, the findings are not intended to be generalized to a broader population of counselor educators. Additionally, the findings of this study do not represent or explicate participants' actual classroom behaviors, interactions with students, or any other physical manifestation of their pedagogy. A methodological approach with a more refined heuristic method, including qualitative approaches such as grounded theory or quantitative experimental or quasi-experimental designs, may strengthen generalizability. A different research methodology may also allow for examination of the research phenomenon over an extended period of time, in more sustained depth, and with a larger sample size (Madison, 2012). Classroom observation may also be a use-

ful source of data collection for a more holistic examination of educators' negotiation behaviors in vivo.

While attention was placed on ensuring a diverse sample, the participants included in this study were not inclusive to the wide diversity of identities present in counselor education, which could limit the application of these findings to non-represented groups. Additionally, the participants self-selected into this study, which could indicate a sample with predisposition to self-examination. It is unknown how similar or different the participants' experiences were to other counselor educators teaching sexuality.

Though strategies such as collaborative theorization, triangulation, and prolonged engagement with the participants and data were utilized to promote fair and accurate data analysis, researcher bias may have influenced the interpretation of the results. As with most qualitative research, the researcher serves as the primary tool for data collection, analysis, and interpretation and thus, subjectivity is woven throughout the research process (Morrow, 2005). Again, quantitative methodology may be useful in minimizing the potential for researcher bias in examining the negotiation of personal values in counselor education classrooms.

Conclusion

While the role of values in the therapeutic relationship has been discussed extensively in the literature, there is much to be learned regarding the processes by which counselor educators' own values, biases, and judgments shape the classroom environment. The findings of this study demonstrated the significant role that the participants' values played in their teaching of human sexuality, which was identified in four overarching themes: the significance of reflexivity, the use of ethical bracketing, the integration of diverse viewpoints, and the recursive nature of teaching and learning. Therefore, counselor educators are encouraged to acknowledge their personal values, self-reflect, and gain consultation on how their personal values may influence their pedagogy, curriculum design, and instructional strategies when teaching sexuality coursework and other counseling content areas.

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