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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

A MOUSTAKAS PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF HOW
COUNSELING MASTER'S STUDENTS EXPERIENCE
INSTRUCTOR USE OF HUMOR IN THE
CLASSROOM

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Claire Gabrielle Critchlow

College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
Department of Applied Psychology & Counselor Education
Counselor Education and Supervision

May 2023

This Dissertation by: Claire Gabrielle Critchlow

Entitled: *A Moustakas Phenomenological Analysis of How Counseling Master's Students Experience Instructor Use of Humor in the Classroom*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in Department of Applied Psychology and Counselor Education, Program of Counselor Education and Supervision.

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ABSTRACT

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The following dissertation presented the findings from the first known Moustakas Phenomenological Analysis study exploring the experience of seven counselors-in-training (CITs) in the classroom with an instructor who utilized humor. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experience of counseling students who had participated in master's classrooms in which the instructor used humor. Previous research has explored the use of humor within counseling, though no research has explored the experience of CITs in a classroom with an instructor who utilized humor. Moreover, no literature has explored the experience of CITs within their instructor-student relationship with an instructor who utilized humor. This study addressed this gap in literature.

The primary research question guiding the study was: How do master's students in counseling experience instructor use of humor in the classroom? An additional sub-research question further explored CIT experience, specific to the student-instructor relationship: How does instructor use of humor in the classroom influence the student-instructor relationship for master's students in counseling? Seven participants engaged in one 30-to-90-minute semi-structured interview, completed a demographics questionnaire, as well as participated in a member checking interview and member checked further through email correspondence.

Three main composite themes emerged from the data: (a) Defining Humor, (b) Humor and Connection vs Disconnection, and (c) Humor and Learning. The Defining Humor sub-theme explored participants' personal definition of humor including what they believed to make something funny and the subjective nature of humor. Humor and Connection vs Disconnection encapsulated participants' experience of humor being a tool to humanize their professors, feeling more connected with their professors due to their use of humor, as well as some information on how humor could also foster disconnection. The final theme, Humor and Learning explored how students perceived humor as a learning tool in the classroom, some stating they felt more engaged and energized when humor was used as well as recalling content better, participants also explored how they felt emotionally in a classroom with humor being utilized, many of which felt more comfortable and less anxious in class. Each superordinate theme contained sub-themes when discussed further in the subsequent document.

Much of the participants' recounted experience matched that which had been seen in previous literature, others added new perspective to the construct of humor in the classroom. Results from this study could have unique implications within the field of counselor education. Results from this study could have the potential to inform counselor educators how students experience humor in the classroom. In turn, this information could better inform counselor educators how to appropriately utilize humor within their teaching to support student learning, comfort, as well as the student-instructor relationship.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Humor has been a pervasive and universal experience for most individuals (Berger, 1987). Though humor has been a phenomenon that has been widely experienced, it has continued to be somewhat difficult to understand due to its subjective nature. One aspect of exploring the phenomenon of humor has been understanding the humor response, or how someone reacts to something funny. Epstein and Joker (2007) believed the humor response was almost a Pavlovian response to a humorous stimulus. The most common response to a humorous stimulus has been laughter and smiling (Dziegielewska et al., 2003).

Counselor educators should be more aware of how humor could be received in different settings to better assess how to utilize humor most effectively within their classroom. From a sociological perspective, Martineau (1972) viewed humor as either a “lubricant” that helped the flow of social situations, or as an “abrasive” that could stall communication or result in friction. Additionally, how humor was received could depend on whether more people were laughing within the setting, for example a comedy club versus a funeral (Epstein & Joker, 2007). How one responded to humor could also vary depending on how they currently felt. If someone receiving humor (the listener) was feeling threatened in the moment, they were more likely to not receive the humor well (Epstein & Joker, 2007). Because counselor educators hold most of the power within the classroom, it would be important their use of humor was utilized in a way that was considered appropriate, so students were less likely to have a negative reaction.

An additional step in understanding the construct of humor would be to explore theories of humor throughout history. Theories of humor have often been categorized into superiority theories, incongruity theories, psychoanalytic theories, cognitive theories, and modern theories. Superiority theories generally saw humor as being based in comparison for the one using it to feel some amount of control in feeling superior to someone else (Wyer & Collins, 1992). Theorists within the incongruity category believed humor was found through experiencing incongruence between reality and our expectations. Psychoanalytic theories, on the other hand, believed humor was used to mask one's aggression, to release tension, or to reduce arousal (Berger, 1987; Freud, 1905/1916; Skinner, 1957; Wyer & Collins, 1992). Cognitive theories saw humor as being used to resolve problems of logic, or to help someone come to terms with difficult concepts. Modern theorists have primarily aligned with cognitive theorists, suggesting that humor was used to help resolve problems of logic (Murdock & Ganim, 1993). Epstein and Joker (2007) developed a theory of the humor response, called the Threshold Theory of Humor. This theory centered around humor being made up of a setup and a punch line and suggested that having one without the other would not result in the same level of humor. Epstein and Joker (2007) also believed one was more likely to have a response to humor if they had some sort of context or previous experience related to the subject of the humor being exchanged. They also believed different forms of humor and the timing of humor result in different humor responses, stating these responses may range from a subtle smile to overt laughter.

While there have been varying reasons for differing humor responses, generally speaking humor has been found to have many benefits. Humor has been seen as an aspect of a fully functioning human with a healthy psyche (Kush, 1997; Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1980). Additionally, humor could be a good fit with counseling because they have several overlapping

features, including that they were both more successful when the facilitator exuded empathy, acceptance, warmth, and skill; they both reflected the personality of the facilitator; and they both promoted changes in ones' emotions, behavior, cognitions, and biochemistry (Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013). Utilizing humor within counseling has been found to have an abundance of benefits. Humor could elicit acceptance, understanding, and insight within clients, as well as promote self-esteem, creativity, and perspective (Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Goldin et al., 2006; Richman, 1996). Humor could reduce anxiety and stress, promote problem-solving, reduce reactions to negative stimuli, boost our immune system, and even be useful in managing pain (Anderson & Arnoult, 1989; Baim, 1998; L. S. Berk et al., 1989; Moran & Massam, 1999; Porterfield, 1987; Robinson, 1977; Sultanoff, 1997; Zwerling, 1955). Humor was also found to have a major impact on resiliency, through helping regenerate antibodies, boosting the immune system, and relieving distressing feelings (Sultanoff, 1997). Additionally, humor could help one manage emotional states, change distorted thinking patterns, and gain more control which could help clients work through social, personal, and emotional issues (Granick, 1995; Solomon, 1996; Sultanoff, 1992, 1997, 2013). Humor has also been a tool in managing anger, assisting in addiction recovery, as well as assisting in depression treatment and career counseling (Donald & Carlisle, 1983; Prerost, 1987; Scott, 1989; Sultanoff, 2013; Sumners, 1988; Ziv, 1987).

Humor has also been found to be helpful in establishing and maintaining relationships (Martineau, 1972; Sultanoff, 1997). Humor could be used as an ice breaker, to relieve tension, increase group cohesion and belongingness, as well as group productivity (Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Humor could also assist in initial interactions with a stranger and help develop closeness and protect against discomfort (Fraley & Aron, 2004). Additionally, humor has been found to have a positive impact on romantic relationships, as positive humor has been related to higher

relationship satisfaction, especially during times of conflict and could promote joy, combat fear, lessen defensiveness, and build cooperation (Borcherdt, 2002; Butzer & Kuiper, 2008).

Moreover, couples who laugh together would be more likely to stay together and be less demanding of each other (Borcherdt, 2002).

Not only could humor be helpful within romantic relationships, it has also been found to be a successful rapport building tool within counseling (Falk & Hill, 1992; Haig, 1986; Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013). Humor could help balance power dynamics and assist the client with finding the counselor less intimidating due to its inherently vulnerable nature (Chapman & Chapman-Santana, 1995; Franzini, 2001). Using humor within counseling could also help to relax clients and foster a positive therapeutic environment which could result in clients feeling more comfortable expressing emotions they might consider taboo (Chapman & Chapman-Santana, 1995; Goldin et al., 2006; Sands, 1984). Humor could also help establish more closeness between counselor and client through shared commonalities, break up the monotony in session, prevent early client termination, and protect against counselor burnout (Goldin et al., 2006; McBrien, 1993).

Like the effects of humor within counseling, humor could also impact the classroom environment by providing a supportive and relaxing social environment, as well as by assisting in rapport building; all of the above leading to students being more receptive to learning, enhancing recall, and improving retention (R. A. Berk, 2014; Dziegielewska et al., 2003; Hill, 1988; R. M. Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Kher et al., 1999). Humor could add spontaneity and openness to the classroom, which also could help to promote a positive learning environment (Hill, 1988; Wlodkowski, 1985). As stated previously, humor could help to decrease anxiety; because of this, if humor was utilized within the classroom, students may feel more receptive to

difficult material, have less test anxiety, be more open to sensitive content areas, and overall perceive the course as less anxiety inducing (Adams, 1974; R. A. Berk, 2014; Bryant et al., 1980; Korobkin, 1988; Ness, 1989). Also, instructors who have utilized humor in the classroom have often been ranked as being more appealing, better at presenting, and better teachers overall (Bryant et al., 1980). While there has been an abundance of research advocating for the use of humor in the classroom, most studies discussed high school and undergraduate classrooms, rather than graduate classrooms. Moreover, to date, no studies have explored the lived experience of master's students in counseling with an instructor who uses humor.

Background of the Problem

While there have been many benefits of humor, caveats have also been found regarding the impact of humor. Radcliffe-Brown (1940) saw joking as a combination of friendliness and antagonism. It would take a strong relationship to allow for both friendliness and antagonism. The friendly and antagonistic nature of joking could have potential to result in the rupture in a relationship if not used appropriately. Some examples of humor that may be seen as “negative” include sarcasm and putdowns, as well as any sort of humor that is insensitive to others' experience, distances oneself from another, alienates other, and humor that punishes, ridicules, or rejects someone (Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Sultanoff, 1994). Dziegielewski et al. (2003) have also found that humor used during a stressful situation could result in distrust and suspiciousness between the parties involved.

As mentioned previously, humor could be received differently based on the setting in which the exchange occurred, and whether someone was part of the in group or out group. While humor being used in a group could help with group cohesion, in the case of office banter, it could also be received poorly if there was a power differential within the relationship (Martineau,

1972). For example, within a work setting, a boss may “joke” with someone to point out undesirable behavior such as showing up late for a meeting. On one hand, this behavior could help the receiver more easily digest the feedback. On the other hand, this could be seen as ridicule which could stir up conflict.

Humor also has had the potential to be harmful in counseling, supervision, and education. Without a solid therapeutic alliance, humor could be received as offensive or destructive by the receiver (Goldin et al., 2006; Ricks et al., 2014). A client may feel alienated by humor in counseling if they were not ready to receive humor, had a specific way they believed counselors should behave, or felt as if their counselor was not taking their concerns seriously (Bernet, 1993; Goldin et al., 2006). It could also be quite likely that a therapist and client had differing senses of humor (Goldin & Bordan, 1999). With all the above at play in the therapeutic relationship, it could be hard to accurately predict how humor may be received.

Humor could also negatively affect the classroom environment under certain circumstances. If humor was used inappropriately, a hostile learning environment could be the result, with students feeling stifled in their self-esteem and communication (Loomans & Kolberg, 1993). Additionally, if a student felt like they were being called out or made fun of in front of their classmates, the classroom climate could likely be negatively impacted (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992). Kher et al. (1999) also suggested instructors avoid using any sexually suggestive humor unless it was directly tied to sex education. Moreover, R. A. Berk (2014) suggested that any sort of offensive humor, such as vulgarity, sarcasm, and sensitive personal experiences, should be avoided to protect the classroom environment.

Humor could also be received differently across cultures. Humor once came about from a place of pain and oppression and as a tool to empower oneself and release aggression related to

oppressive social and political conditions (Vereen et al., 2006). Humor has been used to transform racial slurs into positive terms for the sake of reclaiming control over the term (Avila-Saavedra, 2011). Even with a strong therapeutic alliance, one must consider the cultural identities of the humor receiver to avoid potentially distancing behavior that could lead to clients and students feeling othered (Harris, 1989). While one may understand how humor has been used across cultures, it would be important to not make assumptions and lump people of color into one group, or to utilize the humor style of a cultural group one does not belong to (Vereen et al., 2006).

While many benefits of utilizing humor were listed above, one could see there could also be many cautions in utilizing humor within a professional setting. It could be daunting to navigate these nuances in a way that feels supportive and successful. Additionally, while there was a wealth of literature in support of utilizing humor within counseling (Falk & Hill, 1992; Goldin et al., 2006; Haig, 1986; McBrien, 1993; Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013), there was little research exploring the impact of humor in the graduate classroom. Moreover, there was no research to date describing how counseling master's students experience instructor use of humor. Counselors-in-training may experience instructor use of humor differently than students in other disciplines due to the empathetic and observant nature of counseling work. Counselors have often been aware of nonverbal behaviors and potential underlying meanings of statements, which could lead to a more in-depth processing of humor compared to those outside of the helping fields. Additionally, there was no research at the time of this study exploring how counseling master's students experience the instructor-student relationship in relation to instructor use of humor. For counselor educators to make appropriate choices regarding how they

could utilize humor in the classroom, they must first learn how students experience instructor use of humor.

Statement of the Problem

Literature supported the use of humor in counseling, but no research has explored how humor was experienced within the counselor training classroom. Authenticity has been emphasized within our varying roles as counselor educators, and humor could be one aspect of showing up authentically within the classroom. Literature that advocated for the use of humor in counseling did list some caveats to utilizing humor in those spaces. Educators would need to understand how students experience instructor use of humor in the classroom, especially in relation to the student-instructor relationships in order to appropriately utilize humor in the classroom. This would be especially true given the empathetic and observant nature of CITs, which may lead to CITs processing and interpreting humor on a deeper level in comparison to those not in the helping professions.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experience of counseling students who had participated in master's classrooms in which the instructor used humor. Previous research has been conducted on the use of humor in the counseling context of counselor education and supervision (CES), though no research has explored the lived experience of CITs in a classroom with an instructor who utilized humor. Additionally, no literature has explored how CITs experience the instructor-student relationship with an instructor who utilized humor in the classroom. This study aimed to address this gap in the literature. Moreover, it was imperative to explore this phenomenon with the chosen population due to the possibility of CITs experiencing humor differently in the classroom than students from other

disciplines. Because CITs were immersed in learning active listening skills, they may be more attuned to the nuance of humor that others may not notice and, thus, may have a differing response to the phenomenon. This study was conducted using individual semi-structured interviews. Results from the study would inform counselor educators as to how students experienced humor in the classroom and to better inform counselor educators how to appropriately utilize humor within their teaching.

Research Questions

- Q1 How do master’s students in counseling experience instructor use of humor in the classroom?
- Q1a How does instructor use of humor in the classroom influence the student-instructor relationship for master’s students in counseling?

Significance of the Study

There was a significant amount of literature supporting the use of humor within counseling, especially in relation to humor enhancing the therapeutic relationship (Falk & Hill, 1992; Goldin et al., 2006; Haig, 1986; McBrien, 1993; Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013). Research also supported the use of humor within the classroom in elementary, high school, and undergraduate education (R. A. Berk, 2014; Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Hill, 1988; R. M. Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Kher et al., 1999). While much research existed supporting the use of humor in these settings, there was no research exploring how master’s counseling students experience instructor use of humor in the classroom, especially in relation to the instructor-student relationship. One may assume if there were benefits of humor found in related settings, they would remain true within the counseling classroom, however, there was no literature currently supporting this notion. The results from this study would provide counselor educators with information to better help them make informed decisions around their use of humor in the

classroom. The researcher hoped the information from this study could give counselor educators more tools to show up authentically within the classroom while simultaneously supporting students through their use of humor. The information gleaned from this study could also assist counselor educators in teaching future counselor educators how to effectively foster a positive classroom environment as well as strong instructor-student alliances using humor.

Assumptions

There were several assumptions worth noting to further inform readers on the credibility of the study results. Noting these assumptions also assisted the researcher in beginning to bracket biases as an ongoing process throughout data collection and analysis. This process, known as epoche, is explored more in-depth in Chapter III. The following assumptions were influenced by the researcher's personal experiences, personal identities, as well as by literature the researcher has read pertaining to the construct of humor.

Because of the researcher's lifelong affinity for comedy, she did have quite a bit of background knowledge prior to exploring the literature on humor. Humor has played a large part in her life as it influenced the media she consumed as well as how she communicated with others in her life. Because of the impact humor has had on her life, the researcher went into this research with the belief humor would make an impact in the classroom. Specifically, humor has had a positive impact on rapport building (both personally and professionally) for the researcher, so she also assumed the utilization of instructor use of humor would positively impact the instructor-student relationship. The researcher also believed the degree to which humor affected students would depend on many factors, including but not limited to the rapport between student and instructor, student and instructor cultural background, and how specifically the instructor utilizes humor.

The researcher was also a cisgender woman, and her experience with humor as a woman also impacted her assumptions for the study. Generally speaking, in the researcher's experience, women have often been seen as less funny than men in the comedy world as well as in the real world. Because of this, the researcher was often careful about which settings she shared humor. Similarly, the researcher assumed this could also be the case with instructors who were socialized as women. Additionally, the researcher believed humor could be experienced differently by students depending on the perceived gender of their instructor.

As a white person, the researcher held a lot of privilege in general, though also in relation to the world of comedy. Most comedic media was both created by and consumed by people who held majority identities. Because of this, much of the humor the researcher has consumed would be considered "mainstream" humor. As such, the researcher's sense of humor has been shaped by "mainstream" comedy media. Moreover, after exploring humor literature, the researcher has learned more about how humor may be received and displayed across varying cultures. Because of this, the researcher went into this study assuming that how humor was received may be impacted by instructor and student cultural backgrounds.

Delimitations

This study had several delimitations to restrict the scope of the study, the first of which related to the participant pool. The researcher limited the participant pool to counseling master's students, rather than including related mental health and human services professionals. The rationale for this decision was based in the counseling profession's need to continue to work towards having a distinct professional identity, and one of the ways to do this was to have research that was specific to the profession (D. M. Kaplan & Gladding, 2011).

The study was also limited to working with participants who had access to audio-visual software such as Zoom. The researcher recognized this decision did not provide equity to all participants, as some may not have access to this technology for varying reasons. However, in order to increase transferability, the researcher wanted to have the opportunity to collect data across the United States, which required the researcher to meet with participants virtually.

Conclusion

Humor has been a pervasive phenomenon with many benefits (Kush, 1997; Maslow, 1970; Rogers, 1980). While an abundance of literature supported humor as being helpful in building relationships (Borcherdt, 2002; Butzer & Kuiper, 2008; Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Fraley & Aron, 2004; Martineau, 1972; Sultanoff, 1997) and the utilization of humor as a rapport building tool in counseling (Falk & Hill, 1992; Goldin et al., 2006; Haig, 1986; McBrien, 1993; Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013) and teaching (R. A. Berk, 2014; Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Hill, 1988; R. M. Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977; Kher et al., 1999), there was currently no literature exploring humor in a counseling master's program. Additionally, no literature currently explored master's students in counseling's experience of instructor use of humor. Moreover, even though humor has been found to be a good rapport building tool within relationships (Martineau, 1972; Sultanoff, 1997), no current literature explored how master's in counseling students experience instructor use of humor in relation to the instructor-student relationship. This dissertation research attempted to fill these gaps in the literature. The results of this study could have potential to impact not only how counselor educators show up in the classroom (by authentically utilizing humor in a way that promoted student well-being and success) but also could inform counselor educators on how to train future counselors in the appropriate utilization of humor within the classroom.

Definitions of Terms

Humor. “A social mechanism with definite social functions” which “is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties” (Martineau, 1972, p. 114). Humor could be transmitted through many ways, some examples could include through speech, writing, action, images, and music (Bremmer & Roodenburg, 1997).

Humor Response. How a listener responded to the stimulus of humor, some examples being laughter and smiling (Dziegielewska et al., 2003).

Rapport. A harmonious relationship often marked by mutual understanding, empathy, and effective communication (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Threshold Theory of Humor. This theory postulated that most humorous situations follow somewhat of a formula that included both a setup and a punchline (Epstein & Joke, 2007). A setup was how the joke started and the punchline was the stimulus that would not be funny without the setup. The theory went on to state that for the receiver of the humorous stimulus to give a humorous response, they must have some sort of context or experience with the subject matter.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Overview of Humor

Humor has been a pervasive concept shared by many cultures and societies. Humor has been found in film, literature, and within our conversations (Berger, 1987). Berger (1987) went on to state,

There is no aspect of our lives that is not open to humor, which treats our sexuality, our politics, our business affairs, our institutions, our heroes and heroines, our religion, and everything else with the same democratic spirit of playfulness, irony, ridicule, sarcasm, irreverence, or whatever. (p. 6)

Dziegielewski et al. (2003) stated that humor was defined by two dimensions, either the creation of humor or the appreciation of humor. Because of this, most people have had the capacity to experience humor and laughter. Additionally, according to Berger (1987) humor is “one of our most important coping or adaptive mechanisms, and something that we all need, in considerable quantities, all the time” (p. 14). While humor has been a widely experienced phenomenon, it has remained somewhat puzzling for those trying to fully understand the construct due to its subjectivity.

In order to study humor, we must first understand the humor response, or how one reacts to something funny. Many different actions have been tied to the humor response. Humor has generally been defined subjectively in literature, which has made it a difficult construct to research. Epstein and Joker (2007) described the humor response as one closely tied to a

Pavlovian response. Often Pavlovian responses were tied to a specific stimulus, for example, the blink of an eye in response to a close facial encounter with an object. Two characteristics that have usually been present with the humor response: laughter and smiling (Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Given the frequency of the humor response within everyday behavior, it seemed intuitive to place the response in a distinct class of its own (Epstein & Joker, 2007). While this behavior has been experienced by most, there has still been a lack of understanding and a lack of research identifying the specific conditions in which the response to humor occurs (Epstein & Joker, 2007). This lack of understanding and research on the humor response has also been true within counselor education.

Counselor educators should be aware of how humor may be received in different settings. One way of beginning to understand how humor may be received in different settings, would be to explore humor from a sociological perspective. Martineau (1972) saw humor as a “lubricant” and an “abrasive” within social interactions. The use of the term “lubricant” compared the use of humor to oil being used to help machinery function smoothly; humor could be used as a tool to help social interactions flow more smoothly. In contrast, humor could also be an “abrasive;” rather than working as oil on machinery, it could act as sand, stalling the machine. “Abrasive” humor could result in social or interpersonal friction, a stall in the communication process, or a modification of the way in which the interaction was viewed. Additionally, the humor response would also be likely to vary based on the setting in which the setup and punch line were being received. In situations where more people were laughing (think a comedy club versus a funeral), more laughter was likely to occur due to imitative behavior versus feeling the need to suppress the humor response in order to feel more appropriate in the setting (Epstein & Joker, 2007). Additionally, the threshold dynamics of the humor response may change based on whether or not

the listener felt threatened (Epstein & Joker, 2007). For example, if an employee were to enter their boss's office, and the boss had an intention to fire the employee, their setups and punch lines may not be as well received by the employee, regardless of the threshold of awareness. It would be important to keep this theory in mind when utilizing humor in the classroom in order to make informed decisions as to how humor could potentially impact the classroom environment. Counselor educators have held a great deal of power in the classroom and, because of that, could cause a rupture within the classroom if humor was used inappropriately and, thus, should be mindful of the humor they use in the classroom.

Theories of Humor Throughout History

Superiority Theories

While humor has been a fairly universal experience, there were some disparities across explanations and definitions of humor as a construct (Berger, 1987). The first set of humor theories were known as superiority theories, mostly deduced by late philosophers. Superiority humor theorists believed people got pleasure from feeling mastery and control, and the humor response allowed people to attempt to reestablish or maintain those feelings of control through "downward social comparison" (Wyer & Collins, 1992, p. 665). Hobbes, an English philosopher, believed the experience of humor was tied to feelings of superiority (Berger, 1987). Hobbes also stated humor was directly tied to a powerful emotional response as well as an instantaneous impact on the person experiencing laughter (Berger, 1987). Aristotle believed in the tie to superiority as well, stating humor was derived from the "lower echelons of society" (Berger, 1987, p. 7) for the purpose of experiencing pleasure based on comparing ourselves to those we would deem lower than us. This feeling of superiority could also be derived from witticism against an earlier version of ourselves (Berger, 1987; Wyer & Collins, 1992). So, from the

perspective of superiority theorists, humor has always been social/cultural and involved some sort of comparison.

Incongruity Theories

Others believe humor was a result of experiencing incongruence between our expectations and reality (Deckers & Devine, 1981; Deckers & Kizer, 1975; Rothbart, 1976; Wicker et al., 1980; Wyer & Collins, 1992). Berger (1987) deemed incongruity theories as the most widely accepted theories of humor. “An incongruity involves some kind of difference between what one expects and what one gets, a lack of consistency and harmony” (Berger, 1987, p. 8). Sometimes these incongruences appeared as disappointments while others simply had some sort of opposition. It could be argued that the theory of superiority could fall under the umbrella of incongruity theories because they too involve comparison.

Psychoanalytic Theories

Psychoanalytic theories (in true Freud fashion), on the other hand, have taken the stance that humor was facilitated as a means to mask aggression, release tension, or reduce arousal (Berger, 1987; Freud, 1905/1916; Skinner, 1957; Wyer & Collins, 1992). An example of this could be sexual humor. Psychoanalytic humor theorists would believe the use of sexual humor was to cover up sexual aggressiveness or hostility. Humor has also been seen as an opportunity to escape the control of our superegos (Berger, 1987). “Humor enables the id aspects of our personalities to engage in aggressive behavior and by disguising this behavior as humorous, escape from detection by superego elements in our personalities” (Berger, 1987, p. 9).

Cognitive Theories

The next set of humor theories were cognitive theories. From this theoretical lens, humor was the resolution of paradoxes and problems of logic (Berger, 1987). One of the best-known

cognitive theorists of humor was Gregory Bateson. Bateson believed the brain was unable to process certain types of information and used humor to better come to terms with complex concepts (Berger, 1987). For example, one may use humor when coping with the death of a loved one, as death could be a complex and hard to grasp concept.

Modern Theories

More modern theories have focused on humor being used as a tool for resolution of problems of logic (Murdock & Ganim, 1993). Behaviorists have not explored much into the humor response either, though, Skinner (1957) has been known to use humor, yet provided little explanation of humor as a construct, simply stating he believed people laughed due to hearing something they found surprising, clumsy, or awkward, generally something the listener did not expect.

Epstein and Joker (2007) attempted to further explore the humor response through their Threshold Theory of Humor. This theory stated most humorous situations started with a setup and ended with a punch line. A setup was essentially how the joke was established, whereas the punch line was a trigger or stimulus that would otherwise not be funny without the initial setup (Epstein & Joker, 2007). Similarly, the setup would not be funny without the punch line. The length of the humor stimulus may vary, though the formula of setup and punch line were quite constant. The receiver of the humorous stimulus usually had to have some sort of context or previous experience with the subject matter in order to elicit a humor response. Take puns for example: “What do you get when you cross a cow and a duck? Cheese and quackers.” (Epstein & Joker, 2007, p. 52). This simple pun, while potentially groan worthy, followed the formula of setup and punch line and, without each part, the pun would not be as effective in stimulating the humor response. Of course, jokes were not the only form of humor. The humor we could find

within our everyday lives often came from exaggerations, mistakes, coincidences, word play, and much more (Berger, 1987). That being said, these everyday instances of humor could potentially still follow the setup punch line formula.

Different forms of humor could result in different humor responses (Epstein & Joker, 2007). Epstein and Joker (2007) went on to state a weak humor response was usually identified with only mouths or mouths and eyes reacting, or if it was very weak, the response could be completely covert. In contrast, a strong humor response would have much more dramatic changes in facial expression beyond the mouth and eyes, including perhaps vocalizations, physiological changes, or changes in breathing (Goldstein & McGhee, 1972). Some factors that may influence how strong a humor response was would be how well a joke was told and whether the listener had history with the subject matter (Epstein & Joker, 2007). Moreover, timing would be a critical proponent to eliciting a humor response. "If the punch line comes too late, the target response will have diminished in strength to a point well below threshold" (Epstein & Joker, 2007, p. 54). On the other hand, if too much time had passed after the setup, the listener may need to be reminded of the initial setup in order to understand the punch line. Having to explain a joke could often provoke a very mild humor response, again due to threshold being diminished over time (Epstein & Joker, 2007).

Regardless of the school of thought attributed to the function of humor, it was clear humor was a regular function of everyday life. Additionally, humor was a subjective experience that depended on the settings, situations, and individuals involved in the sharing of humor. Many factors could be at play in how one interpreted and reacted to humor. While many of these factors were varied, changing, and subjective, the hope of the study was to shed more light on contributing factors to master's students in counseling experience of instructor use of humor. It

would be important counselor educators educate themselves on the function, benefits, and risks of humor in order to best utilize this intervention within the classroom. The present study hoped to inform all of the above.

Benefits Humor and Laughter

Whether the humor response was a “facilitator, indicator, or predictor, it is clearly associated with many important health and social phenomena” (Epstein & Joker, 2007, p. 51). Freud (1905/1916), Maslow (1970), Rogers (1980), and Kush (1997) all believed humor was an attribute of a fully functioning person, as being able to laugh at oneself and life circumstances was a sign of a healthy psyche. Additionally, humor could be a good fit for psychotherapy as both have had some features in common: humor and counseling were social phenomena that were effective in positive settings; humor and psychotherapy could be successful when the initiator exuded warmth, empathy, acceptance, and skill; and humor and psychotherapy reflected the personality as well as treatment approach of the counselor (Richman, 1996). Moreover, the process of psychotherapy promoted changes in emotion, behavior, cognitions, and biochemistry; humor could elicit change in these areas as well (Sultanoff, 2013).

Humor also has had the potential to elicit understanding, acceptance, and insight (Goldin et al., 2006; Richman, 1996). The use of humor in counseling could improve client self-esteem, promote creative thinking, and broaden client perspectives (Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Having an appreciation for humor could also help people work through perfectionism and move towards a more emotionally healthy life (Borcherdt, 2002). Sultanoff (2013) and Maples et al. (2001) stated the lighthearted use of humor could help clients accept the absurdity of some situations and foster wellness, as well as provide perspective when a client felt a loss of control.

Humor and Anxiety and Stress

Humor has also been found to reduce anxiety and stress as well as facilitate problem solving (Anderson & Arnoult, 1989; Porterfield, 1987; Robinson, 1977; Zwerling, 1955). Additionally, humor could function as a protective shield from negative stimuli as well as reduce reactions that may be perceived as negative (Moran & Massam, 1999). Humor could also be helpful in managing pain (Matz & Brown, 1998; Sultanoff, 1997). Similarly, laughter could reduce stress (L. S. Berk et al., 1989), help to energize and increase desire to choose activity over inactivity (Sultanoff, 1997), and even give a boost to our immune systems by altering how we feel and think as well as behave (Baim, 1998; Sultanoff, 1997).

While stress has been common in most lives, resiliency could be an important protective factor in handling life's stressors. Humor could play an important role in enhancing one's resiliency. "By changing one's biochemistry, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, humor can help build physical and emotional resilience as it stimulates the production of physical and psychological antibodies" (Sultanoff, 1997, p. 1). Resiliency has been the ability of a person to be able to recuperate from experiencing a stressor (Sultanoff, 1997). When one experienced stress, antibodies helped to cope with the stressor. Multiple stressors could deplete the immune system and, without the regeneration of antibodies, one could experience a breakdown whether that be emotionally, physically, or both (Sultanoff, 1997). Humor has helped to relieve distress as well as helped to regenerate these lost antibodies in order to protect the immune system from the depletion that could lead to breakdown and, thus, helping to sustain resilience (Sultanoff, 1997).

Humor could also be an effective coping tool for stress. Humor has had cognitive effects, in that it could help to break through rigid thinking which could assist someone in seeing the world more realistically, without distortions (Sultanoff, 1997). How we feel has been tied to how

we perceive events occurring around us. A stressor in and of itself would not inherently be stressful; the stress would stem from how one perceives the stressor. Different people would be impacted in different ways by the same stressor depending on their perception or meaning they place on the stressor. Humor could be used as a tool to adjust a belief system and provide a more realistic perspective of a stressor (Sultanoff, 1997).

Humor and Emotional Distress

In addition to being a coping tool for stress, humor could be used to teach someone to have the ability to manage their emotional states (Sultanoff, 1992, 1997). Humor has been found to help clients work through personal, social, and emotional issues (Granick, 1995). It has been difficult to experience distressing emotions while also experiencing humor at the same time (Sultanoff, 1992, 1997). Because humor could affect our emotions, one could learn to manage emotional distress through the use of humor (Sultanoff, 1997). Of course, the use of humor would not be a cure all for mental health, though it could provide a few moments of relief from an emotional stressor. Moreover, humor has allowed people to gain some control in situations or events in which they may not feel they initially have control (Solomon, 1996). Regardless of the situation, being able to laugh at circumstances would allow one to gain some control in their emotional state.

Humor could also assist in managing aggression and anger management (Prerost, 1987; Ziv, 1987). Additionally, humor has been found to be helpful in promoting addiction recovery and alcoholism (Scott, 1989; Sumners, 1988). Similarly, humor has been found to assist in depression treatment (Sultanoff, 2013) as well as career counseling (Donald & Carlisle, 1983). Sultanoff (2013) stated that even the momentary relief from depression at the hand of humor could teach clients experientially that the intensity of their depression could fade.

Humor could help clients find new ways to look at daily events as well as change distorted thinking patterns (Sultanoff, 2013). Sultanoff (2013) went on to state that, while distressing emotions may return, the use of humor could provide temporary relief. Chapman and Chapman-Santana (1995) stated that using humor could help clients see painful events from a less frightening lens as well as lessen feelings of guilt and anxiety from painful events. Freud (1905/1916) found that the use of humor could allow clients a defense against disturbing emotions such as fear and anger as well as relieve some of the pain of misfortune. Moreover, humor could be used as an important tool in helping clients experience catharsis (Falk & Hill, 1992; Haig, 1986) by motivating clients to share their most inner thoughts and feelings (Dziegielewski et al., 2003).

Humor with Children and Families

Humor has also been found to be a useful tool in both family and child therapy as well as within couples therapy. Erickson and Feldstein (2007) stated that understanding how children use humor as a defensive strategy could help them transform humor into a coping tool. Additionally, humor has been found to be especially helpful with child clients who were particularly resistant (Ricks et al., 2014). Ricks et al. (2014) developed an intervention utilizing humor through client created comics as a tool to navigate family discord, roles, communication styles, dynamics, and differences. Humor could also help in treatment of phobias experienced by children (Ventis et al., 2001). In addition, humor could be used as a diagnostic tool with children and adolescents in order to gauge their ability to experience humor, as humor was associated with self-efficacy, coping skills, and positive relationships (Bernet, 1993; Erickson & Feldstein, 2007). Moreover, humor could alleviate some frustration felt by parents towards adolescent children (Chapman & Chapman-Santana, 1995). Not only could humor alleviate some family

frustration, humor could also assist families in healing and promote healing, forgiveness, and acceptance (Ricks et al., 2014). With couples, humor could help partners when feeling stuck in patterns as well as help them cooperate (McBrien, 1993).

Humor as a Tool for Forming Connections

Humor has been found to be helpful in establishing as well as maintaining relationships (Martineau, 1972; Sultanoff, 1997). Sultanoff (1997) stated, “We are more likely to greet and connect with others when we experience humor” (p. 2). Dziegielewski et al. (2003) stated that, within a team, humor could be used to break the ice, gain control of emotions and issues, as well as release tension both in the short term and long term. Shared laughter has also been shown to increase group cohesion, a sense of belongingness, and well-being which could increase group productivity (Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Additionally, a shared humorous experience could help strangers feel closer when they are interacting for the first time (Fraley & Aron, 2004). Fraley and Aron (2004) stated the distraction and self-expansion provided by humor could be a buffer against the discomfort of first meeting someone. Within romantic relationships, couples who report being more satisfied with their relationship were more likely to use positive humor rather than negative humor, especially while in conflict with one another (Butzer & Kuiper, 2008). Butzer and Kuiper (2008) went on to state that, in contrast, couples with low relationship satisfaction reported experiencing high levels of negative humor whether in conflict or not. This would show that the appropriate use of humor within relationships could enhance relationship satisfaction, while inappropriate use could have the inverse effect. Additionally, couples who laughed together had a tendency to be less demanding of each other and more likely to stay together (Borcherdt, 2002). Borcherdt (2002) also found humor could positively impact romantic relationships through increasing tolerance levels, preventing emotional confusion, promoting

happiness and joy, lessening defensiveness, combating fear, promoting self-discovery, contributing to harmony and goodwill, promoting creativity, building cooperation, deflecting awkward moments, and conveying self-confidence.

In the context of counseling and CES, humor has been found to be a key tool in building rapport and enhancing the therapeutic alliance (Falk & Hill, 1992; Haig, 1986; Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013). Because humor has involved some level of vulnerability using humor within an unequal power dynamic could even the playing field for a more egalitarian relationship (Franzini, 2001). Sands (1984) stated that using humor within counseling allowed clients to relax in a way that opened them up to express taboo emotions. Richman (1996) believed laughter within session drew the counselor and client closer through sharing the commonalities of being human. Shared laughter in session could help foster a positive therapeutic environment as well as break up some of the monotony of serious conversation which prevented early client termination as well as counselor burn out (Goldin et al., 2006; McBrien, 1993). Additionally, utilizing humor in a therapeutic environment could increase social cohesion and feelings of belonging (Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013). Chapman and Chapman-Santana (1995) also found that humor could relieve some client anxieties around being in counseling, especially in relation to the client originally finding the counselor intimidating, humor could help even that playing field. Additionally, using humor could enhance communication and attending skills because it helped get someone's attention (Sultanoff, 1992). Franzini (2001) stated that therapists who were not in favor of using humor in counseling often liked holding the power in the relationship, were simply just not funny. With so much evidence supporting humor positively effecting relationships, one may wonder how humor could impact relationships within the classroom.

Humor in Higher Education

In order to create an environment conducive to student learning, educators would need to be creative (Kher et al., 1999). Humor could be seen as a form of creativity and could be used in an education setting as a tool to enhance the learning process (Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Students would be more likely to be receptive to learning when their teacher had provided a supportive social environment, and humor could be one tool that could be used to enhance the social environment, relax students, and help with the instructor-student rapport (R. A. Berk, 2014; Kher et al., 1999). Additionally, humor has been linked to enhancing student recall (Hill, 1988) as well as improving retention (R. M. Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977).

Teachers within higher education have believed the use of humor could stimulate both interest and student interaction and cooperation within the classroom (R. A. Berk, 2014; Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Humor has also been found to create an environment which allowed for a unique perspective on teaching and learning as well as allowed for openness and spontaneity within the classroom (Wlodkowski, 1985). In addition to stimulating interest and openness, Hill (1988) believed humor also had the capacity to encourage a positive learning environment, promote physical well-being, help students retain the lesson, and provide some socially acceptable coping mechanisms for the class. If a student could laugh and learn simultaneously their emotional well-being could be enhanced (Borcherdt, 2002). Utilizing humor within the classroom has also been found to raise student curiosity as well as present difficult material in an entertaining way, which may contribute to students' desire to learn (Ness, 1989). Because humor has had the ability of decreasing anxiety, using humor in the classroom could lower the potential anxiety inducing nature of some courses, help students be more receptive to difficult material, and have a positive effect on their test performance (R. A. Berk, 2014; Bryant

et al., 1980; Korobkin, 1988). It has also been found that humor could be helpful in teaching courses with sensitive content areas such as sexuality education courses as it promoted balance in the subject material and promotes learning (Adams, 1974).

Humor has also been found to enhance student attention, learning, and motivation (Bryant et al., 1979; Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Dziegielewski et al. (2003) stated “laughter can boost a bored, inattentive listener, facilitating higher learning performance and memory retention” (p. 78). Instructors who have had a more playful attitude and were willing to use humor appropriately in the classroom could enhance classroom communication (Duffy & Jones, 1995). Moreover, students were more likely to rank professors as being more appealing, better presenters, and better teachers when they actively used humor in the classroom (Bryant et al., 1980).

While there was much evidence to support the use of humor in the classroom, there was little research on the impact of instructor use of humor in master’s students, particularly counseling master’s students. Additionally, there was no research on how master’s counseling students experience their instructor-student relationship being affected by instructor use of humor.

How Humor is Incorporated Into the Classroom

Some examples of how humor could be used in the classroom were: joke telling, sharing cartoons or comic strips, assigning readings that utilize humor, sharing a funny story, riddles, puns, and including funny answers within exams (Bryant et al., 1979; Ness, 1989; Rosenfeld & Anderson, 1985). Humor could also be implemented with multimedia such as using funny pictures, charts and graphs, or diagrams, as well as audio and video. Humorous multimedia could help with student memory, comprehension, understanding, and deep learning (R. A. Berk, 2014).

R. A. Berk (2014) also stated funny music or sounds could help set the tone in class help with student mood. Humor could be implemented into courses at various instructional phases (Kher et al., 1999). For example, humor could be incorporated in a course syllabus or perhaps during an instructor introduction (R. A. Berk & Popham, 1995). Humor could also be used as classroom ice breakers (Korobkin, 1988). Humor could be infused into the classroom though the use of humorous media within PowerPoint slides (R. A. Berk, 2014). Instructors could implement both planned and spontaneous humor in the classroom (Kher et al., 1999). Kher et al. (1999) also stated instructors could utilize humor to communicate classroom management expectations. In order to be most effective using humor in the classroom, one may want to have a peer review their syllabi, PowerPoint, or other media before presenting to the class as well as practice delivery of humor in advance (R. A. Berk, 2014).

Humor in Counselor Education

Ness (1989) believed utilizing humor within the counseling classroom could offer the same positive results that have been found in the counseling room. Ness (1989) made a case for utilizing humorous journal articles as an easy way to infuse humor into the classroom. He stated the utilization of humorous articles could enhance the learning process through adding to enjoyment, heightening interest, reducing tension and anxiety, enhancing feelings of belonging, defining proper professional behavior, and aiding in language acquisition (Ness, 1989).

Harmful Humor

While humor could be a useful tool in forming connections, it could also be damaging in some contexts. Radcliffe-Brown (1940) defined the joking relationship as

A relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who in turn is required to take no offence. ...

The joking relationship is a peculiar combination of friendliness and antagonism (p. 90)

While there were variations in what the joking relationship looked like across cultures, Radcliffe-Brown suggested the joking relationship was widespread across the world. While the joking relationship has not been inherently bad, depending on the context and content of the joking relationship, the result could be to rupture a relationship or bring the relationship together. Some examples of what may be seen as “negative” types of humor were sarcasm or put downs, any sort of humor that may be insensitive to someone’s experience, humor used to distance oneself from another, humor may alienate others, humor used to punish, ridicule, or reject someone, or humor that increases hostility (Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Sultanoff, 1994,). Additionally, using humor during a stressful conversation could cause some distrust between those conversing as well as incite some feelings of suspiciousness of motivation (Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Dziegielewski et al. (2003) also stated team members or group members may become upset with the group balance if someone was unsuccessful in their use of humor. Moreover, any humor utilized to serve the clinician’s self-satisfaction could potentially be harmful to the therapeutic alliance (Richman, 1996).

Humor as an Intragroup and Intergroup Interaction

Martineau’s 1972 Model of the Social Functions of Humor gave some insight into how humor was received depending on the situations in which humor occurs. The result of the humor could vary depending on how it was received by the group members. If the humor was received as esteeming by the intragroup members, they felt more solidified as a unit. This could be seen even within smaller instances of banter between acquaintances. The banter could relieve some

social awkwardness and lessen feelings of social distance. In contrast, when humor was received as disparaging by group members, it may function in several different ways. One of these ways may be to control the group. For example, humor could be used within a group to “jokingly” point out undesirable behavior, such as employee showing up to a meeting late. In this scenario, the “joking relationship” was used as a means to convey disapproval to both the individual and group in a more covert easily to digest manner. Humor used in a self-disparaging way could further solidify ingroups through humorously sharing their flaws or missteps. This type of humor could also be introduced in order to stir up conflict already present within the group or to “to foster disintegration of the group” (Martineau, 1972, p. 118) An example of this would be ridicule, a form of disparaging humor that could be utilized as a weapon for conflict.

In contrast, humor received as esteeming an outgroup could also further solidify a group. This form of humor would be less common, though when it did occur there would usually be a group consensus about the outgroup that would further be enhanced through humor. In some cases, if group members disagreed with the humorous stance, judgment and distrust may result. When humor was perceived as disparaging towards an outgroup, group members could feel closer together or they could foster hostile feelings toward said outgroup. Often, these two phenomena could occur together (Martineau, 1972).

Martineau’s (1972) intergroup example of humor was when humor was initiated by an outgroup though functions within the ingroup in various ways depending on how it was perceived by the ingroup members. When the ingroup perceived the humor as esteeming towards the ingroup, it helped to increase morale and bring the ingroup closer. This sort of praise from the outgroup could also potentially be an invitation for relations with the ingroup. In contrast, if the outgroup humor was perceived as disparaging to the ingroup, it could result in varied responses.

This humor could increase morale and help bring the ingroup closer. Think of this as if the ingroup had a common enemy, their shared anger could bring them closer as a group. This form of humor could also be used to control the ingroup or to foster disintegration in the ingroup. If the humor was perceived as esteeming towards the outgroup, this could introduce hostile feelings from the ingroup towards the outgroup or bring the ingroup closer with a common enemy. If the humor used by the outgroup to the audience of the ingroup and was perceived by the ingroup as being disparaging towards the outgroup, this too could bring the ingroup closer together or foster hostile feelings towards the outgroup (Martineau, 1972).

Another form of intergroup humor involved both ingroup and outgroup parties and how they perceived the humor. If the humor was perceived as esteeming to only one of the groups, the result could be to foster consensus or to foster disintegration of the relationships. On the other hand, if the humor was perceived as disparaging to one of the two groups, it may also foster the disintegration of the relationships, or redefine the relationships altogether, depending on who was the butt of the joke (Martineau, 1972).

In summation, depending on the audience, how the humor was judged, and whether the person eliciting the humor was within the ingroup or outgroup, relationships were affected in various different ways. It would be important to keep these examples in mind when using humor in social situations, as humor could bring people together, while it could also be used as a vessel for conflict. Educators should be mindful of these interplays between ingroup, outgroup, humor, and perception in order to foster trust and belongingness in the classroom, rather than mistrust and division.

Risks of Humor in Counseling, Supervision, and Education

Without a solid therapeutic alliance, humor could be received as destructive, offensive, or counterproductive (Goldin et al., 2006; Ricks et al., 2014). If the client or supervisee was not ready to receive humor within the relationship, or perhaps had rigid expectations of what counseling looked like, the client may feel alienated (Bernet, 1993; Goldin et al., 2006). Clients may also view counselors' use of humor as not taking their issues seriously (Bernet, 1993; Chapman & Chapman-Santana, 1995). Additionally, clients may have a different sense of humor than therapists (Goldin & Bordan, 1999). Moreover, one could not always predict how humor would be received. For example, certain uses of humor could bring up difficult memories for clients (Richman, 1996).

In the classroom, improper use of humor could create a hostile learning environment with stifled student self-esteem and communication (Loomans & Kolberg, 1993). If a student felt like they were being made fun of in class, the entire classroom climate would be affected negatively (Edwards & Gibboney, 1992). Similarly, humor that was sexually suggestive should be avoided unless in conjunction with sexuality education (Kher et al., 1999). Any sort of offensive humor, including but not limited to profanity, vulgarity, sarcasm, ridicule, sensitive personal experiences, and innuendo, would be best to be avoided in the classroom (R. A. Berk, 2014).

Appropriately Utilizing Humor

It would be important for counselors and counselor educators to be aware of how humor could be harmful in order to avoid distancing behaviors within session and the within the classroom. In order to be effective in using humor within counseling, supervision, and education, the facilitator of humor must be sure a positive alliance was first in place. Before utilizing humor in session, counselors must first consider family values, cultural practices, and levels of

resistance (Ricks et al., 2014). Humor has been considered therapeutic when it enhances health and wellness through playful expression or through appreciating the incongruence and absurdity abound within one's life (Association for Applied and Therapeutic Humor, 2005).

Sultanoff (1994) believed one must examine three aspects of humor in order to utilize humor in a therapeutic and healthy way: the target of the humor, the environmental conditions, and the receiver's receptivity to humor. The target of the humor was usually oneself, someone else, or a situation. Generally speaking, humor aimed at oneself has a tendency to be healthier rather than harmful, while humor aimed at someone else was often more harmful than healthy, and humor pointed towards a situation laid somewhere in between (Sultanoff, 1994). Richman (1996) referred to this as "laughing with rather than laughing at" (p. 561).

When Sultanoff (1994) described the environmental conditions of humor, he was speaking to the nature of the relationship between giver and receiver of humor, the timing or circumstance of the humor being shared, as well as the setting in which the humor was being presented. For example, humor has often been used as a coping tool by mental health professionals. Sharing a joke with colleagues about a particular mental health diagnosis could be a way of coping with working with difficult clients. That same joke would not be appropriate in a different environment in which a client was present. In order for humor to be received as therapeutic, there must first be a positive and accepting good-humored atmosphere, good communication between parties, empathy, the facilitation of insight and understanding, as well as the facilitation of belonging (Richman, 1996).

The third condition Sultanoff (1994) described was the individual's receptivity to humor. Gladding and Drake Wallace (2016) also agreed assessing client receptivity to humor was an important step before implementing humor in a therapeutic setting. While most were capable of

experiencing humor, some may not be receptive to or may be closed off to the use of humor due to current circumstances such as a recent loss or chronic depression (Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Goldin & Bordan, 1999). So how does one decipher another person's receptivity to humor? Sultanoff (1994) postulated one could glean insight into others' humor receptivity through observing their current use of humor, asking directly the role of humor in their life, observing their ability to laugh at themselves, and observing their response to humor. Dziegielewski et al. (2003) agreed that "one must reiterate that timing, client perception, and therapeutic relationships are all essential elements to determining when to use humor within the counseling arena" (p.11). Part of assessing for client receptivity to humor would also be having an awareness of the type of humor utilized by clients. An awareness of client humor could help inform clinicians as to how to appropriately utilize humor within session. Jacobs (2009) listed the four forms of humor she observed clients using: (a) conflict humor, (b) control humor, (c) consensus humor, and (d) concealment humor. Conflict humor was used as a tool to show aggressive behavior, control humor helped clients gain control, consensus humor helped clients foster social interaction, and concealment humor was used as a tool to deflect.

Another aspect of utilizing humor in a therapeutic way was authenticity (Gladding & Drake Wallace, 2016). If one did not use humor in their day-to-day life, they should probably avoid using humor within their roles as counselor educators and supervisors. Rogers (1980) suggested the nature of the therapist was key for therapeutic interventions to be received as therapeutic. Essentially, interventions should be coupled with the counselor's way of being (Rogers, 1980). Relating this to humor, in order for a counselor to effectively use humor as an intervention, it must also fit with who they were as a person. Rogers (1980) also emphasized that his tenants were not only for use in a counseling setting, they were effective in other settings as

well, so one may assume this could also be applied to the classroom. Chapman and Chapman-Santana (1995) warned that therapist who were awkward with humor should avoid its use professionally. Humor should also only be used if it was a benefit to the client, supervisee, or student, rather than for the entertainment of the counselor, supervisor, or educator. An additional aspect of being authentic with humor was laughter. If a client, student, or supervisee made a joke the receiver found funny, it would be important to laugh; while laughing out of pity, laughing disparagingly, or trying to one up the user of humor would be counterproductive (Franzini, 2001).

Additionally, one must take into account the ability for counselors, supervisors, and educators to address the impact of interventions they have used that the receiver may experience as negative (Sultanoff, 2013). Confrontations have occurred in the classroom and therapy room regardless of how cautious we were utilizing interventions. In order to utilize humor within counseling, supervision, and education, practitioners must feel comfortable processing potential offense. It would also be important to note that when a misstep was made, “clients who feel bonded to their therapists will “forgive” humor that they experience as insensitive or unpleasant” (Sultanoff, 2013, p. 397).

In the classroom, how humor was delivered impacted how it was received by students. If humor was delivered in a sarcastic manor, it may defeat the purpose of using humor as a tool for fostering a positive learning environment (Brown, 1995). Gladding and Drake Wallace (2016) described seven types of humor they found to be positive: anecdotes, jokes, puns, stock conversational witticisms, irony, hyperbole, and self-enhancing humor. The authors also noted five forms of humor that may leave others feeling devalued or discouraged: satire, sarcasm, dark grim or depressing humor, teasing, or risqué humor.

Richman (1996) summarized using caution with utilizing humor well by stating, “do not try to utilize humor. Do not force it, and if there is any doubt, don’t” (p. 560). Richman (1996) went on to state that, “humor entails a risk, because it touches upon areas that are often taboo, and with results that are not always predictable” (p. 560). While one should be aware of the potential caveats of utilizing humor, “humor when sensitively and properly applied, enriches therapy, increases the mutual enjoyment of client and counselor, draws people closer together, and [can] even saves lives.” (Richman, 1996, p. 560).

Cultural Considerations in Using Humor

Humor historically arose from the pain of oppression as a tool to empower, release aggression, make note of social conditions, and make political points (Vereen et al., 2006). Humor could help to heal injustices from the past, present, and future (Garrett et al., 2005; Vereen et al., 2006). Additionally, humor has been used as a way to transform oppressive or offensive racial slurs into more positive terms as a way of reclaiming control of the term (Avila-Saavedra, 2011). Burma (1946) explored how humor functions systematically in race relations. Burma believed humor was a useful tool in conflict due to its “adaptability to varying subject matters and its potential for subtly conveying malice” (Martineau, 1972, p. 106). Martineau (1972) stated racial humor was used to foster satisfaction at the expense of a differing racial group by attempting to make the other group look “ludicrous.” Even if a strong therapeutic alliance was formed, it would be important counselors, supervisors, and educators to exercise caution before engaging in humor with someone from a different culture without first understanding the person’s cultural identity (Fox, 2016; Maples et al., 2001). An instructor must always avoid using humor that refers to personal identities such as ethnicity, disability, sexuality, etc. as this could potentially distance students and leave them feeling othered (Harris, 1989).

It would be important to not lump people of color into one group for any reason and assume they had the same receptivity for humor. For example, African Americans may use put downs within a greeting, whereas that sort of humor would be deemed inappropriate to some native from Africa or the West Indian Islands (Maples et al., 2001; Vereen et al., 2006). Within African American culture, put downs or “snaps” has been used to lighten the mood, gain respect, or show their quick wit (Vereen et al., 2006). African American counselors utilizing well-timed “snaps” in a therapeutic context with African American clients could help dispel stereotypes and aid in client resistance as well as help foster the therapeutic alliance (Maples et al., 2001). It would be important to remember that, just because this form of humor worked between a client and counselor with similar backgrounds, it would not mean this would have the same effect from a white counselor. Because African American clients have endured oppression and ridicule at the hands of white people, they may not initially be open to playful banter from their counselor (Vereen et al., 2006). As with other instances of using humor, it would be a good idea to first form the relationship and assess for client receptivity to humor before utilizing it as a tool within the therapeutic relationship.

Within Latinx cultures, humor has been a symbol of expression of cultural identity and the discourse between tradition, religion, and assimilation (Fox, 2016). In Latinx, cultures humor has been used to challenge stereotypes as well as addressing panethnicity and unifying sub-groups (Avila-Saavedra, 2011). Many within the Latinx culture have valued respect, so counselors should be careful in using humor prematurely as humor may be seen as unprofessional, lacking maturity, or insincere (Maples et al., 2001). Counselors must be aware of how machismo and marianismo have been important to many within the Latinx culture, and how their use of humor may impact those beliefs (Fox, 2016).

Within Asian culture, humor has been a means of connection within the family (Fox, 2016). Self-deprecating humor has often been used within Asian cultures as a means to show humbleness and hierarchy within the family, though an outsider such as a counselor or educator utilizing the same humor could be seen as disrespectful (Maples et al., 2001). Maples et al. (2001) stated that some Asian Americans may enter into the counseling relationship distrust around the therapist's intentions, so it would be important to first gain trust and respect prior to utilizing humor within the relationship. While there were some gendered differences in humor within Asian culture, sarcasm has been universally seen as undesirable (Zhang & Kramarae, 2012). Zhang and Kramarae (2012) went onto state, generally speaking, women used humor more with close friends and family rather than with others in order to not be looked down upon or resented by other women. In contrast, Zhang and Kramarae (2012) found humorous men as seen in positive light by all genders. This information could offer insight for clinicians and educators as how to best utilize humor with certain populations and potential style of humor. One could assume that these messages in the realm of counseling could also be applied to working with students and supervisees from differing cultural backgrounds.

Conclusion

Humor has been identified as a tool to enhance a number of health and wellness objectives. Humor has been a part of the full human experience and has been linked to enhanced rapport, awareness or irrational thinking, and shared emotional experience (Franzini, 2001). Whether a giggle or a guffaw, humor has had an undeniable therapeutic value. Humor has had a long history of research backing up its effectiveness within multiple spaces such as counseling and teaching. Much of the literature focused on humor as a rapport building tool in counseling, only one study has been conducted to the researcher's knowledge exploring the use of humor in

clinical supervision, and only one study to the researcher's knowledge has explored how humor can be utilized in the CES classroom.

Previous research has been conducted on the use of humor in the counseling and supervision context of CES, though no research has yet to explore the lived experience of CES learners in a classroom with an instructor who utilized humor. Additionally, many of the studies exploring humor within teaching and pedagogy were focused on elementary, high school, and undergraduate classrooms, very little research explored the use of humor in the graduate school classroom. Moreover, no literature has explored how CES learners experienced the instructor-student relationship within a classroom with an instructor who utilized humor.

By sharing the experiences of counseling learners with an educator that actively utilized humor in the classroom, counselor educators could more deeply understand how their use of humor may impact students. Additionally, this information could inform counselor educators as to how humor effects classroom cohesion and belongingness. This information could inform counselor educators as to how humor impacted the student-teacher relationship. All of the above information would allow counselor educators to better understand how to appropriately use humor within the classroom as a tool to enhance the student-teacher relationship as well as increase classroom cohesion and belongingness.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experience of counseling students who had participated in master's classrooms in which the instructor used humor. Procedures were chosen that were consistent with PA, considering the unique perspectives of individual participants while also finding commonalities across participant experiences. This chapter provides an overview of ontological and epistemological foundations, theoretical perspectives, research questions, methods, methodology, as well as trustworthiness procedures.

Ontological, Epistemological, and Theoretical Considerations

This study was grounded in relativist ontology (Crotty, 1998). Through a relativist lens, knowledge has been seen as being influenced by biases and values, rather than truth being fact, in other words truth was socially constructed (Crotty, 1998). How one experiences humor has been socially constructed and hugely influenced by one's own biases and personal values, so the construct of humor was well situated to be understood through this ontological lens.

This study was grounded in subjective epistemologies. Subjective epistemologies assert individuals experience reality differently, or subjectively, and because of this, researchers could not be separated from their research (Crotty, 1998). Humor is a subjective experience, and how one interprets and is impacted by humor is subjective, leading to subjective epistemologies being a good fit with the construct being studied. The theoretical perspective guiding this study,

interpretivism, aligned with a subjective epistemology due to its assertion that individuals constructed their personal reality. In other words, through an interpretivist lens, there could be multiple interpretations of truth rather than there being one singular truth. Interpretivism “attempts to understand and explain human and social reality” and “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, pp. 66-67). This study aimed to explore the individual realities of master’s counseling students who had experienced instructor use of humor and how those students interpreted and understood those experiences.

The above ontological, epistemological, and theoretical considerations laid the foundation for a methodology that provided a space for participants to explore their experience as students in a classroom with an instructor who utilized humor. Additionally, the researcher was interested in how those experiences have been impacted by contextual factors. These considerations also asserted that researchers have influence over the research process and could not be removed from the research process due to an inability to be completely objective (Crotty, 1998). This influence was embraced and will be accounted for in the following sections.

Phenomenological Analysis

Phenomenology was chosen as the methodology for this study because it was “well suited to studying affective, emotional, and often intense human experience” (Merriam, 2009, p. 26). Moustakas (1994) stated, “the understanding of meaningful concrete relations implicit in the original description of experience in the context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge” (p. 14). Moustakas (1994) identified several tenants of phenomenology, which were applied to the current study.

Moustakas (1994) stated phenomenological research should strive to be rid of researcher bias, to see concepts as they were. Throughout the study, the researcher kept in mind that her understanding of the phenomenon of humor as well as how she viewed participants and their experiences were directly tied and influenced by her own experiences as a cis woman, counselor, counselor educator and supervisor, and someone who regularly consumed humorous media. To address this tenant of PA, the researcher took part in epoche and phenomenological reduction. Epoche is the process of researchers bracketing their judgements and assumptions (Moustakas, 1994). Through this process, researchers attempted to enter their studies through an unbiased perspective. To allow herself to fully hear participants, the researcher explored and identified her biases related to the potential effects of humor on students. While one cannot fully remove themselves from the research process, this process helped to set aside researcher bias to the best of the researcher's ability, to draw conclusions based on participant experience. In the discussion of the analysis of findings, participant experiences would be connected to existing literature to provide applications of the information found in this study, though otherwise, participant experiences and language would be maintained throughout the data collection and analysis process.

Phenomenological research has urged researchers to take a holistic perspective of their chosen phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). Because of this holistic perspective, the researcher viewed the phenomena from all perspectives, considering participant experience, the societal construction of humor, as well as what the existing literature had to say about experiencing humor in the classroom. Phenomenological reduction, explained below, also assisted the researcher in viewing the phenomenon of experiencing instructor use of humor holistically.

Moustakas (1994) stated that within phenomenology, meaning and understanding of phenomena was explored through the process of reflection and intuition related to the observable qualities of the phenomena. Because of this, participants were prompted to speak on their intuitive and reflective experiences of humor, rather than exploring the “objective truth” (as seen in positivistic epistemologies) of humor. The researcher’s definition of humor was based on both her experience with humor throughout her lifespan as well as how current literature defined humor. As defined in Chapter I, the researcher understood humor to be, “A social mechanism with definite social functions” which “is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties” (Martineau, 1972, p. 114). During semi-structured interviews, the researcher read this definition of humor verbatim to participants, then asked them how they would define humor in their own words.

While Moustakas (1994) stated that exploration began at the individual participant level, there was also a reality to be uncovered through inter-subjective experiences across multiple participants. In other words, each participant’s individual subjective story held value, though through connecting multiple participants’ subjective stories, one could better understand the phenomenon being studied. Participant narratives were explored on both an individual level and linked together to find similarities across participant experiences. Chapter IV provides the themes found across all individual participants as well as composite themes across all participants, thus, providing both the individual and collective experience of participants.

Research Questions

There is one primary research question and one sub-research question for this study:

- Q1 How do master’s students in counseling experience instructor use of humor in the classroom?

Q1a How does instructor use of humor in the classroom influence the student-instructor relationship for master's students in counseling?

Methods

Sampling and Recruitment

The researcher utilized purposeful sampling methods to recruit master's students who had experienced instructor use of humor in the classroom (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Purposeful sampling was described as "choosing people who have a unique perspective or occupy important roles" (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011, p. 156) and, thus, required specific inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria for this study were as follows:

1. Participants must be currently enrolled in a master's program in counseling, which met either in person or synchronously.
2. Participants must have experienced, per self-report, being a student in a classroom with an instructor who used humor within the classroom.
3. Participants must have access to Zoom or similar audio-visual software.

Upon receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (Appendix A), participants were recruited through three methods. First, recruitment began through posting on the CES email listserv. Recruitment also took place through word of mouth. The researcher spoke with professional contacts (through both virtual and in person means), such as CES faculty and counselor colleagues, to spread the word with their current students and fellow colleagues. A copy of the recruitment letter used can be found in Appendix B.

Once participants were identified, the researcher contacted them through the provided contact information to introduce herself, gave an overview of the study including what was expected of participants, criteria for participation, and the researcher's contact information. Once participants agreed they met criteria and were interested in participating in the study, an initial

interview was scheduled, and the informed consent emailed to participants; informed consent (Appendix C) was also verbally reviewed during the first interview.

Merriam (2009) put forth guidelines regarding sample size for qualitative research, stating data collection could be stopped once “a point of saturation or redundancy is reached” (p. 80). Saturation was determined by the researcher’s and auditor’s review of transcripts of interviews based on whether the research questions had been sufficiently answered, and participants were no longer providing new information pertaining to the research questions. Saturation was met after seven participants.

Setting

All interviews took place virtually, through Zoom, which allowed participants to be interviewed across the nation with confidentiality being maintained. The time of the interview was mutually determined by researcher and participant. All interviews were audio recorded through Zoom for transcription purposes. The researcher chose to conduct interviews via a visual platform to allow for the observation of potential non-verbal cues that could assist her in asking follow-up questions.

Data Handling

Interviews were recorded and transcribed utilizing the recording and transcription feature on Zoom. This recording was downloaded directly to the personal password protected laptop of the primary researcher. A back-up method of recording was also utilized during participant interviews. The researcher audio recorded interviews via her smart phone. Once the researcher listened through the interview and checked the transcription for errors, as well as member checked the transcripts with participants, the recording of the interview was deleted from her personal computer and smart phone. Pseudonyms chosen by participants were utilized in the

transcripts and identifying information was removed by the researcher to protect participant anonymity. The completed demographic questionnaires were stored by pseudonym only on the researcher's computer, with a separate document linking the participant's given name with their pseudonym.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews (Appendix D) and a demographics questionnaire (Appendix E). Participants were given a demographics questionnaire at the first interview where they chose their own pseudonym. The researcher shared her screen so participants could see the questionnaire and what was being transcribed as they verbally answered the demographics questions, to ensure the participant, voice was being accurately documented. Moustakas (1994) encouraged researchers to start interviews by introducing the participant to the phenomenon being studied, then gently guiding them to explore their experience with the phenomenon. The researcher introduced the participant to the phenomenon by providing the definition of humor included in Chapter I, followed by inquiring how they defined humor. Information was gathered pertaining to participants' thoughts, feelings, ideas, and potential examples related to their experience of humor in the classroom to gain textural description of the phenomenon. The researcher engaged with participants in two separate interviews, which ranged from 40 minutes to an hour and a half, the second of which was a member checking interview. Having multiple interviews allowed the researcher to have prolonged exposure with participants which assisted in trustworthiness, which will be discussed more in depth later in this chapter. Additionally, as the researcher was the primary instrument for data collection in qualitative research, the researcher asked follow-up questions within the interview based on participant response and personal intuition and self-reflection. Self-reflection

also helped to ensure the researcher remained unbiased throughout each interview. A journal was utilized to record researcher reflections after each interview. These journals were shared with the auditor as an additional step to assess potential researcher bias to continue towards ensuring trustworthiness throughout the data collection and analysis process. See Appendix F for the prompts used to guide the self-reflection process of journaling.

As discussed previously, the researcher engaged in epoche throughout the data collection process, meaning personal biases were bracketed to cleanly study the phenomenon of humor. Phenomenological reduction occurred once epoche had been completed, for the purpose of isolating the phenomenon to identify the meaning of the experience (Merriam, 2009). Phenomenological reduction was accomplished by being aware of one's own thoughts and feelings while simultaneously opening oneself up to the meaning of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994). In other words, this process required the researcher to condense participant experiences of a phenomena while also keeping in mind their own experiences of the phenomena. Phenomenological reduction occurred by following four steps as outlined below.

Phenomenological reduction's first step was for the researcher to focus their attention on the experiences of the participant (Moustakas, 1994). In relation to this study, the researcher took this step by focusing on the participants' experiences of being students in a classroom with an instructor who used humor, not only during semi-structured interviews but also throughout the transcription and data analysis process. Additionally, to address this step, while conducting semi-structured interviews, the researcher focused primarily on experiences surrounding the phenomenon rather than exploring additional student experiences. Moreover, journaling was utilized by the researcher following each interview to further ensure the focus of interviews was maintained. While transcription occurred automatically through Zoom, the researcher listened

back to recordings of interviews while reading transcripts to assess for accuracy as well as to note whether she kept the focus on the phenomenon throughout the interview.

Moustakas (1994) stated the second step in phenomenological reduction was to view all participant experiences as equally important, regardless of researcher opinion or whether participant experiences aligned with existing literature, which was also known as horizontalization. While reading through transcripts of interviews, each statement was to be read as its own “horizon,” meaning statements represented one piece of knowledge while also representing knowledge that existed outside of the statement, much like when looking at a horizon one was aware of what they were seeing as well as what may be beyond what they were seeing. This was accomplished by separating parts of transcripts that pertained to specific parts of the experience of humor in the classroom. The coded segments were then clustered into themes both within and across participants.

The third step of phenomenological reduction was to remove redundancies in participant transcripts, leaving the statements that encapsulated the experience being studied (Moustakas, 1994). This was accomplished by reading through participant transcripts and locating statements that most descriptively articulated their experience. An auditor was also used in this process to reduce the likelihood of research bias in the analysis process. This step helped to distill the information into more succinct rich descriptions of the participants’ experiences.

The final step of phenomenological reduction was to combine succinct salient statements and themes from the above step into solid descriptions of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). Previously found themes were merged to describe the experiences of participants. This step focused on the “texture” of participant experience of the phenomenon. In other words, the feel of

the phenomenon. This was found through participants describing thoughts, feelings, sensations, etc. associated with their experience of humor.

Another aspect of phenomenological reduction was imaginative variation. Imaginative variation was, in a sense, mental experimentation (Turley et al., 2016). Through imaginative variation, the researcher was able to describe the experience of receiving humor more distinctively by expanding their perspective beyond the surface definition of the phenomenon. Moustakas (1994) described imaginative variation as exploring the how of the experience. This was accomplished by looking over the themes found in phenomenological reduction and exploring underlying causes that possibly influence participants' experience of instructor use of humor.

Finally, meanings were synthesized. Previous textural descriptions were synthesized to depict the meaning of the phenomenon of experiencing instructor use of humor in the classroom. This would offer readers a thick description of the phenomenon being studied and understanding of how participants experienced the phenomenon. While experiences of phenomena are forever changing (Moustakas, 1994), the hope was the description of participant experience of instructor use of humor could better assist counselor educators in making mindful decisions of how to utilize humor in the classroom, with knowledge as to how their words may affect students' experience.

Data Analysis

Moustakas (1994) outlined modified steps of phenomenological analysis, to be followed with each transcript, based on research by van Kaam's (1966) method of analysis:

1. List every statement relevant to the phenomenon.

2. Make sure each statement contained an experience necessary for understanding the phenomenon that could be abstracted or labeled, if not, the statement would be eliminated.

Repetitive, overlapping, and vague statements would also be eliminated.

3. Cluster the remaining statements that were related into a theme. These would be considered the core themes.

4. Review the statements and their themes against the entire transcript to ensure the statements and themes were explicitly stated and, if not, were they compatible, if neither were true, they should be deleted.

5. These validated statements and themes would be used to construct an individual textural description of the phenomenon utilizing verbatim examples.

6. Create an individual structural description of the phenomenon using the individual textural description and imaginative variation.

7. Combine the products of steps 5 and 6 to create a textural-structural description of the meanings and essence of individual participant experiences.

8. The textural-structural descriptions and themes from step 7 would be combined and compared across transcripts to develop a composite description of the experience which represents the entire group.

An auditor completed steps 1-4 separate from the researcher. The auditor and researcher met after step 4 with each transcript to reach consensus on main themes. If consensus was not reached, a second auditor would have been brought in, though consensus was reached across all participants. The researcher then completed steps 5, 6, and 7 on her own and presented the textural-structural descriptions for each individual participant to the auditor. The auditor assessed these descriptions for any bias and provided edits to the researcher. The researcher then

implemented any feedback given by the auditor on the individual textural-structural descriptions. After steps 1-7 had been completed for an individual transcript, the researcher met with the participant for a member checking meeting to present the textural-structural description of their experience to assess for accuracy in the researcher's understanding of the participant experience. The researcher and auditor then met to work collaboratively on step 8 to reach consensus on combined themes. The researcher then completed the composite textural-structural description of the phenomenon and presented it to the auditor for an additional check for personal biases and edits. After implementing auditor feedback, participants were emailed the final themes and composite textural-structural description to note whether their experience was encapsulated. Any edits or comments made by participants were changed to accurately reflect the participant's experience in the final composite textural-structural description of the phenomenon.

Researcher Stance

Researcher bias has to be explored in phenomenological research to ensure that the researcher has bracketed their biases throughout the data collection and analysis process (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The researcher's biases and assumptions have been influenced not only by her personal experiences and identities but also by reading current literature pertaining to the effects of humor within relationships. Below, the researcher went into more in-depth on some assumptions based on varied identities and experiences

Comedy Nerd

The most predominant assumption of this study was fueled by the researcher's lifelong appreciation of humor and comedy, some may refer to her as a "comedy nerd." Humor has played a large part in the media she consumed, how she communicated in her personal and professional relationships, as well as how she built relationships both personally and

professionally. Because of the researcher's strong appreciation of humor and comedy as well as how humor played a role in her life, the researcher assumed instructor use of humor did impact the student-teacher relationship. That being said, the researcher also assumed the degree of which this occurred depended on the student and instructor both as individuals and as a relationship. Additionally, the researcher assumed how humor was used and timed in the classroom could also impact how humor was received by the student.

Gender

Being socialized as a cis woman also impacted the researcher's assumptions of the study at hand. In the world of comedy, women have often been seen as less funny than their male counterparts. The researcher had experienced the internalization of this patriarchal idea that women were less funny than men and was often careful who she presented her humor to as a result. Because of these experiences, the researcher assumed feminine presenting instructors' use of humor would be received differently than masculine presenting instructors' use of humor.

Cultural Background

The privilege associated with the researcher's white identity extended to the comedy world as well. Most media that contained humor was created by and consumed by those holding majority identities. As a result, the humor the researcher had consumed and developed was in line with what may be considered "mainstream" humor. Additionally, after reading literature pertaining to the construct of humor, the researcher had learned humor may be received differently across cultures. Due to this, the researcher assumed how humor was received by students may vary depending on their cultural background as well as the cultural background of the instructor.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

Kvale (1995) outlined seven stages of research related to the trustworthiness and rigor of qualitative studies: thematizing, designing, interviewing, transcribing, interpreting, verifying, and reporting. The following paragraphs glean more information about the above concepts.

The first aspect of trustworthiness outlined by Kvale (1995) was thematizing. Thematizing was ensuring the theoretical foundation made sense for the study and research questions. Trustworthy thematizing was met through exploring existing literature to build a rationale for the present study. Additionally, the researcher discussed the theory that grounds the study, interpretivism, and how it aligned with the study.

The second element of trustworthiness was related to designing (Kvale, 1995). Designing was grounded in ensuring studies were designed ethically and had value for the human condition. Ethical studies addressed research questions through thoughtful procedures that respected human participants. To address designing, participants were given informed consent digitally prior to their interviews, was given a verbal overview of informed consent in the beginning of their interview. While discussing the informed consent with participants, the researcher would also pause to see if participants had questions. Part of this informed consent document included that participation was voluntary, participants could leave at any time, and there were no foreseeable risks in partaking in the study aside from uncomfortable feelings associated with a potentially negative experience of humor in the classroom. Another aspect of designing trustworthiness was gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval. Institutional Review Board approval further ensured the study design was ethical and caused no harm to human participants. See Appendix A for proof of IRB approval. Another component of trustworthy designing in this study related to maintaining anonymity. Participants chose their own pseudonyms and all identifying information

was removed in the reporting of findings. Moreover, all audio/video recordings were kept on the researcher's password protected computer and smartphone and were deleted following data analysis. Additionally, the study was potentially valuable to the human condition in that the knowledge gained from the study could assist counselor educators in better supporting students in their courses.

Trustworthiness in interviewing pertained to the truthfulness and intentionality of interview questions and participant responses (Kvale, 1995). This was addressed through following Moustakas' (1994) suggestions for the researcher's semi-structured interview protocol. While one could not guarantee participant truthfulness, the hope was to create a comfortable and atmosphere built on Rogerian concepts of authenticity, unconditional positive regard, and non-judgment to provide participants with a space to share their honest experiences freely.

Additionally, member checking allowed the researcher to continuously check to make sure the information obtained from participants was accurately represented. Participants conducted member checking through both email correspondence and through a second virtual meeting. None of the participants stated the transcripts inaccurately represented their experience, however, a few participants did add additional information to their transcript to provide further context to their experience. These changes were made within the transcript and validated in real time with participants during their member checking interview.

Kvale's (1995) fourth component of trustworthiness was transcription accuracy, making sure the study portrayed "a valid translation from oral to written language" (p. 27). Poland (1995) described strategies that could be utilized with recording equipment in interviews which could help to ensure accurate transcription. Through Poland's (1995) recommendations, the researcher utilized up-to-date recording equipment (recording and transcribing through Zoom)

and checked transcripts by reading through them and listening to participant interviews, conducting interviews in quiet places, and requesting participants do the same, speaking clearly, and reviewing transcripts soon after interviews in order to be more likely to recall information. In addition to the above, as mentioned previously, the researcher sent participants finished transcripts to check for errors.

The next aspect of trustworthiness outlined by Kvale (1995) was interpreting. Interpreting centered on researchers exploring how the participant transcripts answered the questions as well as whether researcher interpretations of those answers were clear. This was accomplished through the use of a semi-structured interview protocol that generated data relevant to the research questions, the utilization of an auditor, and member checking. Additionally, PA researchers refrained from forming their own interpretations of participant experiences (Crotty, 1998; Moustakas, 1994). This was achieved through journaling as well as utilizing an outside auditor to further assess for bias within the data collection and analysis process. The researcher self-reflected after each participant interview through her bridling journal. Within this journal, the researcher explored and processed things such as what she wished she would have asked participants and what kept her from asking those things. The researcher also reflected on her own personal reactions to the participants as well as how she felt following the interviews. The auditor had access to the journal submissions and found no bias throughout the data collection process.

Secondly, the researcher's utilization of an auditor throughout the entire data analysis process further ensured accurate interpretation of data. The specific auditor was chosen due to their experience working with phenomenological analysis. The auditor has a Ph.D. in CES as well as had personal experience conducting research utilizing phenomenological analysis.

Finally, the researcher engaged in a final member checking step with each participant. During this final interview, the researcher provided participants with the combined description of the phenomenon via email and asked whether they believed the description to accurately represent their experience. No participants reached out stating any of their experiences were misrepresented. Participants did note that it was interesting to read the experience across participants. This step not only honored participant voices, it also allowed for better accuracy of researcher interpretations.

Kvale's (1995) sixth step of trustworthiness, verifying, referred to whether the results could be understood and used. This step was also met through member checking. Member checking, as mentioned above, ensured participants understood and agreed with the researcher's interpretation of the phenomenon based on their experiences. Readers of the study should be able to determine whether the information was transferable to their experience through reading rich description of findings and participants.

Rich description also assisted in Kvale's (1995) final aspect of trustworthiness, reporting. Reporting referred to whether the researcher had presented their findings in a way that accurately represented the data collected as well as if their findings were found to be transferrable to readers. Member checking also played a role in reporting. Participants were asked to give feedback after reading the findings, to see if they felt the findings encapsulated their experience with instructor use of humor. Participants reported their experience was encapsulated in the final composite description of the phenomenon. Finally, the researcher's dissertation committee was also utilized as a resource to provide additional support and feedback regarding trustworthiness of researcher findings and how those findings were presented. The researcher's committee was able to give feedback during the dissertation proposal and defense as well as through the editing

of the dissertation document. Committee feedback has been implemented within the document throughout the dissertation process.

Conclusion

This PA qualitative study was grounded in a relativist ontology, subjective epistemologies, and an interpretivist theoretical perspective. These chosen ontological, epistemological, and theoretical perspectives were a good fit for the subjective nature of studying the experience of receiving humor in the classroom. The utilization of PA allowed the researcher to collect and interpret data in a way that honored participants' voices and explored the phenomenon from many angles. Several steps were taken to ensure trustworthiness and rigor in the present study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to investigate the lived experience of counseling students who had participated in master's classrooms in which the instructor used humor. The study was guided by one research question and one sub-research question:

Q1 How do master's students in counseling experience instructor use of humor in the classroom?

Q1a How does instructor use of humor in the classroom influence the student-instructor relationship for master's students in counseling?

The following chapter includes brief descriptions of the seven participants as well as the report of the findings from seven individual semi-structured interviews, each followed by a member checking interview. The analysis was guided by Moustakas's (1994) modification of van Kaam's (1966) method of analysis. The findings are first presented from each individual participant, followed by the composite themes found across all participants.

Participants

During their first Zoom interview, participants were presented with a demographics questionnaire following the discussion of their informed consent. The researcher shared her screen during the interview and typed the responses verbatim, allowing the participants to change any of the wording as they saw it in real time. The following are the demographic details each participant provided in their own words.

Sandy

Sandy self-identified as a white, non-Hispanic, heterosexual, cis-gender female. Sandy identified her pronouns as she/her/hers and did not disclose any particular spiritual or religious identities. At the time of the interview, she was 44, upper-middle class, and lived in the western region of the United States. This participant listed no specific identities related to ability status. Sandy has been in teaching roles prior to her experience as a counseling master's student and brought that insight into the interview as well. She was the first participant to be interviewed and had much to offer in her responses, resulting in an interview that was around twice as long as all other interviews that followed. Sandy provided robust descriptions of her experience during an interview that lasted around an hour and a half, in comparison to the other interviews which only lasted around 30 minutes.

Molly

Molly identified as a white, bisexual, female using she/her, hers pronouns. Molly stated "I don't know" when asked if she had any spiritual or religious identities. Molly stated she was middle class and, in regard to her ability status, had "some cognitive functioning issues due to past illness but does not identify as disabled." At the time of the interview, Molly was 32 years old and living in the western region of the United States. When asked if she wanted to share any additional identities, she shared she was a single mom.

Vanessa

Vanessa was a white, bisexual, female who used she/her pronouns. This participant self-identified as agnostic and saw her socioeconomic status as falling within lower-middle class. She did not list any abilities or disabilities. Vanessa was also 24 years old and lived in the midwestern region of the United States. She excitedly discussed humor within her interview as

she was very clearly a huge fan of humor and comedy, not only in the classroom, also within media and as a part of her own personality.

Angela R.

Angela self-identified as gender fluid and used she/her pronouns. Angela also stated she was bisexual and her racial/ethnic identities were Asian/Middle Eastern. Angela considered herself to be spiritual and to fall within the mid-middle class. When exploring her ability status, Angela stated she considered herself to be partially disabled due to her auto-immune disease fibromyalgia. At the time of the interview, Angela was 30 years old and living in the western region of the United States. Throughout Angela's interview, she often smiled and laughed, indicating an appreciation for humor.

Billy

Billy was a white, not Hispanic, heterosexual male who used he/him pronouns. Billy deemed his spiritual and religious identities to be non-denominational spiritual. Billy was able bodied and stated his socioeconomic status as "moving on up." Billy was 47 and living in the western region of the United States. Billy was a major advocate for the use of humor across all domains. He cracked jokes and laughed within the interview while emphasizing his desire to be authentic in how he showed up through his use of humor.

Charlie

Charlie was a heterosexual female living in the southern region of the United States. Charlie stated she used she/her pronouns and was Caucasian. She was 22 at the time of the interview and self-identified as Christian. Charlie considered herself to be able bodied and her socioeconomic status to be within the middle class. She was soft spoken and received as incredibly kind, this felt confirmed by her statements around not having a hard outer shell.

Charlie had an appreciation for humor in the classroom and felt it was a way to humanize instructors.

Tim

The final participant, Tim, self-identified as a Caucasian, straight, male. Tim stated he used he pronouns and listed his spiritual and/or religious identities as “none.” When reflecting upon his socioeconomic status, he stated his status as being “shitty.” Tim stated he was an able bodied, 32 years old, and living in the southern region of the United States. Tim emphasized the importance of being able to be himself within his career. One of the ways Tim showed up authentically was through his use of humor in the classroom.

Results

Individual Results

Moustakas’ (1994) modification of van Kaam’s (1966) method of phenomenological analysis walks researchers through several steps of analysis: horizontalization, reduction, elimination, the clustering of themes, textural descriptions, structural descriptions, textural-structural descriptions, composite description, and essences. Chapter III explained each of these steps in detail. Because each participant had a unique experience of instructor use of humor in the classroom, findings are being presented as individual experiences, followed by findings across participants.

Sandy

The data indicated that Sandy struggled to nail down a concrete definition of humor. Additionally, Sandy’s experience as an educator provided a lens in which she conceptualized her experience of instructor use of humor in the classroom. Three themes emerged from the analysis of Sandy’s transcript: (a) What is Humor, (b) What Makes Humor Successful, and (c) Humor

and Dis/connection. Each theme held sub-themes further exploring Sandy's experience in class with an instructor who uses humor.

What is Humor. The first main theme found in Sandy's individual transcript analysis was What is Humor. This theme encapsulates moments in which Sandy attempted to define humor in her own words. Three sub-themes were found within this theme: (a) Defining Humor is Slippery, (b) Humor Serves a "Communicative Function," and (c) Humor is "What I Value."

Defining Humor is Slippery. Throughout our time together, Sandy had a hard time nailing down her definition of humor. One of the issues with providing a specific definition of humor was that "defining the boundaries of what qualifies as humor as itself, I think, just a philosophical issue." Each time she gave a concrete definition of humor, she found conflicting arguments that offered a counter to her previous definition. Due to the subjective nature of humor, the concept of humor itself was incredibly hard to define, Sandy stated, "I know there are philosophers who work on humor just because of the nature [of] it's slipperiness. And I'm just as you and I are talking and trying to pin down a concept that I take to be very kind of amorphous."

Humor Serves a "Communicative Function." Sandy described humor as "serving a communicative function in the way that language does." Sandy also noted that,

When humor is the communicative mechanism, that's not as laborious as 'ok this is funny because of x, y, and z.' That paves the way for other abbreviated communicative mechanisms ... humor has paved the way for things like eye contact to serve as meaningful communicative mechanisms.

She provided examples in which humor served as a form of communication between herself and her instructor in the classroom. There were moments in which she felt alone in her thinking, wondering if she was the only one in the classroom who was noticing a lack of rigor in the

program. Moments in which she caught the eye of an instructor confirmed for her that she was not alone in her way of thinking which provided reassurance for Sandy. Additionally, she often felt that some questions students asked in class were “ridiculous,” thinking they should have more capacity for academic rigor. Sandy stated, “the instructor will catch my eye, and it was kind of like this understanding of you’re right to think this is a ridiculous question.” Similarly, Sandy was able to catch moments of humor with the instructor that served as a “reality checker” in the classroom, stating,

There are times where you’re in a class, and you feel the material is kind of water[ed] down, and you’re not really sure, you’re kind of disoriented so it’s kind of like,”okay, am I just being this weird sort of academic elitist, then I need to just relax.” Or “is this kind of being dampened down?” And if it is, that’s fine, if it’s being watered down, but what helps me is, the instructor’s kind of confirmation like yeah this is being watered down. “You’re not mistaken in your thinking,” you know so it’s kind of like it’s a it’s a reality checker.

Sandy offered the example:

Instead of saying “yes, Sally, your paper needs to be in separate paragraphs and spell check, and related to the content you’re being asked about,” you instead have a pun or a joke or something to deflate that tension that was serving that same communicative function without being explicit.

Humor is “What I Value.” Sandy described humor that worked for her, stating she valued ingenuity and smarts, thus, coming to the conclusion that our perception of humor was often based on our values. Sandy stated: “say the humor that works for me is the one that isn’t obvious isn’t low hanging fruit ... if I can laugh as hard at someone who doesn’t do that that’s

more of an art, that's more of 'oh, there's ingenuity present,' and see that's that's what I value." Sandy went on to state that, "so much of what we consider humor is part of what we value." The instructor she felt connected with through his use of humor gave her "insight into their intellect ... the fact that this person ... came up with this pun ... you need to be clever to some extent, right?" Sandy stated this "gave me more of this comfort like 'Oh, they really are actually exceptionally bright' ... it just made me feel better that, wow this person is really bright." This felt like a breath of fresh air to Sandy as she had previously worried about the rigor of the program and the intelligence/knowledge of her instructors. When it came to other instructors in the program, prior to that moment in the classroom, Sandy "did not at all have confidence in their intellectual capacity."

What Makes Humor Successful. The second of the three main themes that emerged from Sandy's individual data was What Makes Humor Successful. This theme was made up of moments within Sandy's experience in which she described what she believed to make humor successful across individuals. Four sub-themes emerged from within this main theme: (a) "Reasonable Person Standard," (b) Success of Humor is "Receiver-Dependent," (c) "Necessary and Sufficient Conditions," and (d) Gender Differences.

"Reasonable Person Standard." While discussing what made humor successful, Sandy described the "reasonable person standard," stating: "in law they have a reasonable person standard, so, what would the reasonable person say if they had all the facts?," implying that, in order to define humor, we needed to see it from the perspective of a reasonable person, rather than focusing on potential outliers such as those who may be neuroatypical. Drawing from the above theme of humor being hard to define, offering the reasonable person standard help, Sandy further nailed down a definition of humor without having to consider all of the potential outlying

information. The reasonable person standard was essentially only including people with “average sensibilities” while offering a definition of humor.

Success of Humor is “Receiver-Dependent.” Sandy also discussed that the success of humor was receiver-dependent stating, “I do think there are aspects of humor that are receiver-dependent,” and that the “interpretive command” of humor was on the audience. Sandy later struggled with that stating, “I really also don’t like that either,” and stated that humor may not actually be receiver-dependent. Sandy cited examples of her being in the classroom and some laughing at the instructor’s use of humor, but others not laughing. Upon reflection of that experience, Sandy explained that she believed that, even though the humor may not have resonated with everyone in the classroom, it did not mean the original statement was not humorous. She also believed that, in order to find something funny, one needed to be informed on the subject being discussed, that some amount of background knowledge was needed in order to find something humorous. Sandy believed that, in order to “understand the concept . . . it requires certain kind of understanding.”

“Necessary and Sufficient Conditions.” Sandy stated that, within the success of humor, there were “necessary and sufficient conditions.” Sandy listed humor resonating with the audience as a sufficient condition to something being considered humorous, even if it was not received as humorous to everyone in the audience. Sandy also stated that, even if the audience did not laugh in response to an attempt at humor, as long as certain features were present, it could still be considered humor. Sandy was not able to list any specific conditions necessary for something to be considered humorous, rather she stated, “given certain features of the act itself, it still qualifies as humor.”

Gender Differences. Sandy also described potential gender differences in how people receive humor, stating that she had done research on gender in the classroom and found that, across the board, female instructors were perceived differently than their male counterparts, and she assumed humor in the classroom would be no different. “And like many things, with respect to humor, gender counts against female professors. ... And honestly, just like we see in basically every other context, the standards for what counts as humor is going to be higher far for the females than for the males.” Sandy processed her own potential biases around humor and gender, though believed the differences of whether or not she found a professor funny more so were related to whether she butted heads with versus liked the professor or if she felt their humor showed their intelligence, rather than the gender of the instructor. She then recommended including gender within my study to see what students’ experiences were based on the differences in the instructors’ gender.

Humor and Dis/Connection. Sandy’s individual data also included the exploration of humor and disconnection as well as connection. Within this final main theme, Sandy described how humor could serve as a tool for both connection and disconnection within relationship building. Five sub-themes emerged from this main theme: (a) “Pandering,” (b) Shared Knowledge, (c) Insight into the Person, (d) I Do Not Like You, and (e) Humor Helps us Know “Who our People Are.”

“Pandering.” One of the major conditions of humor which led to either connection or disconnection with instructors was whether or not she received the humor as “pandering.” Sandy experienced “non-pandering” humor as authentic, and it elicited a feeling of warmth in her: “It just like warmth you know cause it’s like it’s just this person is showing us who they are.” In contrast, Sandy did not feel connected with instructors who used humor she viewed as

“pandering.” Sandy stated, “the pandering is the opposite of authentic.” Sandy often received “pandering” humor as instructors trying to force rapport and get the students to like them, which gave her the “creepy crawlies.” Sandy did note that, because of her background as an instructor, she understood and had compassion for the use of “pandering” humor, stating that, when she saw pandering humor, “it’s a flag that compassion is needed, because there is a reason they’re trying so hard.”

Shared Knowledge. She also stated interpretation of humor could depend on shared experience and “depends on certain background knowledge.” Sandy seemed to connect with instructors whose use of humor shared a body of knowledge with her. “Humor just for me was a way to connect with the instructor and was kind of like more of an insight into ... ‘oh you find this funny, and I find it funny, too, probably because we’re calling on the same body of knowledge.’” Sandy offered a hypothetical example of this outside the classroom stating,

You’re watching CNN’s Don Lemon at night and it’s you and let’s say you’re politically liberal, and you’re with a Conservative family member, and you start laughing at the irony that’s being pointed out between how we regulate guns and how we regulate women’s bodies, and the other person doesn’t laugh ... I know people’s sense of humor varies but at the same time that resonance depends on at least in the political example of being informed in the right sort of way.

Insight into the Person. Sandy described how an instructor’s use of humor gave students some insight into who the instructor was as a person which, in turn, served as a vessel for connection with her instructors as it showed their values because “much of what we find funny, I think, is really just another way of kind of elucidating what our values are.” She believed that,

“the humor that works well is the one that you know, kind of gives people an insight into who you are, and you’re connecting with them.”

I Do Not Like You. Sandy also mentioned feeling as if our interpretation of humor may also be a result of whether or not we liked someone. Sandy reflected on interactions with instructors who utilized humor in the classroom and was able to identify the ones in which she received their humor as funny, she liked, whereas the instructors whose humor she did not find funny, she did not like or “buted heads” with: “An instructor who I’ve butted heads with ... it doesn’t surprise me that I didn’t find her funny.” This was also shown in the quote: “fall flat humor, that is gonna track with cases where there isn’t that much a relationship, or perhaps there’s even dislike.” In Sandy’s member-check meeting, upon reflection of her experience with an instructor she had butted heads with, in her current class with the same instructor she found herself entering the course with more openness towards the instructor which, in turn, resulted in laughter in response to the instructor’s use of humor in the classroom. Sandy mentioned “there’s something there” in relation to how one responded to humor towards someone one likes versus does not like.

Humor Helps us Know “Who Our People Are.” Similar to humor being received differently when you liked someone versus when you did not, Sandy believed a major function of humor was to help us find “who our people are.” Humor could have the potential to “identify in-group membership.” “In other words, that one’s humor resonates with another is a convenient way to recognize who ‘our people’ are. That said, the downside to this is that if humor has this function, then it can also be used to exclude people.”

Molly

Molly's interview resulted in three main themes: (a) "The Funnier Things are the More I Pay Attention," (b) Humor and Connection Versus Disconnection with Professors, and (c) Humor has Two Sides. Two sub-themes emerged within the first main theme and three in the second main theme. The third main theme to emerge from Molly's interview (Humor has Two Sides) did not result in any additional sub-themes.

"The Funnier Things are the More I Pay Attention." The first main theme that emerged from Molly's data was "The Funnier Things are the More I Pay Attention." This theme encompassed Molly's reflection of her time in a classroom with an instructor who used humor and how it impacted her learning. The first sub-theme within this main theme was Humor Facilitates Learning. The second and final sub-theme that emerged within this first main theme was Humor in the Body.

Humor Facilitates Learning. Molly explained that "the funnier things are, the more I pay attention." Molly described her time in the classroom with her professors who often shared personal stories stating, "they almost always ended with something funny, and that kind of like made me want to listen more." She often expected his stories to end with a funny twist, so she would pay extra attention. She stated she "didn't expect to be so interested in [the class]I, honestly I thought it was gonna be kind of boring" because the content was related to development, and she felt she knew about the content already from her experience as a mother. She ended up enjoying the course material, learning new things, and connecting the information to what she already knew as a result of her professor's funny stories. "I remember thinking that I just wanted to know more." Her experience with her instructor's use of humor also led to her feeling as if he was really engaged with the students in the class: "I'm experiencing him as very,

very engaged also, which is nice, because, you know it's helpful when the professor and the students are engaged." His use of humorous stories also opened Molly up to asking more questions because she found herself wanting to know more about the content. "I tend to be a pretty inquisitive student, especially if I'm really interested in a class, so I it definitely encouraged some questions for me."

Humor in the Body. Molly described how she felt in her body while she was in the classroom with the instructor who used humor. She recalled experiencing feelings of "warmth, and like my body was tingly because I was just very excited and interested and engaged, fully engaged in what I was learning." She also noted that sometimes that tingly feeling could tell her she was anxious, though stated she was not anxious in a negative way, rather she wanted to listen and learn more.

I was anxious in like I just wanna sit here and listen and learn more. I was like so focused on this professor that I, I don't know, I could have like flown out of my chair with just excitement, because whatever he was talking about had fueled up, you know a fire for me that just kind of literally engaged all of me.

Even in hindsight, as Molly was recalling her time in the classroom, she could visualize the classroom and her feelings of warmth, comfort, and happiness.

Humor and Connection Versus Disconnection with Professors. The second main theme to emerge from Molly's transcript was Humor and Connection Versus Disconnection with Professors. Within this theme, Molly discussed how the use of humor from an instructor could humanize them within the classroom. In contrast, Molly also discussed how a lack of humor could result in her feeling disconnected from her instructors. Molly also took a moment to reflect upon what it was like to explore her relationship with her instructors in hindsight through the

lens of humor. Three sub-themes emerged from the data: (a) Humor is a Humanizing Act, (b) Disconnection, and (c) Exploring the Connection in Hindsight.

Humor is a Humanizing Act. Molly felt very connected with her instructor who told humorous stories. She felt like he was “attempting to [connect] with all of the students” but not in a way that felt like he was trying too hard to force the connections. She experienced his attempt at connection as “a very genuine attempt at connecting with the whole class.” Additionally, Molly felt this connection with her instructor because she felt “like he was trying to connect and kind of like get down on our level sort of, and it really it, it built rapport.” Molly also reflected that her instructor who used humor “just kind of seemed so human.” Because of that, she felt so much more comfortable asking questions in class. Molly revealed that, at times she felt insecure in class,

Even though I’m an inquisitive student I’m also like afraid to ask questions sometimes and I can like doubt myself in asking the questions and think like “Oh, my gosh, I don’t want somebody else to think I’m stupid or whatever by asking this question,” and I never felt that way in his class.

Disconnection. In contrast to the instructor who used humor, Molly felt disconnected in classrooms where humor was not a mainstay. She found it “harder to connect, harder to stay interested, harder to just pay attention” in class. She had a hard time paying attention in those classes because “if you know the person teaching you isn’t totally involved or invested like you are, then it’s like, eh.”

Exploring the Connection in Hindsight. Prior to our meeting, Molly “hadn’t thought about humor in the classroom.” While she was in the class, it did not occur to her that her relationship with her instructor was being strengthened as a result of his use of humor; these

were all revelations that occurred in hindsight. Participating in this study allowed her to reflect on her experience with humor in the classroom through a new lens. “But before that I had really never thought about how humor impacts any, any relationship.” Additionally, taking the time to reflect on this experience also opened her up to consider how her own use of humor could help her connect with her own clients: “I’m a case manager, and ... sometimes humor is used there to like, as a nice breaker, or to connect and build that rapport and build that trust ... and I think humor in general seems to be a very humanizing act.”

Humor Has Two Sides. While Molly shared a positive experience of humor in the classroom, she also noted that there were “multiple sides to using humor.” She offered examples of humor being used in political platforms which could be polarizing and could “really upset a lot of people.” Overall, she thought “humor is amazing” but also believed it needed to be used “tastefully” in the right setting with the right people. While she was discussing how humor was “multifaceted” and could be interpreted in different ways by different people, she remembered there was someone in her class that did not agree that the professor was funny, though she also noted this individual “just had a different set of circumstances.”

Vanessa

Vanessa’s love of humor was palpable throughout her interview. It was clear that Vanessa was someone who regularly used humor in her own relationship building and felt connected with those who did the same. Six main themes emerged from the data collected in Vanessa’s interview: (a) Some People are Innately Funny, Some are Not (b) Humor can Connect Class Material, (c) I Like Professors Who Can “Go Back and Forth with Me,” (d) “Being Funny is the Best Way to Keep me Engaged,” (e) Humor can be a Distraction, and (f) Humor can

Humanize a Classroom. Sub-themes were found within some of the main themes, which are discussed below.

Some People are Innately Funny, Some are Not. The first theme that emerged from Vanessa's transcript was Some People are Innately Funny, Some are Not. This theme encapsulated Vanessa's beliefs around what made someone funny. She believed that, while some could be taught to be funny, many have had an innate ability to build upon. Vanessa also emphasized the importance of being authentic within one's use of humor. The sub-themes within this first main theme were: (a) "It's Funny Because You're a Funny Person," (b) Presentation and Delivery Make it Funny, and (c) "The Best Thing You Can Do is Bring in Your Own Personality to Your Humor."

"It's Funny Because You're a Funny Person." Vanessa believed that a major influencer of whether material was funny depended on whether the person making an attempt at humor was innately funny. She believed being humorous was "like a state of being and like a presence." She believed one was either funny or not funny, and "if you're funny you don't have to say you're funny you just are," highlighting that for Vanessa, humor was an innate trait. Vanessa explained that her ethics professor was funny, though "it's not that the stories themselves are funny, it's that it's been 10 minutes and the story is still going." She described her ethics professor as someone who went on long tangents with his stories, sometimes connected to material sometimes not, often ending in a twist. The way Vanessa spoke of this instructor indicated a fondness towards him because of this interesting character quirk. She thought, "even if the words themselves don't land, it's funny because it didn't land, because he's such a funny guy." She described Generation Z's humor as being "post ironic," meaning that her generation found things funny even when they were "not funny, but because it's not funny, it's so funny." She offered the

example of her ethics professor: “So his, you know, telling a story about a football game he watched like 10 minutes, is so unfunny that it becomes hilarious just because of how ridiculous it is.” She saw her ethics professor as someone who just had a naturally funny personality. She also expressed some worry around this data being used to tell professors they should be funnier in class, emphasizing that she did not believe people could be taught to be funny, that instead some people were just inherently funnier than others.

Presentation and Delivery Make It Funny. In addition to Vanessa’s belief that some people were funny and some were not, she also believed that the presentation of something humorous as well as the delivery was so much more important than the actual content of the humorous stimulus. This was shown in her quote:

It’s the same reason why like you can write an awesome joke, but if a robot like speaks it out it won’t be funny, it’s only funny because “Oh, look at this robot doing comedy” like the joke itself isn’t funny it takes like a secondary layer of irony ... I think that it’s more about the presentation and the delivery and light heartedness, and being like engaged in wanting to make people laugh than the actual like words and jokes themselves.

She related this to acting and comedy: “What makes a good actor is the ability to deliver. And same thing with a good comedian, it’s all about delivery and timing and those things that are more than just the words.” She also noted “that there are so many different ways to be funny,” there was not one correct presentation or delivery that made something funny, that it depended on the person.

“The Best Thing You Can Do is Bring in Your Own Personality to Your Humor.”

Building upon Vanessa’s belief that some people were funny and some were not, Vanessa also emphasized the importance of one being themselves and not trying too hard to be funny. Vanessa

stated that instructors trying too hard to be funny “really does feel like ‘please like me.’” Moreover, Vanessa noted that instructors did not have to utilize the specific humor from the generation they were teaching, that instructors should be authentically themselves in their use of humor. She also believed “the best thing you can do is bring in your own personality” rather than coming in with planned humor as a means to connect, because it could feel desperate to students in the classroom. Quotes that captured this included: “They want to relate to you. They want to make you laugh but it’s just not funny.” And “just be yourself as you are a funny person, because everybody, I think, could be a little funny. Some people are funnier than others, but everyone’s got a little bit of humor ... bringing your personality, even if you’re not a funny person just bringing you into the classroom, and not a teacher is so important.”

Humor Can Connect Class Material. Vanessa explored how humor could be used to connect course material within classes. While many of her ethics professor’s stories were long winded and did not connect much to what was being discussed in class that day, she did find “the humor is a way for him to connect the material.” She noted there were moments in which he shared stories from his experience on the ethics board and tied those stories into class. Additionally, the same professor taught her development class and often shared stories about his son related to certain developmental stages “because his son is like 14, so as we’re going through the different developmental stages he’s like, ‘Oh, yeah, here’s a time where my son did this.’” She noted that there could be more opportunities to connect class material with humor and funny stories: “I think if he really lesson planned it ... it also is like his mind kind of wanders to a different thought ... but if he was like we’re talking about Piaget’s Stages, and here’s what happened then it would totally totally stick.” She noted that “maybe if he taught theories, maybe

if he taught something like practicum or internship, where it can be a little more concrete, I could see that happening” in relation to humor connecting course material.

I Like Professors Who Can “Go Back and Forth with Me.” Vanessa reflected upon how having some banter with her professors led to her being more excited for class. This was captured in this quote: “If they can go back and forth with me, then that’s a good professor as far as I’m concerned.” Vanessa considered herself a funny person, though felt embarrassed to say so because of her belief that funny people should not have to say they were funny. She compared and contrasted three different professors with varying levels of humor: a professor who told long humorous stories, a professor who very rarely used humor, and a professor who could “go back and forth” with her in class. She noted that in classes where professors did not “go back and forth with her,” that “it’s harder to connect or to really appreciate the class, at least the teacher, when I feel like I can’t connect with them.” She much preferred to be in the class with the professor who went “back and forth with her:” “it really does make class more interesting, and it makes me want to go even if it’s a little bit of narcissism peeking out that I just get a time to kind of like show off ... it’s a little stage time.” She also stated, “I feel like I listen more because I’m looking for that opportunity to make a joke because I know he’ll play with me.” Vanessa explored the difference she felt between the humor with her ethics professor and her professor that bantered with her stating that the professor that bantered was “engaged with [her] as it individual ... whereas you know the ethics professor, it’s like [he’s] engaging with the class as like an audience, and so he is a relatable figure in that way, but [she doesn’t] know him like personally enough.” Vanessa did attempt to crack jokes in the class with the professor who rarely used humor but felt like the instructor saw humor as,

A little bit of a distraction, or it kind of throws her off from her lesson plan, or like she just wants to get to the material like I said not in like a she's not doesn't seem mean or cold, or like scary. It's more that she's just really focused on the material.

Vanessa also noted that she understood this may not ring true for all students, "other people might not have the same issue with that or the same feelings that I do ... about how important it is to have somebody that's funny or will at least like engage me." While reflecting back on her relationships with her professors in regard to their use of humor, Vanessa emphasized all of the above by stating,

I didn't expect to get into this idea of how my relationships change as a as a result of that, you know I felt really close to [the professor who banter with me] because he walks that line so well, whereas with, you know, my ethics Professor, I still respect him ... but I don't feel that personal closeness, because there's not a lot of back and forth ... so I just found that interesting to kind of explore that more, too, because I hadn't thought about it like that.

"Being Funny is the Best Way to Keep Me Engaged." Vanessa noted that, while some thought humor in the classroom may seem inappropriate or unprofessional, she actually had a great deal of respect for professors who utilized humor within the classroom: "I mean I have a lot of respect for him ... some people might think it's inappropriate or unprofessional, but I don't, I think that it's really the way to teach a class to be, engaged with your students, make class interesting," she said. Vanessa discussed the things professors often did to make class more fun "are like the worst for me, like I don't like icebreakers, I don't like group projects." Instead, she offered humor as a suggestion to keep the classroom interesting. Vanessa found it easier to be engaged within a classroom where humor was a regular occurrence by sharing: "Being funny is

the best way to keep me engaged in class. I don't wanna do small side activities or discussion boards or really anything like that ... but for me, like being able to deliver material in an interesting way is how I learned." Vanessa felt excited about class with her professor who told humorous stories because she never knew where his stories would end up. Additionally, she felt "like I can stay engaged if I wanna like, laugh at how long it is" in regard to his long-winded stories. She noted that in those classes she felt "kind of like excited like ... this is gonna be fun, and who knows what he's gonna say next." Vanessa felt energized in her course with the instructor who bantered back and forth with her because she felt the instructor was more active and engaged in the classroom: "I just get excited like I feel energized by him in the classroom because he's so active and engaged and interested in what all of us have to say and you know just like the back and forth and stuff."

Humor Can Be a Distraction. While, generally speaking, Vanessa was a fan of humor in the classroom, she also noted that it could become a distraction from course content. When reflecting upon her experience in the classroom with her ethics professor, who often told long-winded stories, she noted that, because of these long-winded stories, he did not often get to all of the content that was supposed to be discussed: "He goes too far; I think he gets like a little lost in the sauce sometimes of his own stories." She often saw that class as "things are spiraling" but noted that "I think there's a way to reel it in." In the beginning of her experience with this instructor, she felt some anxiety because she did not feel she was learning as much as she had expected: "At first I was like 'oh, my God what am I paying for I'm not learning anything?'" Over time she learned she had to compensate for this deficit by paying extra attention to readings and reviewing material after class to ensure she knew the content well:

I would say I enjoy his classes much more but I'm also I'm probably going to need to study ethics a little harder ... now I have to go back and read again because I read this chapter like days ago, and we didn't really touch on what I needed or I really have to focus a lot more when I'm doing the reading.

She compared this experience to her experience in the classroom with her instructor who rarely used humor. She found that, while she may not enjoy her classes and may find them boring, she did actually retain more information because the content did not get off track through the use of humor. Vanessa discussed her professor who bantered with her as being a happy medium between her ethics professor and her professor who did not use humor:

He's not as funny as my ethics professor, but he gets a lot more of the material through ... I think that's really the power of that middle line ... I've just, getting the material out but still being like a person in the classroom.

At this point in the interview, the reviewer and Vanessa joked that she had arrived at somewhat of a Goldilocks situation, too much humor could distract, too little humor could make a classroom dull and disinteresting, but the back-and-forth banter that got back on topic was just right.

Humor Can Humanize a Classroom. The final main theme to emerge from Vanessa's data was Humor can Humanize a Classroom. Within this theme, Vanessa's experience was explored in relation to how she found humor to be a tool that humanized multiple elements in the classroom. In contrast, Vanessa also discussed feeling disconnected with professors who did not use humor. Three sub-themes made up the final main theme: (a) Humor Can Humanize a Professor, (b) Professor is Less Approachable Who Does Not Use Humor, and (c) The Classroom "Feels Like a Community" When There is Humor.

Humor Can Humanize a Professor. Vanessa reflected upon the nerves she had at the beginning of her program and found that her ethics professor's use of humor sat her at ease in those early classes and led her to feeling like her classes were going to be fun. When she started the program, she felt there was "this stigma that ... it's gonna be so hard" and that first course with her ethics professor really paved the way that the next 3 years of her life did not have to be "hellish." This was further evidenced by this quote:

I think that my ethics professor was the most like poignant one, because it was my first professor and first dip into grad school, and so that, I think has had the most profound effect on me just because he was the first in line to be like "this is going to be fun," like "this is not gonna be a hellish 3 years," like "we're gonna get along." And so that really calmed my nerves down I think.

How he showed up in the classroom showed her that we are professionals as counselors, but it did not always have to be so serious. Vanessa felt incredibly close to her professors who used humor and felt like she was able to trust them with more than just her questions around course content. Because of the shared humor in the classroom, Vanessa felt almost as if she were friends with the professor, but not in a way that did not respect him as a professor:

I feel incredibly close to [this other professor], like I trust him with everything I've gone to [the other professor] about things that I like are probably are not a professor's job but this like that sort of stuff. I'm like this is my guy like [this professor is] my friend, but not in like a I don't respect you you're my friend, kind of way, but like he's still like respect admiration adoration. Like he's a great professor.

It was very clear that Vanessa adored her professors who used humor and felt a great closeness with them: "What it really boils down to is not like the effectiveness of retaining content, it's

more like, do your students love you, like do they like wanna come to you for things, do they trust you, do they relate to you?" Vanessa felt like the two professors who used humor actually knew her as a person, and because of that, she felt she could come to them with anything. She also noted how important authenticity was within the process of using humor in the classroom. She felt a closeness with these professors because they showed up authentically. Their use of humor was an extension of their authenticity:

I feel like I relate to him, and he feels like a person to me, and not a professor, and I think that's a big distinction too, that you don't want to be seen as like an authoritarian figure that says words to you, and you write them down like he, he feels like a person to me ... I think, has helped me feel that closeness because I think he knows me as a person and I feel like I know him because ... it would be impossible to pretend to be the person that he's being you know what I mean like he's so very authentic, and that would be like almost impossible to fake.

Professor is Less Approachable Who Does Not Use Humor. Throughout Vanessa's recollection of her experience with instructor use of humor, she often discussed three different professors: one who used humor through long stories, one who had a back and forth with her and stayed on topic, and one who felt more serious and did not use humor. The professor that felt more serious of the three, Vanessa did not connect with. While Vanessa learned a lot from this professor and respected her, she was not someone she felt close with or comfortable opening up to stating,

I would probably never go to her about anything personally ... because in my mind she does not fulfill that role as like a person, she's a person obviously, but I mean she doesn't

feel that role of like I'm your friend and I'm here, for you, you know ... I trust her to do what she's supposed to but it's just she would not be my first choice.

Vanessa also noted that classes with that particular instructor often felt harder and longer in comparison to those with instructors who used humor: "she's not mean by any means, but she's not really funny ... her classes, they feel harder, they feel longer." In contrast,

The other professor that taught Developmental classes, the one that was like kind of newer and more strict, I learned way more in her class. Did I dread going Mondays? Yes, I did, but you know, and do I feel connected to her? No, but I learned so much more because it's really focused on the material.

The Classroom "Feels Like a Community" When There is Humor. Vanessa discussed how being in a classroom with an instructor who used humor helped to facilitate a classroom that felt like a community: "I feel so much better it feels like we're all people together like it feels like a community." Vanessa felt like class could be fun, which was especially important during COVID when everything was virtual: "class becomes a space where it's fun to be, which is so important in like COVID times." Additionally, she was living in a new place where she did not know anyone and this classroom environment helped her form relationships with her peers in class: "Moving to a new area where you have no other friends other than the people that you were in class with, like, feeling that belonging is so important. And I feel belonging through laughing with other people." Because of that laughter, she said, "my cohort does feel like a community." They had inside jokes from their experiences in class together as well as a group chat they often used to discuss the absurdity of their instructor's long stories.

Angela

In Angela's interview, she excitedly reminisced about a specific instructor who often told funny stories in class. It was clear Angela had a fondness for this professor as she often smiled and laughed throughout the interview while recollecting the details of being in class with her. Two main themes emerged from Angela's data: (a) Humor Makes Learning More Fun and (b) Humor and Connection. Each main theme contained the following sub-themes further encapsulating Angela's time in the classroom.

Humor Makes Learning More Fun. Humor Made Learning More Fun was the first of two main themes tied to Angela's time in the classroom with an instructor who used humor. This theme encompassed how she had experienced humor in the classroom in a way that made learning fun for her. The sub-themes within this first main theme were: (a) Telling Humorous Stories is "One of the Best Ways that I Learned," (b) Humor Makes the "Dark Shit" More Fun, and (c) The Way a Story is Told is What Makes It Humorous.

Telling Humorous Stories is "One of the Best Ways that I Learned." Angela reflected on a past instructor who shared funny stories in class, "she loves to tell stories. It is one of the best ways of her explaining concepts to us." The specific story Angela shared involved the instructor walking in on one of her friends being intimate, then learning they had become pregnant, to which the instructor referred to herself as the "pregnancy fairy." Even in hindsight, Angela was laughing reflecting back on the story. Angela really loved that class and working with that instructor, "it just made me really grateful to have the time with her." Angela saw that instructor as being "sassy" and "sarcastic," qualities she enjoyed because she shared them herself, while at the same time being able to teach content in a way that was easy to understand. She also felt like the material in the class was more accessible because of the funny stories the

instructor shared, “it’s really one of the best ways that I learned.” Angela also found that the learning process felt “fun” with this instructor, especially in comparison to previous courses that felt more dry, like ethics:

It almost made it like, it just made learning fun and more accessible in a way of like it’s more real life than just, “here’s a textbook, this is how it’s supposed to go, here’s some people from like the seventies who created everything” but here’s a real life example of like a couple who was struggling ... I was just like wow, she just makes this whole learning process so fun.”

Angela also felt more motivated in the class with the instructor who told funny stories: “Sometimes it just makes you want to learn more, and it makes you more excited to continue learning.” Angela felt that the storytelling within that class really helped her cohort ease into the program because at the time they were still feeling really new and nervous:

I think I really think in the storytelling, especially in this field, a lot of our least our cohort, you know we love asking how did the scenario happen, or like did you ever experience a case with blah blah blah that’s like a huge comfort for us since we’re we just finished our first year in the program. So, you know we’re still feeling very new and very nervous.

Humor Makes the “Dark Shit” More Fun. Angela appreciated her instructor’s use of humor especially in relation to the humor being juxtaposed against the seriousness of the field. Within the program, she felt like they were often discussing serious material in addition to exploring things within themselves as individuals that perhaps they had put off in exploring. Without humor, much of the learning within the program felt “dark” and “depressing:”

Because especially like in a master's program for counseling and everything and therapy we're like learning some dark shit a lot of the times, and we're uncovering things about ourselves that we have been putting off for a long time, or maybe we've never done a deep dive on, and to bring that element of just like humor and making it more fun than everything is always so morose, so depressing.

Additionally, Angela was taking ethics the same semester as the class she took with the instructor who used humor. Within her ethics class, she often felt nervous about making mistakes within the profession, "everything you do is wrong be careful, you're gonna get arrested so we had that kind of like looming in the back of our head;" but the humor within her other class helped to balance that out, it "like eased, that tension, and brought that kind of like that seriousness down from that class in her own." In general, Angela found humor in the classroom to be very helpful because she did not feel like everything needed to be so serious all the time. While she understood that she was being prepared to be a "secret keeper," that did not mean she could not have some fun along the way. Angela believed humor injected fun into the serious moments, she also found humor to be a great tool for emotional regulation and coping with "the dark shit" of the profession.

The Way a Story is Told is What Makes It Humorous. Angela believed the quality of humor and how it was being delivered was more important than the content itself to be received as funny. She discussed how story needed build up to heighten the anticipation of the story, rather than abruptly getting to the punchline:

If there's like a buildup with the story and everything like that, rather than just like, "oh, my God, this happened," and then just laying it out there that's probably a little bit less

funny than someone's like building up a whole story around it and giving you details and things like your thoughts or whatever.

Angela reflected back on the "pregnancy fairy" story her instructor told and found it to be "just one of the funniest things that I had heard that day." What made the story so funny was how outrageous it was while at the same time being somewhat relatable, it could happen to anyone.

Humor and Connection. The final of the two main themes found within Angela's data was Humor and Connection. This main theme emerged from Angela's recollection of how humor impacted the classroom environment. Angela recalled feeling more connected with her professor, feeling more comfortable in class, and felt more able to be herself as a result of her instructor's use of humor in the classroom. This main theme was made up of two sub-themes: (a) Humor Reminded Me I Could be Myself as a Clinician and (b) Humor Helped Me Relate with My Professor and Classmates and Feel More Comfortable.

Humor Reminded Me I Could be Myself as a Clinician. Seeing her instructor use humor in the classroom reminded her that she could show up as herself as a counselor. Of her professor, she shared "how great of a therapist I think she is." Because she showed up as herself in the room and used humor, this gave Angela the permission to do the same. Angela found this to be:

Inspiring because it it made me feel like I will have a space in the field one day and I totally can be myself, and I don't need to be afraid of those things, or like nervous about showing up authentically and and fully as myself.

In previous classes, "we had this idea of like play, when we're in therapy with a client we have to be these like very serious ... how does that make you feel kind of people," but this instructor's use of humor was able to:

Open us up to be like, remember to bring yourself into the room ... so just hearing those like funny stories and funny anecdotes are really helpful because it just makes it less scary, for you know the future of our careers, and everything like that like we don't have to be these serious people like wrapped up in a cardigan, like, you know, analyzing every single thing.

Angela stated during that first year there was a fear of "messaging up" and humor eased some of those fears and "allowed us to feel like we could be messy."

Humor Helped Me Relate with My Professor and Classmates and Feel More Comfortable. Angela had so much respect for her instructor who used humor. She thought the instructor was hilarious and valued her for that. She also saw the instructor as "brilliant" and hoped to work with her in the future "in her internship." When she reflected back on the moment in the classroom where her instructor shared the "pregnancy fairy" story, she remembered "feeling happy and just in general like I always look forward to her classes," to the point that she was disappointed when the classes had to meet online "because we wanted to experience her in person." Angela added she "felt always very close to her" instructor who used humor in the classroom. While she knew this instructor was a professional who was further along in her career and could potentially be her supervisor in the future, "it also was this element of like just feeling that she was on the same page as us, she could relate to us a lot in a lot of different ways." The humor the instructor used connected with the students on their level which helped bridge the gap of professor and student. Angela felt like the more she got to know her instructor, the more comfortable she felt and the stronger their relationship became:

I just felt like, you know, throughout the whole semester, and in that moment, anytime I just felt like the relationship was growing. Yeah, I just felt like you look more we went

through the semester. The more she got to know us, the more we got to know her, the more comfortable we got, and just like the stronger the connection became. ... And I think the humor helped make that comfortability happen faster.

She also said the class felt less formal and less intimidating as a result of the instructor's use of humor because it could ease whatever tension may be in the classroom. Angela also noted the instructor's use of humor eased the tension in the classroom as well as the stress of being a first-year graduate student and learning "all of that."

Charlie

Charlie's sweet and gentle disposition allowed for a very comfortable interview process. It was clear she was fond of both humor and her professors that used humor while listening to her experience. The data collected from Charlie's interview resulted in three main themes: (a) Humor is "Lighthearted" and "Warm," (b) Humor and Connection, and (c) Humor Facilitates Learning. Themes two and three were made up of additional sub-themes.

Humor is "Lighthearted" and "Warm." Charlie defined humor as something "lighthearted" that made one feel "warm" and "light," as shared in this quote: I've just always thought of humor as something that something that's lighthearted and not necessarily makes you laugh, but just puts like a warm or a light feeling in in that environment." She noted that one does not necessarily have to laugh for something to be considered humorous as well.

Humor and Connection. The second main theme of Charlie's experience, Humor and Connection, encapsulated Charlie's relationship with professors who used humor. Within this theme, Charlie described feeling closer with professors who used humor. Much like other professors, Charlie also emphasized how authenticity played a part in an instructor's use of humor. This theme was made up of two sub-themes: (a) I Feel More Connected with and Have

More Respect for Professors Who Use Humor and (b) Professors Who Use Humor Feel More Approachable and Trustworthy Due to Their Authenticity.

I Feel More Connected with and Have More Respect for Professors Who Use Humor.

Charlie reflected on her instructor who used humor in class and stated she felt more connected with her and saw her “in a very positive light.” Charlie mentioned that she “didn’t have a relationship prior” with this professor before the class, so she could not recall humor changing their relationship at all since the professor used humor right out of the gate. She did note that her instructor’s use of humor “kind of helped [her] maintain” the relationship. Charlie also discussed how she believed it took “vulnerability” to use humor in a classroom because it allowed one to show up “fully human” in the classroom. Charlie felt more respect towards this professor due to her willingness to be vulnerable and show up as “fully human” in the classroom. This was shown in the following quote: “For some reason the professors who are lighthearted and use humor like that, it’s like I almost have a sort of increased respect for them, too, because I mean it does, it takes vulnerability to be fully human.” Charlie noted that she considered herself to be a vulnerable person who did not “keep a very hard shell you know it doesn’t take long to break to the human part of me, so I can connect with that just a whole lot better than I can someone who keeps it you know, kind of shelled off.”

Professors Who Use Humor Feel More Approachable and Trustworthy Due to Their Authenticity. Charlie felt like instructors who used humor were “more in reach.” She maintained a level of respect for them and saw them as the authority figure in the room, however, she felt like if she needed to reach out to them they would be there for her. Charlie also felt like instructors who used humor were more transparent and authentic, that she did not “have to wonder if they’re acting one way to you, but then, behind the scenes they’re thinking, like, well,

you know, she's crazy." She also felt these instructors would be more likely to address something with a student from the beginning rather than having to have ongoing private meetings:

Like they just it feels like someone who, if they had a problem with you they would be more likely to address the problem to say, "look, you know this is something I see and I feel like it might be a hinderance," without you having to go through all the you know private meeting and things like that.

Charlie also recalled feeling much more comfortable because of the element of humanness that was added into the room by the professor through her use of humor. This allowed her to feel more comfortable speaking with professors outside of class as well. Humor in the classroom:

Made me feel more comfortable. Going to them with any anything related to the curriculum ... because when you show humor, especially a professor, it gives them this element of humanness ... you know some professors don't show that humanness, or if they do ... you have to know them for a while before you see that humanness. But whenever you have a professor who just uses hum humor right off the bat, it's like you never have to break through a shell because they're just human from the get go.

Humor Facilitates Learning. The final main theme to emerge from Charlie's data was Humor Facilitates Learning. Within this theme, Charlie explored how humor impacted class learning and classroom environment. Charlie also discussed how humor within a classroom helped her feel more comfortable. Two sub-themes emerged within this theme: (a) "This Class is Fun" and (b) Humor Eases My Nerves and Makes Me Feel More Confident.

"This Class is Fun." Charlie stated that, not only did humor in the classroom make the class more fun, it also helped her learn content. When Charlie was in a classroom with an

instructor who used humor, she felt “like this is fun. This class is fun. This information is fun. Learning is fun, like it just makes everything more fun.” Moreover, because humor felt like somewhat of an unconventional teaching tool, she was more likely to remember what was being discussed in class: “I do remember the content when the content is tied in with like humor, or is put in a way that’s maybe unconventional, and humor is involved. I’m very much more likely to, like, it’s more likely to stick in my brain.” In other classes, when humor was not used, the classroom often felt “dead.” These “dead” classrooms seemed to make content harder to recall and harder to pay attention to: “It’s like it’s a lot harder to remember and like recall the information, and I’m more likely to have to study it more on my own when I get home to remember it.”

Humor Eases My Nerves and Makes Me Feel More Confident. Charlie reflected back on her first day of class stating, “I was really nervous” and felt “definitely that anxiety.” Once her instructor started using humor, she immediately felt those nerves and feelings of anxiety melt away: “And then the professor, like used humor that would all of a sudden that nervousness would for me personally, it would go away, and it would just make me feel like way more comfortable and kind of included.” Charlie also felt more confident in classes where humor was used,

More confident after the use of humor because that’s kind of a result, like when the nervousness was kind of when that went away, then it’s all of a sudden like okay like I’m in the classroom, I’m comfortable, I got this. So, it’s like kind of it gives the students that feel like a better a better sense of confidence, and also like comfortable, just more comfortable in a classroom.

This confidence allowed Charlie to be “more likely to contribute” in class because “they’ve created an environment where, like it feels easy to discuss with my peers.”

Billy

The researcher thoroughly enjoyed meeting with Billy, as his love for humor permeated the entire interview process. Even within his member-checking meeting, Billy was chuckling at his own quotes. Two main themes emerged from the data collected in Billy’s interview: (a) Defining Humor and (b) Humor Humanizes. Both themes were made up of additional sub-themes that further explored Billy’s experience with instructor use of humor in the classroom.

Defining Humor. The first main theme to come from Billy’s interview was Defining Humor. Within this theme, Billy explored his own thoughts on what humor was. Billy ultimately landed on humor being subjective, that how it was received was dependent on all parties involved in the exchange. Two sub-themes made up the first of two main themes: (a) Humor is “Subjective” and (b) Humor and Cultural Differences.

Humor is “Subjective.” Billy believed humor was “all subjective.” He stated that, while “sometimes someone will think something’s not humorous, but then it really is to me, so it’s different for everybody else.” Similarly, he said, “if you think you’re not being funny, you might be being funny.” Billy added that, when someone may believe they were being funny, they “might be being offensive.” He offered an example from work stating that sometimes he would say something to one team and they would think it was funny but when he shared the same thing with another team, he got a completely different response. This highlighted how humor could be subjective based on who was speaking and who was listening. He wondered how his team members did not experience compassion fatigue if they were “so serious all the time” and did not allow themselves to laugh stating, “well shit I don’t know, you’re so serious how you get through

the day? How do you not get into like some kind of you know, compassion fatigue? How do you avoid burnout if you're not having a good time?" When asked if he felt like people should be cautious with humor due to its subjectivity, he said, "No ... I just you know, I can't control other people's you know behaviors or the way they react to situations. So all I can do is be genuine."

Humor and Cultural Differences. Billy reflected that "one of our professors was a nonnative speaker of English." Billy tried to use humor in that class and found that it fell flat. Billy stated the instructor "just didn't understand American humor." Billy found that, because of cultural differences, he and his instructor were unable to understand each other's use of humor in the classroom. Ultimately, though, Billy stated, "It was all right, I understand where he's coming from." These quotes highlighted how humor was culturally bound.

Humor Humanizes. The second and final theme of Billy's experience of instructor use of humor in the classroom was Humor Humanizes. This theme encapsulated Billy's experience with humor and how it has impacted his experience in the field of counseling, within the classroom, and within his program at large. Being a fan of humor, Billy advocated for its use across all three domains. Three sub-themes emerged within this final theme: (a) Humor is "Necessary in Our Field" to Alleviate Tension, (b) Humor Made the "Student-Teacher Relationship a Lot Easier," and (c) Humor "Gave Me Hope for the Program."

Humor is "Necessary in our Field" to Alleviate Tension. Billy described the "relief" he felt when humor was used stating that it was a necessary commodity in the field of counseling. While some may believe the counseling field should be serious most of the time, Billy disagreed, stating, "it's like the reality of our situation is like, as you know, humor is really ... necessary, and in our field everyone thinks that you need to be serious constantly, and I disagree." Billy worked with individuals who had substance use disorders, and he believed humor should

especially be used within this counseling specialty. Billy stated that addiction “is serious and life threatening ... but it is also kind of weird as shit.” Billy reflected that, often the situations substance use clients found themselves in could be ridiculous and “weird,” and laughter could be something that helped in coping during those moments: “in my job now I deal with a lot of people that have a lot of trauma, and you know, have a use of humor, not like making fun of their trauma, using humor to alleviate tension. It seems to be working.” He believed humor was important within sessions with clients, as well as outside of the counseling room in counselor’s personal lives as well as within team meetings. Billy further emphasized this by stating:

I just think it’s really important that it is used ... because ... having humor in this line of work is really important ... I have some real serious stuff happening a lot and it’s good to have like a team that you like have humor with outside of whatever.

Humor Made the “Student-Teacher Relationship a Lot Easier.” Billy had been out of school for “20 years” before he pursued his master’s degree. Because of that, he “had no idea what to expect” when he started the program. He also worried the field would be serious and “intense.” During his first semester of the program, one of his professors used humor in the classroom which came as a major relief to him. He remembered feeling “emotions like relief but happy” in those moments because he felt a part of something and felt validated in his choice to pursue the field. He felt the student-teacher relationship was much easier to develop through his instructor’s use of humor in the classroom stating, “when they use humor I just maybe like feel like connected, like they’re a real person and not just like some talking head of ethics.” He also felt like he could come to his professor to talk more about course content, “if [he] actually had a real concern,” because he felt a closeness and trust with her. He found instructors who used humor to be more “approachable.” He stated he used his humorous instructor as a professional

reference because of their relationship. Upon further reflection, Billy realized “there was three professors at the beginning, and I used two of them for a professional reference, and one of them wasn’t humorous, so I didn’t contact them.”

Humor “Gave Me Hope for the Program.” Billy was worried about the seriousness of the program due to his experience in the program orientation prior to the start of the fall semester. He remembered the orientation feeling awkward and serious stating, “well, this is as weird as crap ... this is uncomfortable as heck.” During the orientation, there was also an “emphasis” on his cohort being the “inaugural cohort” of the program, further stressing the seriousness and importance of him starting the program. Billy wondered “what have I got myself into.” He started his first class and when he saw his instructor use humor, he felt a huge sense of relief. That instructor’s use of humor gave him hope that he would “be able to continue on” and that the program was not going to be overly serious. He “realized that [he] would be able to ... use humor as well, so that opened up the whole avenue that feels to be a little bit easier,” stating this gave him “hope.”

Tim

Tim was kind and soft spoken in his exploration of instructor use of humor. Throughout his interview, he emphasized his need to be authentically himself and how humor could be a major tool in allowing for that in the classroom. Four main themes emerged from Tim’s data: (a) Humor is “Anything That Makes You Laugh [and] Smile,” (b) Humor and Connection, (c) Humor “Pulls Me More Into a Topic,” and (d) Humor Calms the Nerves and Makes Me More Comfortable. Only the fourth main themes contained sub-themes, which will be explored further.

Humor is “Anything That Makes You Laugh [and] Smile.” When prompted to explore how he defined humor, Tim stated that he considered humor to be “anything that makes

you laugh, smile, makes you feel happy.” He stated that most of his professors were humorous “vocally” rather than by showing funny videos, slides, or memes in class. He also noted there was a “difference in funny and humor,” though did not explain a specific distinction between the two.

Humor and Connection. Tim experienced humor as a humanizing act that helped him to form connections with professors and his cohort mates. Tim shared he felt connected to professors who used humor because “it lets [him] know that [his] professors are human, too.” He compared the instructors from his undergraduate experience to his graduate experience as an example. In his undergraduate program, Tim found his instructors to be “cut and dry, I don’t care what you do, get out of my class when you’re done.” In contrast, his graduate instructors would often share funny anecdotes that reminded him they were “people just like you are.” He also noted that “all of [his] teachers are Doctors,” which felt “very intimidating” to him. He felt like when he entered class, he was entering a room where the instructors “are much smarter than [he is].” When his instructors used humor, those feelings of intimidation began to dissipate. Not only did humor help him connect with his instructors, he also found it was helpful in building “comradery” with his cohort. Tim was a part of “one of the largest cohorts so far” that at times felt “like they got their little click and then there’s the few of us that don’t really mess with anybody.” Using humor “opens the door for conversation amongst the whole cohort” which led to feeling closer to his fellow cohort members. Tim wondered if humor was as important to others as it was to him stating “I hope humor is like as important to everybody as it is to me ... ‘cause I think it’s huge, it’s so important to peoples’ connections and peoples’ just overall emotional, I guess I’m gonna go as far as saying like acceptance.” Tim also noted, “I don’t think there’s enough of it just in the professional world.”

Humor “Pulls Me More Into a Topic.” Similarly to how Tim felt about humor and connection, he also felt more drawn to the subjects in which humor was used stating, “it pulls me more into the topic.” He compared this to an instructor just reading dryly off a PowerPoint stating he would not retain any of that information. Tim further emphasized how humor impacted his classroom experience while stating, “it draws me into the topic at hand ... when they’re showing some kind of like humorous behavior.” Tim was someone who liked to banter back and forth with others, so if humor was used in the classroom, he was often thinking about how he could jump in with something witty to keep the joke rolling. Tim explored this by stating, “I’m always looking for something witty to say [when] someone says something funny, like, I just like to keep the train rolling.” This quote showed how a professor’s use of humor could increase Tim’s engagement with the material.

Humor Calms the Nerves and Makes Me More Comfortable. The final theme to emerge from Tim’s interview was Humor Calms the Nerves and Makes Me More Comfortable. This theme encapsulates Tim’s experience being put at ease in the classroom when his instructor used humor. Tim also explored how humor could be a “gate opener” to more conversation within the classroom. This final main theme was comprised of two sub-themes: (a) Humor Helps with “Comfort and Confidence” in Contributing to Class and (b) Humor Calms my Nerves.

Humor Helps with “Comfort and Confidence in Contributing to Class.” Tim described humor in the classroom as a “gate opener” to more conversation. Tim painted a picture of who he used to be as a student stating, “I’ve always been the guy that’s kind of back row, don’t talk to me, don’t like call on me, I don’t want anybody sitting next to me.” Once humor was used in the classroom, he stated, “I found myself engaging in more conversation ... I find myself engaging a lot more with that versus the person that I knew two years ago sitting in class that was like, I

don't care, like just say what you gotta say, let me leave." When humor was used in the classroom, Tim felt increased "comfort and confidence" and was better able to contribute to class. The feeling of confidence and comfort came from the instructor using humor, reflecting that if they were comfortable and confident enough to banter back and forth with him that he could do the same in return stating, "if you feel comfortable enough to cut up with me, then I'm automatically comfortable enough to cut up with you."

Humor Calms My Nerves. As mentioned previously, Tim felt "intimidated" by his instructors when he started because of their level of education. Once they started to use humor, he settled into class much more comfortably. Tim experienced "relief" in the classroom when humor was used. He found humor to be a much better "icebreaker" in class than the icebreakers often planned by his instructors. In fact, Tim believed if instructors used humor rather than traditional icebreakers, "it would help with a lot ... it would kind of like calm people ... our cohort's like really tense, like some of them are working crazy hours ... I think it helps all the way around, like I don't see any negative at all for it." Tim also found that he was much more comfortable giving class presentations within classrooms with an instructor who uses humor. Tim stated,

I'll go as far as saying my presentations for classes are entirely different, depending on my instructor. I feel like I can have a bit of humor in one of my presentations, like versus that we have had the nervous instructor ... I mean I was sweating bullets, like I was so nervous like I didn't want to do it. It was terrible, awful.

With his humorous instructors, he felt less nervous during his presentations, more able to settle in, and be himself. In contrast, in classes where humor was not used by the instructor, he felt very nervous and does not feel comfortable presenting authentically.

Composite Themes

Each participant shared unique experiences of instructor use of humor in the classroom. Participants also shared how they defined humor and what they experienced in the classroom as a student with an instructor who used humor. Within their description of their experience, participants described thoughts, feelings, and body sensations linked to their experience in the classroom. Participants also shared their unique perspectives of their relationship with their instructors who utilized humor in the classroom. Some commonalities were found across these unique participant experiences.

Within this section, I present the common themes across participants. Common superordinate themes included: Defining Humor, Humor and Connection Versus Disconnection, and Humor and Learning. Each main theme is described in relation to previous research as well as implications for counselor educators. Each superordinate theme also included sub-themes which are discussed in further detail as well. Table 1 showcases participant endorsement of themes.

Table 1*Participant Endorsement of Themes*

Themes/Sub-themes	Vanessa	Tim	Charlie	Sandy	Molly	Billy	Angela
Defining Humor	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
What Makes Something Funny	X	X	X	X			X
Humor is Subjective				X		X	
Humor and Connection versus Disconnection	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Humor is Humanizing	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Feeling Connected with Professors	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Humor and Disconnection	X			X	X		
Humor and Learning	X	X	X		X	X	X
Being Funny is the Best Way to Keep me Engaged but it can also be Distracting	X	X	X		X		X
Humor Eases my Nerves and Instills Hope	X	X	X		X	X	X

Defining Humor

The first main theme contained data from six out of seven participants (Vanessa, Tim, Charlie, Sandy, Molly, and Billy). This theme encapsulated moments in which participants described humor in their own words, what made something funny, the subjectivity of humor, and other elements to the humor experience. Many participants struggled to define humor due to its subjective nature; others were able to describe how they defined humor in just a few words. This theme was made up of two sub-themes: (a) What Makes Something Funny and (b) Humor is Subjective.

What Makes Something Funny. The first sub-theme of Defining Humor (What Makes Something Funny) was made up of experiences expressed by Vanessa, Tim, Sandy, Angela, and Charlie. Each participant was asked to make an attempt to define humor in their own words as the first question in their interview process. Many participants had a hard time defining humor and often went back and forth throughout the process of forming their definition. Charlie and Tim were able to define humor in their words very succinctly. Tim stated humor was “anything that makes you laugh, smile, makes you feel happy.” Charlie saw humor as something “lighthearted” that made one feel “warm” and “light.” Charlie went on to state that humor did “not necessarily make you laugh, but just puts like a warm or light feeling in that environment.”

Sandy defined humor as a tool that helped us find who our people were due to shared values and knowledge. Sandy believed a major function of humor was to help us find “who our people are.” She saw humor as a convenient way to “identify in-group membership.” Sandy stated, “the humor that works well is the one that ... gives people an insight into who you are, and you’re connecting with them. Of course, if it could let us know who our people were and identify in-group membership, “it can also be used to exclude people” which is discussed further

in sub-theme three. Sandy found that humor in the classroom gave her insight into who her professors were as a person and also served as a vessel for connection because of potential shared values: “much of what we find funny, is really just another way of kind of elucidating what our values are.”

Vanessa offered a robust description of her take on humor. Vanessa believed whether what someone said was received as funny was dependent on whether the person themselves were “innately” funny. She saw humor as “a state of being,” as a “presence.” She also believed that, if someone was funny, they “don’t have to say you’re funny, you just are.” Vanessa explored her experience in the classroom with her Ethics professor who she stated often went on long tangents with his funny stories stating, “it’s not the stories themselves that are funny, it’s that it’s been 10 minutes and the story is still going.” She went on to say that “even if the words themselves don’t land, it’s funny because it didn’t land, because he’s such a funny guy.” She also believed that the delivery of the content was often more important than the content itself when it came to being funny stating,

It’s the same reason why like you can write an awesome joke, but if a robot like speaks it out it won’t be funny, it’s only funny because ‘oh, look at this robot doing comedy ...’ it’s more about the presentation and the delivery and light heartedness ... than like the actual like words and jokes themselves.

Similarly, Vanessa stated, “what makes a good actor is the ability to deliver,” and noted that, “with a good comedian it’s all about delivery and timing ... more than just the words.” She also noted “that there are so many different ways to be funny” rather than one correct presentation or delivery, which depends on the person.

Angela, in agreement with Vanessa, also believed the quality of humor and how it was being delivered was more important than the content itself to be received as funny. She discussed how a story needed build up to heighten the anticipation of the story, rather than abruptly getting to the punchline:

If there's like a buildup with the story and everything like that, rather than just like, 'oh, my God, this happened,' and then just laying it out there that's probably a little bit less funny than someone's like building up a whole story around it and giving you details and things like your thoughts or whatever.

Humor is Subjective. Participants Sandy and Billy discussed the subjective nature of humor. While attempting to define humor, Sandy stated: "defining the boundaries of what qualifies as humor as itself, I think, just a philosophical issue ... I know there are philosophers who work on humor just because of the nature [of] it's slipperiness." Sandy went on to discuss the subjective nature of humor, noting there were gender differences with humor, specific conditions needed for humor to be successful, as well as humor depending on shared values and knowledge. These are described in subsequent paragraphs.

Sandy also explored the subjectivity of who was speaking and who was listening to humor and how "there are aspects of humor that are receiver dependent." Sandy explored times in which she laughed in class at a professor's joke when other students did not. She did not think this meant the professor's attempt at humor was unsuccessful, rather that it just did not resonate with everyone in the class, thus, emphasizing the subjective nature of humor. Billy also saw humor as "all subjective" and stated that "sometimes someone will think something's not humorous, but then it really is to me, so it's different for everybody." Billy also added that, when someone might think they were being funny, they "might be being offensive." Billy also

explored the differences in receptivity to his use of humor within the different teams he encountered at work. Billy said he could say one thing to one team and they would laugh, then tell it to another team and get a completely different response; highlighting the subjectivity of the speaker-receiver dynamic that was first addressed by Sandy. Sandy also explored how the subjectivity of humor depended on shared knowledge by stating, “humor just for me was a way to connect with the instructor and was kind of more of an insight into ...’oh you find this funny, and I find it funny too, probably because we’re calling on the same body of knowledge.”

Another subjective facet of humor the participants discussed were social locations, such as cultural differences and gender. For example, Sandy discussed how potential gender differences influenced how people received humor. Sandy had previously conducted research on gender in the classroom and found that, across the board, female instructors were perceived differently than their male counterparts. Sandy stated, “like many things, with respect to humor, gender counts against female professors ... just like we see in basically every other context, the standards for what counts as humor is going to be higher for the females than for the males.” Similarly, Billy discussed the subjective nature of humor based on cultural differences. Billy reflected on his time in the classroom with a “professor [that] was a nonnative speaker of English.” Billy attempted to use humor in the class but found it did not connect with the professor. Billy stated that the instructor “just didn’t understand American humor.” When asked if he felt as if people should be careful in their use of humor due to its subjective nature, Billy stated, “no ... I can’t control other people’s, you know, behaviors, or the way they react to situations, so all I can do is be genuine.”

***Humor and Connection versus
Disconnection***

The second of three main themes (Humor and Connection Versus Disconnection) was endorsed by all seven participants. Within this main theme, participants shared their experience with humor in the classroom and how it impacted their connection with their peers and professor. Participants explored concepts, such as how they related professors, felt closer and more comfortable with them, how their classrooms felt like a community when humor was used, and felt less alone. Three sub-themes emerged within this main theme: (a) Humor is Humanizing, (b) Feeling Connected with Professors, and (c) Humor and Disconnection.

Humor is Humanizing. The first sub-theme to emerge from the data (Humor is Humanizing) included the experiences of Charlie, Molly, Vanessa, Billy, Tim, and Sandy. This sub-theme encapsulated the participants' experience of humor facilitating the humanization of their professors. This humanization often resulted in participants feeling closer to and more comfortable with their professors, which had a domino effect of also feeling more comfortable within the classroom, and for some, with their peers as well.

Charlie viewed her professor who used humor "in a very positive light." Charlie reflected on the "vulnerability" she felt it took to use humor in the classroom because it allowed one to show up "fully human." Charlie also noted that she herself did not "keep a very hard shell you know it doesn't take long to break to the human part of me, so I can connect with that just a whole lot better than I can someone who keeps it you know, kind of shelled off." Charlie also reported feeling more comfortable because of the humanness that was added into the room by the professor's humor. This allowed Charlie to:

Feel more comfortable going to them with any anything related to the curriculum ...
because when you show humor, especially a professor, it gives them this element of

humanness ... you know some professors don't show that humanness, or if they do ... you have to know them for a while before you see that humanness. But whenever you have a professor who just uses hum humor right off the bat, it's like you never have to break through a shell because they're just human from the get go.

Similarly, Vanessa felt a closeness with her professors who used humor because she felt they showed up authentically:

I feel like I relate to him, and he feels like a person to me, and not a professor, and I think that's a big distinction too, that you don't want to be seen as like an authoritarian figure that says words to you, and you write them down like he, he feels like a person to me ... I think, has helped me feel that closeness because I think he knows me as a person and I feel like I know him because ... it would be impossible to pretend to be the person that he's being you know what I mean like he's so very authentic, and that would be like almost impossible to fake.

Tim also shared that he felt connected with professors who used humor because "it lets [him] know that [his] professors are human, too." He found his undergraduate teachers to be "dry" and "serious," though his graduate instructors often shared funny stories that reminded him they were "people just like you are." According to these participants, the use of humor meant they saw their professors authentically and vulnerably, leading to a deeper connection, respect, humanization, and approachability with their professors.

Participants also explored how much respect they had for professors who used humor, which led to a closer connection. Angela reflected back on the respect she had and how much she valued her professor who used humor in the classroom. She found her instructor to be "brilliant" to the point where she hoped to work with her in the future. Angela stated she "felt always close

to her” instructor who used humor and, while she knew she was a professional, her use of humor added “this element of like just feeling that she was on the same page as us, she could relate to us in a lot of different ways.” Charlie also maintained a level of respect for her instructors and saw them as the authority figure in the room, though knew if she needed them, they would be there for her. Because of the previously mentioned “vulnerability,” Charlie felt more respect towards this professor as highlighted in this quote: “for some reason the professors who are lighthearted and use humor like that, it’s like I almost have a sort of increased respect for them, too, because I mean it does, it takes vulnerability to be fully human.” Molly also found her instructor’s use of humor humanized her experience with him stating, “he just kind of seemed so human.” She found his use of humor to be “a very genuine attempt at connecting with the whole class ... like he was trying to connect and kind of like get down on our level sort of, and it really, it built rapport.” Because her instructor felt more human to her, she felt more comfortable speaking up in class, even as someone who at times felt insecure in class: “even though I’m an inquisitive student I’m also like afraid to ask questions sometimes and I can like doubt myself in asking the questions and think like ‘Oh, my gosh, I don’t want somebody else to think I’m stupid or whatever by asking this question,’ and I never felt that way in his class.”

Vanessa also worried readers of this research could misinterpret her experience and hear that they should be funnier in class; to clarify, she emphasized that some people were just funnier than others, so use of humor by professors should not be forced. She emphasized the importance of instructors being themselves and not trying too hard to be funny, because it often “feels like ‘please like me.’” Vanessa added that instructors should be their authentic self when using humor in the classroom rather than trying to use the humor of the generation they were teaching, stating, “they want to make you laugh but it’s just not funny ... the best thing you can do is bring

in your own personality,” because it felt desperate otherwise. Vanessa added, “bringing your personality, even if you’re not a funny person, just bringing you into the classroom, and not a teacher, is so important.”

While many participants discussed how humor helped to humanize their professors, Billy, Molly, and Charlie expanded on the idea and offered his perspective on how humor could also humanize them as counselors. When reflecting on the perceived seriousness of our profession, Billy stated, “it’s like the reality of our situation is like, as you know, humor is really ... necessary, and in our field everyone thinks that you need to be serious constantly, and I disagree.” He added that humor could also be a coping tool for clients, pointing out the ridiculous and “weird” moments that arose during active addiction. Billy added, “in my job now I deal with a lot of people that have a lot of trauma, and you know, have a use of humor, not like making fun of their trauma, using humor to alleviate tension. It seems to be working.” Billy also saw humor as a tool to be used by counselors themselves stating,

I just think it’s really important that it is used ... because ... having humor in this line of work is really important ... I have some real serious stuff happening a lot and it’s good to have like a team that you like have humor with outside of whatever.

He was also curious how his team did not experience compassion fatigue because they were “so serious all the time ... how do you avoid burnout if you’re not having a good time.” While exploring humor in the classroom through hindsight, Molly also noted that she could use humor to connect with her own clients in her role as a case manager as an ice breaker and to build rapport due to humor’s humanizing nature. Charlie also reflected on how humor could help her in her own work through its humanizing nature stating, “I’m a case manager, and ... sometimes

humor is used there to like, as a nice breaker, or to connect and build that rapport and build that trust ... and I think humor in general seems to be a very humanizing act.”

Similar to Billy’s experience of humor breaking up the seriousness of the field, Angela appreciated her instructor’s use of humor with it being juxtaposed against the seriousness of the field. Within the program, professors were often discussing serious material in addition to students exploring difficult and serious things within themselves. Angela found that, without humor, much of her felt “dark” and “depressing:”

Because especially like in a master’s program for counseling and everything and therapy we’re like learning some dark shit a lot of the times, and we’re uncovering things about ourselves that we have been putting off for a long time, or maybe we’ve never done a deep dive on, and to bring that element of just like humor and making it more fun than everything is always so morose, so depressing.

Feeling Connected with Professors. All participants reported feelings connected with their professors who used humor in the classroom. This sub-theme encapsulated participant experiences with humor in the classroom and how it helped them feel closer with their professors. Many participants found humor to be a vessel which allowed for humorous communication that led to closeness, especially in comparison to professors who did not use humor. Some participants also found this closeness extended to their peers within a classroom utilizing humor.

Some participants expressed feelings of higher levels of trust with their professors who used humor which led to them feeling more comfortable coming to their professors to discuss more personal information. Vanessa expressed feeling very connected with her professors who

used humor, even stating she trusted them with more than just her questions around course content. Vanessa stated:

I feel incredibly close to [my professor], like I trust him with everything, I've gone to [another professor] about things that are probably not a professor's job, but like that sort of stuff. I'm like this is my guy like [this professor is] my friend, but not in like a I don't respect you you're my friend, kind of way, but look he's still like respect admiration adoration. Like he's a great professor.

Billy also felt like he could come to his professor to talk more about course content, "if [he] actually had a real concern," because he felt a closeness and trust with her. He found instructors who used humor to be more "approachable." He stated he used his humorous instructor as a professional reference because of their relationship. Upon further reflection, Billy realized "there was three professors at the beginning, and I used two of them for a professional reference, and one of them wasn't humorous, so I didn't contact them." Similarly, Charlie stated that, with her instructors who used humor, she did not "have to wonder if they're acting one way to you, but then, behind the scenes they're thinking she's crazy," highlighting how the use of humor helped her professors seem more authentic. She also felt like her instructors who used humor would be more honest with her if there was something going on, "if they had a problem with you they would be more likely to address the problem ... without you having to go through all the private meetings."

Vanessa felt especially close with her professor and could "go back and forth with [her]." She often felt more excited for her class with the professor who would often bantered with her. Vanessa stated, "If they can go back and forth with me, then that's a good professor as far as I'm concerned." Vanessa also noted that the difference between her professor who bantered and her

professor who told long-winded stories was that her professor who bantered was “engaged with [her] as an individual ... whereas you know the ethics professor, it’s like [he’s] engaging with the class as like an audience, and so he is a relatable figure in that way, but [she doesn’t] know him like personally enough.” This highlighted how the general use of humor in the classroom could positively impact the instructor-student relationship, but that humor shared between an individual student and professor (engaging in banter or back and forth exchanges together) could strengthen the connection of students and professors even more. Vanessa also stated: “What it really boils down to is not like the effectiveness of retaining content, it’s more like, do your students love you, like do they like wanna come to you for things, do they trust you, do they relate to you?” This quote highlighted how the use of humor by Vanessa’s professor helped her to trust and relate to her professor more, strengthening their connection. Billy also endorsed humor as a tool for connection with his professors. He felt the student-teacher relationship was much easier to develop through his instructor’s use of humor in the classroom stating, “when they use humor I just maybe like feel like connected, like they’re a real person and not just like some talking head of ethics.”

Participants also explored how instructors who used humor felt less intimidating and “more in reach.” Angela felt like the class itself was less intimidating and formal because of her instructor’s use of humor stating, “the more she got to know us, the more we got to know her, the more comfortable we got, and just like the stronger the connection became ... and I think the humor helped that comfortability happen faster.” Similarly, Charlie viewed teachers who used humor as “more in reach,” due to the above-mentioned vulnerability she discussed. Molly felt closer with her instructors who used humor, however, she “hadn’t thought about humor in the classroom” prior to her interview for this study. During class it had not occurred to her that her

relationship with her instructor was enhanced through the use of humor, but as she reflected on the past, she realized that humor played a role in the student-teacher relationship. Molly stated, “before that I had really never thought about how humor impacts any relationship.” Similarly, while exploring the differences in these relationships through hindsight within her interview, Vanessa noted,

I didn't expect to get into this idea of how my relationships change as a result of that, you know I felt really close to [the professor who banter with me] because he walks that line so well, whereas with you know my ethics Professor, I still respect him ... but I don't feel that personal closeness, because there's not a lot of back and forth ... so I just found that interesting to kind of explore that more, too, because I hadn't thought about it like that.

This feeling of closeness also extended to how some participants felt with her peers in the classrooms with instructors who used humor. For example, in relation to how the classroom felt with an instructor who used humor, Vanessa stated: “I feel so much better it feels like we're all people together like it feels like a community.” Vanessa felt a sense of belonging with her classmates through their shared laughter, which was especially important given she had just moved to an area where she knew no one. Vanessa stated, “moving to a new area where you have no other friends other than the people that you were in class with, like, feeling that belonging is so important. And I feel belonging through laughing with other people.” Similarly, Tim felt more connected with his instructors who used humor because it humanized them, and he also found it was helpful in building “comradery” with his cohort. Tim described being a part of “one of the largest cohorts so far” that felt “like they got their little click and then there's the few of us that don't really mess with anybody.” He found that humor “opens the door for conversation amongst the whole cohort” which led to feeling closer to his fellow cohort

members. As such, these sentiments showed that humor could help increase feelings of closeness with peers as well.

Humor and Disconnection. While all participants endorsed the Feeling Connected with Professors sub-theme, Vanessa, Molly, and Sandy all discussed how humor could be disconnecting when not used well or in its absence. Within this sub-theme, participants explored what kinds of humor could foster disconnection with their professors, why they may not resonate with instructor humor, as well as professors not feeling approachable if they did not use humor regularly.

Throughout Vanessa's recollection of her experience with instructor use of humor, she often discussed three different professors: one who used humor though long stories, one who had a back and forth with her and stayed on topic, and one who felt more serious and did not use humor. The professor that felt "more serious of the three" (due to a lack of humor), Vanessa did not connect with. While Vanessa learned a lot from this professor and respected her, she was not someone she felt close with or comfortable opening up to, stating:

I would probably never go to her about anything personally ... because in my mind she does not fulfill that role as like a person, she's a person obviously, but I mean she doesn't feel that role of like I'm your friend and I'm here, for you, you know ... I trust her to do what she's supposed to but it's just she would not be my first choice.

She also noted that, with the professors who did not go back and forth with her, "it's harder to connect or to really appreciate the class, at least the teacher, when I feel like I can't connect with them." She also explored her relationship with her professor who did not use humor stating she felt the professor saw humor as "a little bit of a distraction, or it kind of throws her off from her lesson plan, or like she just wants to get to the material like I said not in like a she's not doesn't

seem mean or cold, or like scary, It's more that she's just really focused on the material.”

Additionally, Vanessa discussed that classes with the instructor that did not use humor often felt harder and longer in comparison to those with instructors who used humor: “she's not mean by any means, but she's not really funny ... her classes, they feel harder, they feel longer.”

Expanding upon this experience, she said

The other professor [that did not use humor] that taught Developmental classes, the one that was like kind of newer and stricter, I learned way more in her class. Did I dread going Mondays? Yes, I did, but you know, and do I feel connected to her? No, but I learned so much more because it's really focused on the material.

Molly also felt disconnected in classrooms where humor was not a mainstay. She found it “harder to connect, harder to stay interested, harder to just pay attention” in class. She had a hard time paying attention in those classes because “if you know the person teaching you isn't totally involved or invested like you are, then it's like, eh,” demonstrating that for her humor meant the professor was also engaged and invested in the material being taught.

One of the conditions of humor which led to whether Sandy experienced connection or disconnection with instructors was whether she received the humor as “pandering.” Sandy experienced “non-pandering” humor as authentic, and it elicited a feeling of warmth in her: “It just like warmth you know cause it's like it's just this person is showing us who they are.” In contrast, Sandy did not feel connected with instructors who used humor she viewed as “pandering.” Sandy stated: “the pandering is the opposite of authentic.” Sandy often received “pandering” humor as instructors trying to force rapport and get the students to like them which gave her the “creepy crawlies.” Sandy also mentioned feeling as if our interpretation of humor may also be a result of whether or not we liked someone. Sandy reflected on interactions with

instructors who utilized humor in the classroom and was able to identify that the ones in which she received their humor as funny she liked, whereas the instructors whose humor she did not find funny, she did not like or “buted heads” with. As an example, she said: “an instructor who I’ve buted heads with ... it doesn’t surprise me that I didn’t find her funny.” This was also shown in the quote: “fall flat humor, that is gonna track with cases where there isn’t that much a relationship, or perhaps there’s even dislike.”

While Molly was exploring her experience of humor in the classroom as being positive, she also noted there were “multiple sides to using humor.” Molly shared that, because of the subjectivity of humor, humor could often be polarizing, especially when used in political platforms stating that humor could “really upset a lot of people.” While for the most part Molly believed “humor is amazing,” she also thought it should be used “tastefully,” because of how “multifaceted” humor could be which could result in different interpretations by different people. Molly related this to her experience in the classroom, remembering a student in her class that did not think the professor was funny while other students did, though she stated that student “just had a different set of circumstances.”

Humor and Learning

The third and final theme was comprised of data from Vanessa, Tim, Charlie, Angela, Molly, and Billy. This theme encapsulated participant experiences related to how humor impacted their learning in the classroom. Some participants discussed how they felt more engaged with the material when humor was used, some reflected on how class felt more fun if humor was present, humor calmed the nerves of some participants, and others discussed how humor could potentially be a distraction within the classroom. Two sub-themes emerged from

this data: (a) Being Funny is the Best Way to Keep me Engaged But It Can Also be Distracting and (b) Humor Eases My Nerves.

Being Funny Is the Best Way to Keep Me Engaged But It Can Also be Distracting.

The first sub-theme of Humor and Learning (Being Funny is the Best Way to Keep Me Engaged But It Can Also be Distracting) was endorsed by Vanessa, Molly, Tim, Angela, and Charlie. This sub-theme encapsulated participants' experiences related to how humor helped keep them engaged with course content. Participants explored how humor helped them keep their attention in class, how it could keep class fun, as well as how it could potentially be a distraction within class.

Participants discussed how humor could be used to help retain course material. Vanessa explored how she believed humor could be used to connect course material within classes. While she found many of her ethics professor's stories to be long-winded and to not connect much to what was being discussed in class, she did find "the humor is a way for him to connect the material." She also noted there were moments in which her instructor shared stories from his experience on the ethics board and tied those stories into his ethics class. Additionally, when that professor taught her development class, he often shared stories about his son related to certain developmental stages he was teaching about in the class "because his son is like 14, so as we're going through the different developmental stages, he's like, 'Oh, yeah, here's a time where my son did this.'" Vanessa also noted there could be more opportunities to connect class material through humor and funny stories: "I think if he really lesson planned it ... it also is like his mind kind of wanders to a different thought ... but if he was like we're talking about Piaget's Stages, and here's what happened then it would totally stick." Similarly, Tim felt more drawn to the subjects in which humor was used stating, "it pulls me more into the topic." He compared this to

an instructor just reading dryly off a PowerPoint stating he would not retain any of that information. Tim further emphasized how humor impacted his classroom experience while stating, “it draws me into the topic at hand ... when they’re showing some kind of like humorous behavior.” Angela reflected on a past instructor who shared funny stories in class, “she loves to tell stories. It’s one of the best ways of her explaining concepts to us.” Angela saw that instructor as being “sassy” and “sarcastic,” qualities she enjoyed because she shared them herself, while at the same time being able to teach content in a way that was easy to understand. She also felt like the material in the class was more accessible because of the funny stories the instructor shared, “it’s really one of the best ways that I learned.” Angela also felt more motivated in the class with the instructor who told funny stories: “Sometimes it just makes you want to learn more, and it makes you more excited to continue learning.” Because humor felt like somewhat of an unconventional teaching tool, Charlie felt more likely to remember what was being discussed in class: “I do remember the content when the content is tied in with like humor, or is put in a way that’s maybe unconventional, and humor is involved. I’m very much more likely to, like, it’s more likely to stick in my brain.” In other classes, when humor was not used, the classroom often felt “dead” to Charlie. These “dead” classrooms seemed to make content harder to recall and harder to pay attention to: “It’s like it’s a lot harder to remember and like recall the information, and I’m more likely to have to study it more on my own when I get home to remember it.”

Participants also explored how class felt more engaging when humor was used. Vanessa noted that “some people might think it’s inappropriate or unprofessional, but I don’t, I think that it’s really the way to teach a class to be engaged with your students, make class interesting.” Additionally, when Vanessa reflected on being in a class with her professor who bantered with her, she also stated, “I feel like I listen more because I’m looking for that opportunity to make a

joke because I know he'll play with me." Vanessa also added that "being funny is the best way to keep me engaged in class. I don't wanna do small side activities or discussion boards or really anything like that ... but for me like being able to deliver material in an interesting way is how I learned." Molly also found that she was more engaged in courses where humor was used. Molly explained that "the funnier things are, the more I pay attention." When reflecting on her engagement with course material when humor was used, Molly said: "I remember thinking that I just wanted to know more." Molly also explored her time in the classroom with her professors who often shared personal anecdotes, stating, "they almost always ended with something funny, and that kind of like made me want to listen more." She often expected this professor's stories to end with some sort of funny twist, so she would pay extra attention in anticipation of the twist. When reflecting on her class with her instructor who used humor, Molly stated she "didn't expect to be so interested in [the class] I, honestly I thought it was gonna be kind of boring," though ended up enjoying the course material, learning new things, and connecting the information to what she already knew as a result of her professor's funny stories. Molly also described how she felt in her body while she was in the classroom with the instructor who used humor. She recalled experiencing feelings of "warmth, and like my body was tingly because I was just very excited and interested and engaged, fully engaged in what I was learning." She also noted that sometimes that tingly feeling could tell her she was anxious, though stated she was not anxious in a negative way, rather she wanted to listen and learn more. As an example of this, she said:

I was anxious in like I just wanna sit here and listen and learn more. I was like so focused on this professor that I, I don't know I could have like flown out of my chair with just

excitement, because whatever he was talking about had fueled up, you know a fire for me that just kind of literally engaged all of me.

Somewhat similarly, Vanessa felt energized in her course with the instructor who bantered with her because she felt the instructor was more active and engaged in the classroom: “I just get excited like I feel energized by him in the classroom because he’s so active and engaged and interested in what all of us have to say and you know just like the back and forth and stuff.”

Molly stated that her instructor’s use of humor also led to her feeling that he was engaged with the students in the class: “I’m experiencing him as very, very engaged also, which is nice, because, you know it’s helpful when the professor and the students are engaged.” Tim also felt more engaged within classrooms where humor was used. Tim was someone who liked to banter back and forth with others, so if humor was used in the classroom, he was often thinking about how he could jump in with something witty to keep the joke rolling. Tim explored this by stating: “I’m always looking for something witty to say [when] someone says something funny, like, I just like to keep the train rolling.” Not only did humor keep the course material interesting, it also helped students like Tim stay engaged in the class dialogues and discussions.

Participants also explored how humor in the classroom often made class more fun to be a part of. Vanessa discussed the things professors often did to make class more fun “are like the worst for me, like I don’t like icebreakers, I don’t like group projects.” Vanessa, instead, offered humor as a suggestion to keep the classroom interesting and fun. Tim echoed this by noting that he found humor to be a much better “icebreaker” in class than the icebreakers often planned by instructors. Tim believed, if instructors used humor rather than their traditional planned icebreakers, “it would help with a lot ... it would kind of like calm people ... our cohort’s like really tense ... I think it helps all the way around, like I don’t see any negative at all for it.” In

relation to being in class with her professor who told long stories, Vanessa noted she felt “kind of like excited like ... this is gonna be fun, and who knows what he’s gonna say.” Vanessa enjoyed going back and forth with her professor stating, “it really does make class more interesting, and it makes me want to go even if it’s a little bit of narcissism peeking out that I just get a time to kind of like show off ... it’s a little stage time.” Vanessa also noted the importance of humor in the classroom during COVID when everything was virtual: “class becomes a space where it’s fun to be which is so important in like COVID times.” Angela also found that the learning process felt “fun” with her instructor who used humor, especially in comparison to previous courses that felt more “dry” like ethics:

It almost made it like, it just made learning fun and more accessible in a way of like it’s more real life than just, “here’s a textbook, this is how it’s supposed to go, here’s some people from like the seventies who created everything” but here’s a real life example of like a couple who was struggling ... I was just like wow; she just makes this whole learning process so fun.

Similarly, when Charlie was in a classroom with an instructor who used humor, she felt “like this is fun. This class is fun. This information is fun. Learning is fun, like it just makes everything more fun.”

While, generally speaking, Vanessa liked humor in the classroom, she also noted that it could become a distraction from course content. When reflecting upon her experience in the classroom with her professor who often told long-winded stories, she noted that he did not often get to all of the planned content: “He goes too far; I think he gets like a little lost in the sauce sometimes of his own stories.” She often felt “things are spiraling” in class but noted that “I think there’s a way to reel it in.” She felt some anxiety at first during class with this professor

because she did not feel she was learning as much as she had expected to learn: “at first, I was like ‘oh, my God what am I paying for I’m not learning anything?’” Over time she found she needed to compensate for this deficit by paying extra attention to readings and reviewing material after class to ensure she knows the content well:

I would say I enjoy his classes much more, but I’m also I’m probably going to need to study ethics a little harder ... now I have to go back and read again because I read this chapter like days ago, and we didn’t really touch on what I needed or I really have to focus a lot more when I’m doing the reading.

She compared this experience to being in the classroom with her instructor who rarely used humor. She found that, while she may not enjoy that instructor’s classes and may find them boring, she did actually retain more information because the content did not get off track through the use of humor and long stories. Vanessa discussed her professor who bantered with her as being a happy medium between her ethics professor and her professor who did not use humor: “he’s not as funny as my ethics professor, but he gets a lot more of the material through ... I think that’s really the power of that middle line ... of just getting the material out but still being like a person in the classroom.” Overall, humor, when used in moderation, could help keep students engaged and facilitate learning, while too little humor or too much ran the risk of disengagement or distraction from learning.

Humor Eases my Nerves and Instills Hope. The final sub-theme of Humor and Learning (Humor Eases My Nerves and Instills Hope) explored how humor helped to calm students in class. This sub-theme was made up of content from the interview transcripts of Charlie, Tim, Billy, Molly, Vanessa, and Angela. Within this sub-theme, participants discussed how their nerves were eased in class due to instructor use of humor which for some led to feeling

more confident and comfortable in class. Others were instilled with hope for the program and the profession due to the use of humor.

Several participants discussed feeling nervous at the start of their program, then feeling some relief to their nerves when they noticed a professor using humor. While exploring her first day of class in the program, Charlie stated, “I was really nervous” and felt “definitely that anxiety.” Charlie went on to state: “and then the professor, like used humor that would all of a sudden that nervousness would for me personally, it would go away, and it would just make me feel like way more comfortable and kind of included.” Charlie also reported feeling:

More confident after the use of humor because that’s kind of a result, like when the nervousness was kind of when that went away, then it’s all of a sudden like okay like I’m in the classroom, I’m comfortable, I got this. So, it’s like kind of it gives the students that feel like a better a better sense of confidence, and also like comfortable, just more comfortable in a classroom.

Vanessa also discussed feeling nervous at the beginning of her program, worrying that her experience was going to be difficult, then feeling relieved once she had a professor use humor.

Vanessa stated:

I think that my ethics professor was the most like poignant one, because it was my first professor and first dip into grad school, and so that I think has had the most profound effect on me just because he was the first in line to be like “this is going to be fun” like “this is not gonna be a hellish 3 years” like “we’re going to get along ...” that really calmed my nerves down I think.

Similarly, Tim also felt significant nerves surrounding his early experience in his program. Tim discussed how “all of [his] teachers are Doctors,” which felt “very intimidating.” When his

instructors used humor, those feelings of intimidation started to go away. Tim reported experiencing “relief” in the classroom when humor was used. When Billy started his counseling program, he worried the field would be serious and “intense.” This worry stemmed from his experience in the program orientation prior to the start of the fall semester stating, “well, this is as weird as crap ... this is uncomfortable as heck.” During the orientation, there was also an “emphasis” on his cohort being the “inaugural cohort” of the program. Billy wondered “what have I got myself into.” Then, during his first semester of the program, one of his professors used humor in the classroom which came as a major relief to him. He remembered feeling “emotions like relief but happy” and felt validated in his choice to pursue the field. That instructor’s use of humor in his first class gave him hope that he would “be able to continue on” and that the program was not going to be overly serious. He “realized that [he] would be able to use humor as well, so that opened up the whole avenue that feels to be a little bit easier” stating this gave him “hope.” Angela also experienced lowered nerves as a result of instructor use of humor. Angela felt that the humorous storytelling within class really helped her cohort ease into the program stating:

I think I really think in the storytelling, especially in this field, a lot of our least our cohort, you know we love asking how did the scenario happen, or like did you ever experience a case with blah blah blah that’s like a huge comfort for us since we’re we just finished our first year in the program. So, you know we’re still feeling very new and very nervous.

Additionally, within her ethics class, Angela often felt nervous about making mistakes within the profession. Angela reflected on those fears, stating she felt like “everything you do is wrong, be careful, you’re gonna get arrested.” She also noted that the humor within her other class helped

to balance that fear out, it “like eased, that tension, and brought that kind of like that seriousness down from that class in her own.” In general, Angela found humor in the classroom to be helpful because, in her eyes, everything did not need to be so serious all the time.

Not only did the use of humor help students settle in during the start of their program, it also extended to them feeling more comfortable participating in class. The aforementioned confidence Charlie experienced after the instructor use of humor in the classroom allowed her to be “more likely to contribute” in class because “they’ve created an environment where, like it feels easy to discuss with my peers.” Tim also reported feeling more comfortable giving class presentations within classrooms with an instructor who used humor stating,

I’ll go as far as saying my presentations for classes are entirely different, depending on my instructor. I feel like I can have a bit of humor in one of my presentations, like versus that we have had the nervous instructor ... I mean I was sweating bullets, like I was so nervous like I didn’t want to do it. It was terrible, awful.

Tim reflected on what kind of student he was during his undergraduate experience stating, “I’ve always been the guy that’s kind of back row, don’t talk to me, don’t like call on me, I don’t want anybody sitting next to me.” In his graduate program, however, when humor was used, he “found [himself] engaging in more conversation ... engaging a lot more with that versus the person that [he] knew two years ago sitting in class.” When humor was used in the classroom Tim felt increased “comfort and confidence” and was better able to contribute to class. Molly’s instructor’s use of humorous stories also opened her up to feeling comfortable asking more questions because she found herself wanting to know more about the content: “I tend to be a pretty inquisitive student, especially if I’m really interested in a class, so I, it definitely encouraged some questions for me.”

Similarly, Sandy found some relief from humor in the classroom by using it as a “communicative function” as well as a “reality checker.” Sandy saw humor as having “a communicative function in the way that language does ... humor has paved the way for things like eye contact to serve as meaningful communicative mechanisms.” She provided examples in which humor served as a form of communication between herself and her instructor in the classroom. There were moments in which she felt alone in her thinking, wondering if she was the only one in the classroom who noticed a lack of rigor in the program. Moments in which she caught the eye of an instructor confirmed for her that she was not alone in her way of thinking, which provided reassurance for Sandy. Additionally, she often felt that some questions students asked in class were “ridiculous,” thinking they should have more capacity for academic rigor. Sandy stated, “The instructor will catch my eye, and it was kind of like this understanding of you’re right to think this is a ridiculous question.” Similarly, Sandy was able to catch moments of humor with the instructor that served as a “reality checker” in the classroom stating:

There are times where you’re in a class, and you feel the material is kind of water[ed] down, and you’re not really sure, you’re kind of disoriented so it’s kind of like,” Okay, am I just being this weird sort of academic elitist, then I need to just relax.” Or ‘is this kind of being dampened down?’ And if it is, that’s fine, if it’s being watered down, but what helps me is, the instructor’s kind of confirmation like yeah this is being watered down. ‘You’re not mistaken in your thinking,’ you know so it’s kind of like it’s a it’s a reality checker.

Sandy offered the example “instead of saying ‘yes, Sally, your paper needs to be in separate paragraphs and spell check, and related to the content you’re being asked about,’” you instead have a pun or a joke or something to deflate that tension that was serving that same

communicative function without being explicit. This further highlighted how humor could be received as comforting to students within the classroom.

Researcher Reflexivity

Several steps, outlined in Chapter III, were taken for the purpose of promoting researcher reflexivity. The researcher utilized journals following each interview with participants guided by predetermined reflection questions (Appendix F). The auditor also had access to these journals to assess for potential researcher bias. The researcher described more in depth the role of the auditor as well as the member checking process.

Chapter III described the process in which the auditor was utilized to enhance the trustworthiness and rigor of the study. One of the roles of the auditor was to assess for any potential researcher bias that could impact the collection and analysis of data. The auditor had access to each researcher journal following each participant interview. The auditor did not note any potential bias they felt could have impacted the collection of data through participant semi-structured interviews. The auditor also went through the data analysis process both with and separate from the researcher. Because of this, the auditor spent much time with each participant's interview transcript, which allowed the auditor to further assess for potential research bias throughout the interview process. The primary researcher and auditor were able to reach consensus across all individual participant themes and individual textural descriptions. The primary researcher worked independently on the process of establishing a structural description for each individual participant through the utilization of imaginative variation. Once the structural description was completed, the primary researcher took the individual structural and individual structural descriptions to form an individual textural-structural description. This completed textural-structural description was sent to the auditor for changes and feedback. The

auditor did provide some feedback on the primary researcher's individual textural-structural descriptions. Some examples of the feedback the auditor provided and the primary researcher implemented were to change some of the names of themes to encapsulate more of the participants words, to add additional quotes to further include participant voice, and to make examples more clear. Once these edits were implemented, the primary researcher emailed the document to the individual participant and scheduled their member-checking meeting. During the member-checking meetings, the primary researcher and individual participant went through their textural-structural description to ensure the descriptions accurately encapsulated the participant experience. At this time participants were encouraged to provide any feedback to which the primary researcher changed within the document via track changes while sharing her screen.

A few participants did make changes to their textural-structural descriptions at this time. Sandy expressed worry around how she may be perceived when discussing her disappointment in the lack of academic rigor in her program. The researcher offered to remove some of that information or provide context, though the participant stated she did feel like description held fidelity of their interview and did not want to make changes. During this member-checking interview, Sandy provided some information around how she had experienced instructor use of humor since the interview, to which the researcher asked if she could add that to her experience. The updated structural-textural description was emailed to the participant for an extra check, to which the participant made a small wording edit before approving the description.

Angela also made a few changes to her structural-textural description of her experience during her member-checking interview. Overall, Angela felt the description encapsulated her experience well. At the end of her member-checking interview, Angela noted that she believed

that, not only did humor make her more comfortable in the classroom, it also made her classmates more comfortable. Angela stated the instructor's use of humor eased the tension in the classroom, especially being that everyone in the class was a first-year master's student. The researcher and Angela worked together to write an addition to the sub-theme Humor Helped Me Relate with My Professor and Classmates and Feel More Comfortable that portrayed the new information she shared. Additionally, Angela emphasized that, because it was her first year in the program, she was scared of "messing up" and the instructor's use of humor allowed her and her classmates to "feel like we could be messy." The researcher added this piece of information to the Humor Reminded Me I Could be Myself as a Clinician sub-theme to which the participant approved.

Once the individual descriptions were approved by each participant, the primary researcher and auditor worked together in the process of combining individual participant themes to construct a composite description of the participant experience. The primary researcher and auditor did reach consensus on this step of data analysis as well. The auditor did not note any bias through the reading of participant interview transcripts.

Conclusion

Thorough data analysis and researcher reflexivity resulted in a multitude of themes and sub-themes across all participants. Participant quotes coupled with a description of their experience through the use of imaginative variation provided a rich description of each participant's unique experience with the phenomenon. Once these individual structural-textural descriptions were found, they were then combined to create composite themes to describe the experience of the phenomenon across all participants. These themes described how instructor use of humor enhanced the student-teacher relationship as well as classroom learning. The findings

presented in this chapter addressed a gap in the literature regarding how counseling students experience instructor use of humor in the classroom. The findings are discussed further, including implications to the field of counselor education as well as suggestions for future research, in the next chapter.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Discussion and Implications

The following section further explores subordinate themes found in the study in conjunction with previous literature. Each theme will also be explored in relation to the implications for counselor educators. Three main themes emerged from the data: (a) Defining Humor, (b) Humor and Connection Versus Disconnection, and (c) Humor and Learning. Each superordinate theme was made up of sub-themes which are explored further.

Defining Humor Discussion and Implications

The first composite main theme to emerge from the data (Defining Humor) was endorsed by six out of seven participants. Within this theme, participants described humor in their own words. Two sub-themes made up this main theme and are discussed in further paragraphs: (a) What Makes Something Funny and (b) Humor is Subjective. Data from this main theme could be used to help counselor educators conceptualize their use of humor in the classroom, based on how students defined humor and by what they thought is funny.

What Makes Something Funny Discussion

This first sub-theme explored how participants defined humor as well as the characteristics they felt were needed to make something funny. This sub-theme was endorsed by five participants. Each participant defined humor in their own words. Some participants, like Sandy, went back and forth about the “slipperiness” of defining humor and whether or not

something was funny depending on the whether or not someone laughed. Other participants very easily and simply defined humor, such as Charlie who stated humor was anything that made her feel warm and happy. Some participants stated that whether or not someone laughed did not necessarily decide whether something was considered to be humorous. The definition of humor used for the purpose of the study was “a social mechanism with definite social functions” which “is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties” (Martineau, 1972, p. 114). Humor could be transmitted through many ways, some examples included through speech, writing, action, images, and music (Bremmer & Roodenburg, 1997). The humor response definition utilized for the study did align with the above participant definition of humor: How a listener responds to the stimulus of humor, some examples being laughter and smiling (Dziegielewska et al., 2003).

One participant, Sandy, discussed how humor could help us find “who our people are.” She described this as being due to shared values and shared knowledge, these attributes letting us know who we may be able to connect with. She also stated that, “humor that works well is the one that ... gives people an insight into who you are.” Sandy’s discussion of receptivity to humor being depended on shared values and knowledge was in line with Epstein and Jøker’s (2007) Threshold Theory of Humor. This theory stated that, in order for someone to find something funny, they had to have some sort of context or previous experience with the subject material. Similarly, Sandy’s statement aligned with humor research in relation to the counseling relationship. Within the counselor-client relationship humor could help with feelings of closeness through their shared knowledge and values (Goldin et al., 2006). She went on to state that, because of all of the above, humor also has the capacity to “exclude people.” Martineau’s (1972) Model of the Social Functions of Humor explored how humor could have an in-group or

out-group function, depending on the relationship of the giver and receiver as well as the context in which the humor was shared. Through this model, humor could be experienced as esteeming or disparaging to the receiver, depending on the variables at play. Similarly, in the field of counseling, it was suggested that counselors consider the values of clients when they were utilizing humor in session (Ricks et al., 2014).

What Makes Something Funny Implications

Participants generally defined humor as something lighthearted that made one feel warm and happy. Some included laughter in their definition, while others said there did not need to be laughter for something to be considered humorous. This was important to note for counselor educators, because it illuminated that the humor response was going to be different across students. This was important because it may not be easy for counselor educators to gauge the success of their humor in the classroom simply through the lens of whether or not students laughed. Also, one could not know if someone felt warm and happy in response to humor, unless they were explicitly asked.

As mentioned previously, Sandy mentioned humor helping one find “who our people are” based on shared knowledge and values, which aligned with counseling literature regarding relationship building. Counselor educators could use this information to inform how they utilized humor in the classroom. Because humor often came from a place of personal knowledge and values, students having opposing values or different knowledge may feel excluded when that sort of humor was used in the classroom. While some students may feel very connected with their instructor through shared values and knowledge, others may feel ostracized.

Another sentiment shared by some participants was that the content of the humor did not matter as much as the delivery of the humor. Vanessa believed that some were just innately more

funny than others. The essence of this message seemed to come down to authenticity and personality. Students found instructors funnier when they were good story tellers and were funny as part of their personality, rather than sharing simply humorous content. Counselor educators could receive this information as a push to be more authentic within the classroom, to not force humor for the sake of using humor, rather to let it happen naturally. The concept of authenticity is discussed more in depth in coming paragraphs, especially in relation to how it aligned with previous literature.

Humor is Subjective Discussion

The final sub-theme of Defining Humor encapsulated participants' experience of the subjectivity of humor and, thus, the "slipperiness" of trying to define humor. Two out of seven participants endorsed this sub-theme. Participants explored cultural differences in humor, what made humor successful, in addition to how humor came down to shared values and knowledge. All of the above is explored further in the context of what has been found in previous literature in the subsequent paragraphs.

Sandy and Billy both explored how receivers of humor may respond differently to the same humor stimulus based on various differing factors, such as identity. Linking this to the above sub-theme of What Makes Something Funny, even if all students laughed or did not laugh, it was still difficult to gauge whether or not the joke landed because, as some participants expressed, humor does not always have to end in laughter for it to be considered humorous. Sultanoff (1994) offered up a suggestion for how one could determine someone's receptivity to humor. These suggestions were made in the context of the counseling relationship, though may be helpful for counselor educators to use in the classroom as well, to help them decide whether or not students may be open to their use of humor. Sultanoff (1994) suggested counselors access

clients' receptivity to humor by observing the clients' use of humor first. What was the client's capacity to laugh at themselves? Did they use humor in their communication? Sultanoff (1994) also stated one could ask directly how humor played a part in the client's life. The researcher explored some examples of how to utilize this in the classroom in the following implications section. Dziegielewski et al. (2003) also agreed that assessing for receptivity to humor was an important first step before utilizing humor and stated that one must be aware of timing, what the client's perception may be, as well as have a solid therapeutic relationship before using humor in a therapeutic environment.

Sandy and Billy also offered up their perspectives on the subjectivity of humor due to differing social locations. Sandy discussed how humor may be received differently by students if it were from a female professor versus a male professor. Sandy had conducted research on gender differences in the classroom and applied that knowledge to the use of humor stating, "Like many things, with respect to humor, gender counts against female professors ... just like we see in basically every other context, the standards for what counts as humor is going to be higher for females than for males." Kotthoff (2006) found that women's humor was often marginalized both in the scientific world as well as in their day to day lives. She also found there were specific types of humor that were especially sensitive to gender differences: jokes about status, sexuality, social alignment, as well as aggression. She went on to note that women's humor being marginalized happened both covertly and overtly. Bressler et al. (2006) explored the importance of humor in men and women. Their research explored the importance of a sense of humor within relationships, especially romantic relationships, though the results may give insight into how humor was viewed between the two genders across all relationships, including the instructor-student relationship. Bressler et al. (2006) found that men valued their partners'

receptivity to their humor while women valued a partner who both produced humor and valued their use of humor. Similarly, women preferred partners who were humorous within all relationships, whereas men preferred partners who were specifically receptive to their use of humor.

Humor is Subjective Implications

Both Sandy and Billy discussed how people could interpret humor differently and that, according to Sandy, “there are aspects of humor that are receiver dependent.” Both participants offered examples in which they experienced firsthand how one’s use of humor could be received differently with different audiences. Sandy discussed a time in class when she laughed at an instructor’s joke and other students did not. Similarly, Billy discussed times in which he made a joke in a team meeting that resulted in their laughter, then told the same joke with a different team to no laughter. Counselor educators should be aware that, when they made an attempt at humor in the classroom, it may not be found to be funny by all students. Some students may laugh, others may not, some could even feel offended, depending on the topic. As mentioned in the above section, all of the above was linked to counseling literature regarding differing responses to humor, as well as how one may assess for the receiver’s receptivity to humor. While all of the above suggestions were within the counselor-client relationship, these suggestions may also be helpful to counselor educators in order to assist them in assessing student receptivity to humor within the classroom. Prior to utilizing humor in the classroom, counselor educators could first observe students in the classroom in order to gather knowledge regarding their own personal uses of humor. For example, do the students joke around with each other and, if so, what sort of humor did they use. Additionally, counselor educators could use a question regarding humor as a beginning icebreaker during an initial class period. A few suggestions of icebreaker questions

could be: “What role does humor play in your life” or “What is your favorite funny movie?” Student responses to these questions could inform counselor educators the degree to which humor would be received, which could inform the counselor educator’s future use of humor in that classroom.

Sally further explored how identity could impact humor receptivity, specifically related to gender. While the results of humor research explored in the above discussion section were specific to relationships, especially sexual relationships, there was potential that same gender implications of humor could be seen within the classroom. Students who were men may be more interested in whether or not their femme presenting instructors found them funny rather than whether the instructors were funny themselves. So a feminine presenting instructor’s use of humor may not matter much to masculine presenting students, they may be more concerned with whether or not the instructor found them funny. Future research, which will be discussed further in a subsequent section, could explore the differences in receptivity to instructor use of humor based on gender.

In continuation of the exploration of humor and social locations, Billy discussed differences in humor based on language spoken. He had an experience in one of his courses with a non-native English-speaking instructor and felt as if they did not understand each other’s humor due to the differences in where they grew up, stating the professor “just didn’t understand American humor.” While participants only discussed gender and nationality when it came to social locations impacting receptivity to humor, one may assume this extended beyond to various differing intersecting identities. Counselor educators could use the above information to inform them, when teaching a group of students from varied backgrounds, that their use of humor may not land with all students due to differing lived experience. Harris (1989) warned that, even if a

strong rapport was built, one must still consider the cultural identities of those receiving one's use of humor. Even if a counselor educator felt they understood the differences in cultural receptivity to humor, one must not make assumptions, generalize people of color into one cultural group, or use humor from a culture that one did not belong to (Vereen et al., 2006). That being said, even knowing not everyone would receive humor the same, Billy did not believe instructors needed to be cautious with their use of humor, stating, "I can't control other people's behaviors or the way they react to situations, so all I can do is be genuine."

Humor and Connection versus Disconnection Discussion and Implications

The second main theme to emerge from the data (Humor and Connection Versus Disconnection) was endorsed by all seven participants. This main theme encapsulated participant experience with humor and their relationships within the classroom, especially related to their relationship with their instructor. Within this composite theme, participants discussed topics such as feeling more comfortable speaking up in class, feeling closer with their instructors, feeling comfortable with their peers, and in contrast feeling disconnected with some instructors depending on how or if humor is used. This theme was made up of three sub-themes which are discussed further in relation to the role as counselor educator: (a) Humor is Humanizing, (b) Feeling Connected with Professors, and (c) Humor and Disconnection.

Humor is Humanizing Discussion

This sub-theme was made up of the experiences of six out of the seven participants. Within this sub-theme, participants discussed ways in which they found humor to humanize their professors, thus, helping to foster more connection. Participants also explored how humor could

be humanizing within the helping professions, whether it be to build rapport with clients or to help alleviate some of the feelings of seriousness within the field of counseling.

Charlie noted the “vulnerability” she experienced instructors having who used humor in the classroom and saw them in a “positive light” because of it. She saw this “vulnerability” as stemming from those instructors showing up “fully human” in the classroom. She also noted having more respect for them because of the vulnerability expressed and felt it easier to connect with them as well. Vanessa shared this sentiment, stating she was able to relate more with professors who used humor, because she saw them as “very authentic.” Molly echoed this by stating her instructors who used humor “seemed so human.” Tim’s instructor’s use of humor reminded Tim that his instructors were “people just like you are.” All of the above endorsed the previously mentioned authenticity component to humor. Students seemed to connect most with instructors who used humor because it gave them a glimpse into who the instructor was as a person.

The concept of authenticity being tied to the receptivity to humor was shown in the literature as well. Gladding and Drake Wallace (2016) stated that, in order to utilize humor therapeutically, it must be authentic. Also, because of the vulnerable nature of humor, it has been found to equal out a power dynamic more in support of a more egalitarian relationship (Franzini, 2001). Richman (1996) also discussed the humanizing nature of humor, stating that laughter could draw a counselor and client together through their shared humanness. Chapman and Chapman-Santana (1995) endorsed the importance of being authentic with use of humor and warned counselors that, if they felt awkward utilizing humor in their day-to-day life, they should avoid utilizing humor within their work, one may postulate the same could be suggested for counselor educators in the classroom. Moreover, Richman (1996) stated to counselors, “do not

force it, if there's any doubt, don't" (p. 560). Richman (1996) went on to state that humor always entailed a risk, that it should be used with caution.

A domino effect often happened in class as a result of instructor use of humor. Because students experienced their instructors who used humor as being more authentic, they, in turn, started showing up more authentically themselves and felt more comfortable speaking up in class and fostering more connections with their peers and instructors. This domino effect reminded the researcher of person-centered counseling, a theory in which she ascribed to within her role as a counselor. Person-centered counseling emphasized the importance of showing up congruent/authentic with clients as a means to foster the relationship (Rogers, 1980). This too had a domino effect in which clients were able to show up more authentically within session as well.

Billy, Charlie, and Angela all reflected upon how humor could be useful and humanizing outside of the classroom as well, especially in relation to the field of counseling. Both Billy and Angela discussed how serious the field could be and how humor could relieve some of that seriousness for counselors and counselors-in-training. Billy worried that not using humor as a counselor could result in compassion fatigue or burnout. Billy's concern was in line with the counseling literature which stated that humor could, in fact, help prevent both early client termination as well as protect against counselor burnout (Goldin et al., 2006; McBrien, 1993). The researchers went on to state that humor could be used to break up the monotony of a serious conversation, which was in line with the participants' way of thinking that humor could help to relieve some of the seriousness felt within the classroom. Billy and Charlie both noted how humor could be beneficial to clients because of its inherent humanizing nature. As mentioned

previously, Richman (1996) also emphasized the humanizing nature of humor within the counseling room.

Humor is Humanizing Implications

Many participants emphasized the importance of authenticity when it came to instructor use of humor. While much of the literature on humor within the context of counselor education was related to the counselor role rather than the educator role, participant experience showed that the rapport building qualities of humor found within the counseling relationship could extend to the classroom as well. This rapport building could be further emphasized through the authentic use of humor by instructors. Students reported feeling closer with their instructors who used humor because it reminded them that their instructors were people too and they felt like they got to know their instructors more as humans. Counselor educators could authentically infuse humor throughout their teaching in order to humanize themselves which, in turn, had the potential to positively impact the student instructor relationship. Moreover, utilizing humor in the classroom could be seen as vulnerable and authentic by students, which may result in the better fostering of connections in the classroom due to students feeling more comfortable showing up as themselves.

Participants also explored how their own use of humor could enhance their work with clients and prevent burnout, which, as discussed above, was in line with the counseling humor literature. The use of humor in the counseling room could be emphasized by counselor educators to counselors-in-training in the classroom. As counselor educators, when we discuss rapport building with clients in the classroom, humor could be a suggestion in which we offered students in training. Similarly, humor could be offered as a suggestion to students as a way to prevent and/or cope with compassion fatigue and burnout. Lastly, counselor educators could also utilize

humor in the classroom as a means of breaking up some of the more serious topics discussed in class.

Based on both the literature in the above discussion and participant experience, counselor educators should not force humor nor should they utilize humor in the classroom if it was not something they regularly used in their day to day lives. Per student experience, they could pick up on when instructors were being disingenuous with their use of humor which could lead to them feeling more disconnected with their instructors. Vanessa did note a worry that her words of encouragement for the use of humor in the classroom would be misinterpreted by readers. She wanted to clarify that, while she did see humor as a positive tool to be used in the classroom, she did not want counselor educators to get the impression that they should force themselves to use humor if it was not something they engaged in authentically. Vanessa wanted instructors to be themselves, to not try too hard to be funny, stating that it “feels like ‘please like me.’” Vanessa went on to state, “bringing your personality, even if you’re not a funny person, just bringing you into the classroom, and not a teacher, is so important.” This further emphasized the importance of authenticity when utilizing humor in the classroom. Most participants illuded to being able to tell when humor felt authentic versus fake, and reported feeling more disconnected from professors they experienced as fake. Similarly, Sandy discussed how “pandering” humor left her feeling disconnected from her instructors. “Pandering” humor, according to Sandy, was “the opposite of authentic.” She felt if an instructor used “pandering” humor, they were trying too hard to force rapport with the class.

Feeling Connected with Professors Discussion

This sub-theme included data from all participant experiences. All counselors-in-training who participated in the study reported feelings connected with their professors who used humor

in the classroom, this was especially true in comparison to their instructors who did not utilize humor. Within this sub-theme, participants explored feeling higher levels of trust with their humor using professors, feeling more open to discussing more than just course content with their professors who used humor, distinguishing between different types of humor and how it impacted their connection, feeling less intimidated, as well as feeling closer with their peers.

Vanessa, Charlie, and Billy all described feeling more trust and respect for their professors who used humor and in turn, felt more comfortable coming to their professors beyond that of just course content. Billy stated that, “if [he] actually had a real concern” he could come to his professors who used humor because the relationship felt so strong. Billy also noted that, “there was three professors at the beginning, and I used two of them for a professional reference, and one of them wasn’t humorous, so I didn’t contact them.” Charlie also discussed how she trusted her professors more who used humor, stating she did not “have to wonder if they’re acting one way to you, but then, behind the scenes they’re thinking she’s crazy.” She went on to state that, “if they had a problem with you they would be more likely to address the problem ... without you having to go through all the private meetings.” All of the above was evidence of how humor could impact the student-teacher relationship in a positive way. Relationship building has been a cornerstone of all of the roles we have as a counselor educator (counselor, educator, and supervisor). According to participant experience, humor could be a tool used to further connections in the classroom. Previous literature has found that humor was a helpful tool in building and maintaining relationships (Martineau, 1972; Sultanoff, 1997). Sultanoff (1997) believed that people were more likely to connect with others when they experienced humor with them. This was also true with strangers connecting for the first time (Fraley & Aron, 2004). Similarly, previous literature has found humor to be a wonderful rapport builder within

counseling, so one may postulate, if humor built rapport within the counseling context, it would in the classroom with counselors as well (Falk & Hill, 1992; Haig, 1986; Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013). Gkorezis et al. (2014) studied the use of humor in relation to leader effectiveness. Their study found that followers found leaders who used humor to be effective as well as to trust leaders more in mediation. While this research was not specific to the field of counselor education, one may see counselor educators as leaders within the classroom. The participant experience could endorse the notion of trusting their leaders in the classroom more when they utilized humor more.

While the purpose of the study was to specifically explore instructor use of humor and the student-teacher relationship, some participants discussed humor impacting both their relationship with their instructor as well as with their peers. Previous research has found that shared laughter could increase group cohesion as well as group belongingness and well-being, which has the potential to enhance group productivity as well (Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Richman, 1996; Sultanoff, 2013). Similarly, Duffy and Jones (1995) found that, when instructors used humor and were more playful within the classroom, communication w increased.

Feeling Connected with Professors Implications

All participants reported feeling closer with their instructors who used humor. Students also trusted their instructors more who utilized humor. Humor did not just impact the student-teacher relationship in a way that opened up students to discuss content with professors; students also felt comfortable having personal conversations with their professors. While counselor educators should not act as counselors for students, there were times in which students needed to have difficult and personal conversations with their instructors. For example, perhaps students may need to process countertransference they were experiencing with a client and having a

relationship with an instructor who they felt comfortable being more open with could help in that processing. Charlie's statement regarding her trust that professors who used humor would come to her if there was an issue rather than scheduling a more formal private meeting also emphasized that the resulting trust from humor use could positively impact difficult conversations, such as remediation, that counselor educators would need to have with students regarding professional competencies.

Vanessa had also noted, "What it really boils down to is not like the effectiveness of retaining content, it's more like, do your students love you, like do they like wanna come to you for things, do they trust you, do they relate to you?" While in the coming paragraphs humor and learning are discussed, it seemed to Vanessa that the most important result of humor was not learning, it was connection. Counselors know that the counseling relationship was the biggest predictor for change in the therapeutic relationship, perhaps this may be the same within the counseling classroom. Based on Vanessa's experience with her humorous instructors, she seemed to value those classroom connections more than the specific learning in the classroom. Perhaps the relationship could be used as a vessel for learning and more focus could be placed on the student-teacher relationship rather than the content itself. Bryant et al. (1980) actually found that students overall were more likely to rate their professors who used humor as more appealing, better teachers, and better presenters, especially in comparison to professors who did not use humor.

Vanessa compared and contrasted the differences in her instructors' use of humor and related those experiences to her feelings of closeness with them. The researcher and participant joked that she was discussing a Goldilocks situation, in which one professor seemed to use humor too much, another too little, and one that was just right. The instructor that Vanessa

connected the most with was her “just right” instructor who was able to banter back and forth with her in class, while also staying on topic. While she felt connected with her instructor who used humorous stories, she felt less connected with him in comparison to the instructor who bantered with her because the banter felt more personal whereas the humorous stories felt as if he was engaging with an audience rather than individuals. Vanessa explored this by stating, ““engaged with [her] as an individual ... whereas you know the ethics professor, it’s like [he’s] engaging with the class as like an audience, and so he is a relatable figure in that way, but [she doesn’t] know him like personally enough.” On the other side of the coin, her professor who did not seem to appreciate humor, she did not feel connected with. This Goldilocks presentation of humor in the classroom could offer counselor educators somewhat of a scale in which humor could be effective, less effective, or distancing when there was a lack of humor. While the literature described humor that was inclusive of all listeners to be effective, it seemed from Vanessa’s experience having that individual humorous relationship led to her feeling special and more connected with her professor. This was also an indicator that students in a humorless classroom may feel less connected with their instructor overall.

Vanessa also stated her classrooms felt “like a community” because of the closeness that had been established through the use of humor. This was especially meaningful to Vanessa, who had just moved to the area and did not know many people. Tim also felt closer to his peers because of the community that had been established within a classroom of humor. Tim came from “one of the largest cohorts so far” which was very clicky and found that humor “opens the door for conversation amongst the whole cohort.” This was evidence that counselor educator use of humor not only impacted the student-instructor relationship, but it also had the capacity to impact the classroom culture enough that peer relationships were strengthened as well.

Humor and Disconnection Discussion and Implications

While all participants endorsed humor in the classroom, Vanessa, Molly, and Sandy also discussed how humor as well as lack of humor also had the potential to result in feelings of disconnection. Vanessa reported not feeling connected with her professor who did not use humor stating, “it’s harder to connect or to really appreciate the class, at least the teacher, when I feel like I can’t connect with them.” She also noted not feeling comfortable speaking with her professor much outside of class either stating:

I would probably never go to her about anything personally ... because in my mind she does not fulfill that role as like a person, she’s a person obviously, but I mean she doesn’t feel that role of like I’m your friend and I’m here, for you, you know ... I trust her to do what she’s supposed to but it’s just she would not be my first choice.

Vanessa also felt like classes drag on where humor was not used; she also felt they were harder. Molly also felt disconnected from class material in classrooms with an instructor who did not use humor stating she felt like the instructor “isn’t totally involved or invested.” Just as counselor educators should be aware of how humor could be a tool in forming connections with students, it must also be noted that a lack of humor could result in feelings of disconnection within the instructor-student relationship. According to participants, a lack of humor in the classroom could lead to students feeling disconnected with both the instructor and the course material. One could not help but wonder how this may impact student ratings of instruction as well, which could have the potential to impact promotion.

Another aspect mentioned by participants related to the subjectivity of humor was that there were “multiple sides to using humor;” it was “multifaceted,” which could “really upset a lot of people” according to Molly. Similar to Sandy discussing how humor could exclude others and

create an out group, as discussed within the first sub-theme, humor could be polarizing. Throughout interviews, participants often offered up political examples of humor which they found to be polarizing. This led the researcher to believe it may be best for counselor educators to shy away from potentially polarizing humor, especially political humor, within the classroom so as not to ostracize any students who may hold differing beliefs. R. A. Berk (2014) suggested avoiding any sort of potentially offensive humor within the classroom; this included but would not be limited to vulgarity, sarcasm, profanity, ridicule, innuendo, as well as sensitive personal experiences.

Humor and Learning Discussion and Implications

The final main theme to emerge from the data was Humor and Learning. This main theme was endorsed by six out of seven participants. This theme explored participant experience with how humor in the classroom impacted their learning. This main theme was made up of two sub-themes: (a) Being Funny is the Best Way to Keep Me Engaged But It Can Also be Distracting, and (b) Humor Eases My Nerves and Instills Hope. The aforementioned sub-themes are discussed further.

Being Funny is the Best Way to Keep Me Engaged But It Can Also Be Distracting Discussion

The first sub-theme was comprised of the experiences of five out of seven participants. Within this sub-theme, participants explored how humor was a tool in their learning in the classroom. Participants reported humor helping them retain course material, helping them stay engaged and excited about class, and helping class feel more fun. In addition to the upsides to learning, one participant also discussed how humor had the potential to be distracting in class.

Vanessa, Angela, Tim, and Charlie discussed how humor helped them connect to class material. Vanessa found that funny anecdotes about the material helped her retain the information. For example, one of her professors had a son and he often related stories about his son's development to the different developmental stages they were learning in class. She also noted that humor could be used more to connect class material, even encouraged professors to work humor into their lesson plan. Some further suggestions, based on literature, that humor could be used in the classroom were sharing funny cartoons or comic strips, telling jokes, assigning funny readings, sharing funny personal anecdotes, riddles, puns, using humorous multimedia, or including humorous answers within multiple choice exams (Bryant et al., 1979; Ness, 1989; Rosenfeld & Anderson, 1985). Additionally, per Vanessa's suggestion, counselor educators could plan the use of humor within their lesson plans. Kher et al. (1999) believed that part of creating a teaching environment that was conducive to student learning was to be creative. Humor has been a form of creativity that could be used within the classroom to create that learning environment (Dziegielewski et al., 2003). Humor has also been linked to helping students recall and retain information as well as enhancing student attention (Bryant et al., 1979; Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Hill, 1988; R. M. Kaplan & Pascoe, 1977).

Not only did students retain more information when humor was used, they also felt more engaged and energized in class. Vanessa stated that humor made "class interesting" and that she "listen[s] more" as well, even adding that "being funny is the best way to keep [her] engaged in class." Molly echoed this sentiment by stating, "the funnier things are, the more [she] pay[s] attention." Within the counseling literature, humor has been found to enhance communication as well as attending skills because it helped to hold one's attention (Sultanoff, 1992). Molly also found she was more "interested" in the course where her instructor used humor, stating she was

“fully engaged in what [she] was learning.” Vanessa also noted that she felt “engaged” in class with an instructor who used humor because she felt the instructor was “very engaged also.”

Previous literature has found that humor offered students a unique perspective on the lesson as well as opened up students and teachers to more spontaneity within the classroom (Wlodkowski, 1985). Tim also found himself more engaged in classrooms with humor, not only because he felt the material was more interesting, but he also found himself feeling more engaged in classroom discussion. Ness (1989) found that humor had the capacity to enhance student curiosity and desire to learn. Dziegielewski et al. (2003) also stated that humor could be used as an icebreaker because it helped to relieve tension as well as increase group cohesion and belongingness. Humor could also be a tool educators used to present class material in a way that students found more entertaining (Ness, 1989).

***Being Funny is the Best Way to Keep
Me Engaged But It Can Also Be
Distracting Implications***

Tim noted that humor in the classroom really “pulls [him] more into the topic.” He compared instructors using PowerPoint versus them using humor in class and felt like he was more able to retain information when humor was used. Charlie felt similarly, stating classes without humor felt “dead” and harder to pay attention to. Charlie emphasized this by stating, “it’s a lot harder to remember and like, recall the information” when humor was not used in the classroom. Similarly, Angela stated that humor in the classroom was “really one of the best ways that [she] learned.” All of the above examples showcased how humor could be used not only as a rapport building tool in the classroom, it had use as a learning tool as well. Traditionally, many educators often would teach through lecture with the use of PowerPoint slides, however, according to participants, they did not retain information well through this teaching modality.

Instead, students reported being more likely to remember information when it was connected to something humorous. Counselor educators could connect course content through their own humorous anecdotes.

Counselor educators have experienced the feeling of looking out across the sea of students with glazed over eyes, disinterested in the lesson being presented in front of them. Humor was a potential tool that could be used by counselor educators to keep students engaged and involved within the classroom. Participants reported the classroom feeling more fun when humor was utilized by their instructors. Specifically, Vanessa and Tim both discussed how much more they enjoyed humor being used as an icebreaker in class rather than the traditional icebreakers instructors plan. Tim felt that, if humor was used as an icebreaker, “it would help with a lot ... it would kind of like calm people.” Vanessa even stated that icebreakers “are like the worst for [her]” when she was advocating for humor to be used instead. Counselor educators who were attempting to build classroom cohesion, comfort, and relationships could utilize humor in place of traditional icebreakers used during those first few weeks of class. Some examples could include starting class with a funny comic strip that pertained to the day’s topic, instructors could also start class with a funny story pertaining to the topic being studied, or instructors could have students share silly knock knock jokes each week at the start of class.

Participants expanded further on how class was more fun when humor was utilized. Vanessa, Angela, and Charlie all reported feelings that classes where humor was used were more fun than classes where humor was not used. Vanessa stated humor made “class more interesting ... class becomes a space where it’s fun to be, which is so important in like covid times.” Angela stated that humor “just made learning fun and more accessible ... I was just like wow; she just makes this whole learning process so fun.” Charlie echoed these sentiments by stating that, when

she was in a classroom with an instructor who used humor, she felt like “this is fun, this class is fun, this information is fun, learning is fun.” Class would not have to be dry and serious, humor could be a way for counselor educators to infuse some fun and excitement into the course.

While overall, all participants were in favor of humor being used in the classroom to enhance the learning, Vanessa did offer a downside to the use of humor in the classroom. Vanessa found that humor could distract from course content, specifically in relation to her professor’s long-winded stories that often got them off topic. She stated that her instructor often did not get to all of the content because “he gets like a little lost in the sauce sometimes of his own stories.” Vanessa had to compensate for this lack of content outside of the class stating that she would have to be extra careful with her readings to make sure she was retaining the content, knowing it may not be expanded upon in class. Vanessa noted that she “enjoys his classes much more, but [she] also [is] probably going to need to study ethics a little harder.” Counselor educators should keep in mind that too little or too much humor could detract from student learning. Too little humor could result in students feeling disengaged, whereas too much humor could detract from student learning.

Humor Eases My Nerves and Instills Hope Discussion

The final sub-theme to emerge from Humor and Learning (Humor Eases My Nerves and Instills Hope) was endorsed by six out of seven participants. The theme encapsulated participants’ emotional experience of humor. Participants reported feeling more confident and comfortable in classes where humor was utilized. Participants also recounted feeling their nerves lessen as a result of instructor use of humor. One participant also reported feeling more hope about his program because of an instructor’s use of humor.

Charlie, Vanessa, Tim, Billy, and Angela all reported having anxiety and nerves when they started the program and feeling the relief of those anxious nerves through their instructors' use of humor in the classroom. Charlie discussed feeling "really nervous" as well as having "definitely that anxiety" on her first day of class in her counseling program. Charlie went on to state that, "the professor, like used humor, that would all of a sudden, that nervousness, would, for me personally, it would go away, and it would just make me feel, like, way more comfortable and kind of included." Charlie also reported feeling "more confident after the use of humor," as well as feeling more "I'm comfortable, I got this." Vanessa also felt nervous at the beginning of her program and worried her program would be difficult. She noted that her first professor, which was her "first dip into grad school," was "the most poignant one" and "had the most profound effect on [her]." This professor's use of humor in that first class led Vanessa to feeling like "this is going to be fun, this is not gonna be a hellish 3 years, we're going to get along ... that really calmed my nerves down." Much like Charlie and Vanessa, Tim experienced high nerves during his early experience in his counseling program. "All of [Tim's] teachers [were] Doctors" which felt "very intimidating" for him. Tim reported feeling "relief" when humor was used in the classroom and felt his intimidation start to dissipate. This was similar to what had been found in counseling literature which stated that humor could help to balance out power dynamics and help others feel less intimidated due to the vulnerability shared through engaging with humor (Chapman & Chapman-Santana, 1995; Franzini, 2001). Similarly, Billy had worries at the beginning of his program as well. In his orientation to the program, Billy remembered feeling "uncomfortable" and feeling like the program was going to be "intense." He was a part of his program's "inaugural cohort" and wondered "what have I gotten myself into." After that orientation, he was in his first class with a professor who used humor. He recalled feeling

“emotions like relief but happy.” He was worried about the program prior to that, then his instructor’s use of humor gave him “hope” that he would “be able to continue on” in his program. It was also a reminder for him that he would be able to “use humor as well, so that opened up the whole avenue that feels to be a little bit easier.” Lastly, Angela also experienced her nerves dissipating due to instructor use of humor. She felt scared to make mistakes within the profession due to the seriousness within her ethics class. The juxtaposition of the seriousness of her ethics class with her instructor who told humorous stories helped to put her mind at ease. She also noted that her instructor’s humorous stories “eased that tension, and brought that kind of like that seriousness down.”

All of the above were examples in which students felt more comfortable and less anxious due to instructor use of humor in the classroom. The participants’ experience of lowered anxiety was supported by previous research which stated that humor could help reduce anxiety, reduce negative reactions, as well as reduce stress (Anderson & Arnoult, 1989; Moran & Massam, 1999; Porterfield, 1987; Robinson, 1977; Zwerling, 1955). Humor could also be used as a coping tool of stress by offering the receiver a new perspective (Sultanoff, 1997). Also, humor could help one cope with emotional distress (Sultanoff, 1992, 1997). Because humor has had the potential to lower anxiety and emotional distress, introducing humor into the classroom may help students be more receptive to difficult material as well as impact their test performance positively (R. A. Berk, 2014; Bryant et al., 1980; Korobkin, 1988). Similarly, humor could be a tool within courses with sensitive material, such as human sexuality, because it could help to balance out the material as well as promote learning (Adams, 1974).

The comfort level discussed by participants extended beyond those first few days of class and ultimately led to them feeling more comfortable overall in class which opened them up to

more robust participation. Both Charlie and Tim shared personal experiences with how humor helped them contribute to class more. Charlie stated that, when an instructor used humor, she was “more likely to contribute” to class due to the instructor creating “an environment where, like, it feels easy to discuss with [her] peers.” Tim also noted how instructor use of humor played a part in his classroom presentations stating that his “presentations for classes are entirely different depending on [his] instructor.” Tim stated that, when he gave presentations in class with an instructor who did not utilize humor, he “was sweating bullets,” that he “was so nervous, like [he] didn’t want to do it.” Both experiences highlighted how students could feel more confident and comfortable in the classroom through instructor use of humor and how that confidence and comfortability could translate into higher levels of classroom participation. Tim especially felt more comfortable speaking up in class when he was in a course with an instructor who regularly used humor. He reported feeling increased “comfort and confidence” when it came to his classroom contributions. This was counter to his experience in his undergraduate program where he was quiet in class because he perceived his instructors as being dry and serious. Similarly, Molly felt more comfortable asking questions in class with her instructor who used humor. Because of her instructor’s use of humor, Molly felt more engaged with the material which made her more interested in the class which, in turn, “encouraged some questions for [her].” Utilizing humor in the classroom as an instructor could have the potential to encourage more classroom participation. This notion was supported by previous literature. Students were more likely to learn when they were a part of a positive learning environment and humor was a tool that could be used in order to provide such an environment for students (R. A. Berk, 2014; Hill, 1988; Kher et al., 1999). Research also indicated that humor could support cooperation and student

interaction in the classroom as well as openness and spontaneity (R. A. Berk, 2014; Dziegielewski et al., 2003; Wlodkowski, 1985).

***Humor Eases My Nerves and Instills
Hope Implications***

As a counselor educator, the researcher often encouraged students to never lose sight of how nervous clients were in their first session. The researcher suggested the same to counselor educators, do not lose sight of how anxious students were at the start of their program. The above participant experience showcased some of the nerves students felt during the beginning stages of their counseling programs. According to participants, instructor use of humor was an effective way to ease some of those beginning nerves. Counselor educators who taught courses during those first semesters of their program could use humor within the classroom to put students at ease, lower their anxiety, and increase their confidence and comfortability within the classroom. Speaking from personal experience, as an educator, one of the things the researcher encouraged most within the class was classroom participation. This request was harder for some students than others. Based on participant experience, humor could be utilized as a tool to encourage more classroom participation. Participants in the study reported feeling more comfortable not only with their instructors but also within the classroom when their instructors used humor.

Sandy saw humor in the classroom as at times acting as a “reality checker” for her due to its “communicative function.” She described this “communicative function” as humor paving “the way for things like eye contact to serve as meaningful communicative mechanisms.” There were moments in the classroom she felt alone in her thinking that the program lacked academic rigor. She found herself frustrated by what felt like “ridiculous” questions by her peers. At times humor served as a mechanism to let her know she was not alone in her thinking: “the instructor will catch my eye, and it was kind of like this understanding of you’re right to think this is a

ridiculous question.” This “reality checker” provided comfort to Sandy within the classroom so she did not feel so alone in her experience. While this was only one participant experience out of seven, it would still be important to note for counselor educators that humor could serve a “communicative function” for students in a way that provided them comfort and belongingness within the classroom.

Limitations

While the researcher took several steps to ensure trustworthiness and rigor within the present study, there were some limitations. The first of which being that the researcher knew some of the participants prior to their interview. Similarly, for some of the participants, the researcher knew the instructor they were discussing. Due to snowball sampling as well as the sharing of the recruitment letter by colleagues, many of the participants who reached out were within the institution in which the researcher worked or were within an institution to which the researcher knew an instructor. The intuition of the researcher was that participants were being truthful within their interviews, however, there was no way to be certain participants were not holding back in order to not speak ill of someone the researcher may know. The researcher tried to account for this by assuring participants their information would be deidentified and the information gathered from the interview would remain anonymous. Even with those precautions in place, it was possible participants did not feel fully comfortable sharing information about instructors with whom the researcher had a relationship with. Moreover, another precaution taken to account for trustworthiness was the researcher making certain she did not interview any students who had her as an instructor of record. Any students who might have been enrolled in a course taught by the researcher were unable to participate or only participated prior to the start of the class they had in common.

Secondly, because of the methods of recruitment, there was not much diversity in the region in which the participants resided. As stated previously, students were recruited by the sharing of the recruitment letter by colleagues and by snowball sampling. Because of this, many participants resided within the same institution as well as within the same region. Only the midwestern, western, and southern regions of the United States were represented within the sample of students interviewed for this study. Similarly, while there was some variability in identities across participants, the sample was not representative of all ethnic and racial backgrounds, affectional orientations, genders, socio economic standings, ability statuses, or among other additional diverse identities.

The researcher also conducted participant interviews through the virtual platform, Zoom. The rationale for meeting participants virtually rather than in person was to promote more geographical diversity across participants in an attempt to make the results more transferable. Utilizing a virtual platform left the data collection process open to technical difficulties which did arise during a few of the interviews. The only technical difficulty to arise in the data collection process was the cutting in and out of the feed due to internet connectivity issues. Troubleshooting this technical difficulty may have elicited frustration within both the researcher and participants. There was potential that this technical difficulty could have impacted the participant experience as well as the therapeutic conditions of the interview which may have led participants to be less willing to discuss their experience as openly. Some of the technical issues arose during the times participants were speaking and the researcher had to interrupt them to let them know their feed had cut out and vice versa. While this issue did occur a few times, it was very brief, and it was the hope of the researcher that the disruption was minimal for the participants involved. Participants did not state feeling flustered with these technological

disruptions nor were their non-verbal behaviors indicative of frustration from the researcher's perspective. However, one could not know with certainty these interruptions did not impact interviews. These sorts of issues would not have arisen had the interviews been in person which led the researcher to wondering whether the participants may have been more open to sharing their experience had they been in person without technological interruption.

Another potential limitation of virtual interviews was the barrier to researcher intuition due to her lack of ability to see all participants' non-verbal behaviors. The researcher relied on her intuition throughout the data collection to assess potential emotional reactions that could be further discussed to develop a textural description of the phenomenon. Without being able to see participants' entire body, the researcher could have missed some participant reactions (such as nervously tapping their foot) that could have assisted the researcher in gathering more information through follow-up questions.

As mentioned in Chapter III, the researcher came into this study with some assumptions based on her own experiences and identities. In the researcher's experience, cis women, an identity she has held, were often seen as less funny than their male counterparts. The researcher did wonder if her being a cis woman could have potentially impacted the participants' willingness to be open about their experience of humor. While the researcher did not feel at any point during interviews as if her gender was impeding the interview process at all, there was no way to know for certain that was the case.

Future Research

This dissertation was the first study exploring how master's in counseling students experienced instructor use of humor in the classroom. Because of this being the first study of its kind, there would be much more to explore regarding instructor use of humor within this

population. In Chapter II, the researcher described some of the differences in humor across varying ethnic groups. Future research could explore specifically how master's in counseling students experience instructor use of humor in relation to their intersecting identities. Similarly, future research could explore how students experienced instructor use of humor in the classroom across varying instructor identities. For example, how do students experience instructor use of humor with a female presenting versus male presenting instructor? Additionally, the researcher suggested future researchers collect case study data in order to gain knowledge regarding the differences of experiences of humor within the same classroom. Future studies could also explore how non-native English speakers experience instructor use of humor within an English speaking classroom.

Future research could also recruit using different methods in order to achieve a more diverse sample. As mentioned previously, only three regions of the United States were represented within the sample and varied recruitment or longer recruitment periods of time could enhance the regional diversity of the sample. Similarly, because of the sampling method, the researcher had a relationship with some of the participants or knew the instructor in which the participants were speaking of. Future research could utilize a differing sampling method, recruit participants through different means or disqualify participants from participating if there was any personal knowledge of the instructors being discussed. While one could not know for sure if this impeded the present study, future research could protect against this potential variable. Moreover, future studies could prioritize the inclusion of more diverse identities in order to learn more of the experiences of humor across cultures.

Many participants discussed how humor impacted their learning. Future research could explore further how humor could be used as a teaching tool and how it could enhance student

learning. Some participants also explored how different types of humor could enhance or detract from the learning environment. Future research could focus on types of instructor use of humor and how students may experience those types of humor within the classroom. Participants also discussed how the classroom environment was impacted by instructor use of humor, both relating to their own feelings of comfort and confidence as well as their relationship with peers. Future research could explore how humor impacted the classroom environment as well as how humor impacted cohort dynamics and relationships.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the study and discussed the implications in relation to the field of counselor education. Additionally, results were discussed in relation to previous research findings. The findings in this study encapsulated the experience of counselors-in-training within a classroom where an instructor used humor. Moreover, limitations of the present study were discussed. Finally, suggestions for further research were provided.

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APPENDIX A
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



UNIVERSITY OF
NORTHERN COLORADO

Institutional Review Board

Date: 06/30/2022

Principal Investigator: Claire Critchlow

Committee Action: IRB EXEMPT DETERMINATION – New Protocol

Action Date: 06/30/2022

Protocol Number: 2205038808

Protocol Title: A Moustakas Phenomenological Analysis of How Counseling Master's Students Experience Instructor Use of Humor in the Classroom

Expiration Date:

The University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board has reviewed your protocol and determined your project to be exempt under 45 CFR 46.104(d)(702) for research involving

Category 2 (2018): EDUCATIONAL TESTS, SURVEYS, INTERVIEWS, OR OBSERVATIONS OF PUBLIC BEHAVIOR. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met: (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects; (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by 45 CFR 46.111(a)(7).

You may begin conducting your research as outlined in your protocol. Your study does not require further review from the IRB, unless changes need to be made to your approved protocol.

As the Principal Investigator (PI), you are still responsible for contacting the UNC IRB office if and when:



- You wish to deviate from the described protocol and would like to formally submit a modification request. Prior IRB approval must be obtained before any changes can be implemented (except to eliminate an immediate hazard to research participants).
- You make changes to the research personnel working on this study (add or drop research staff on this protocol).
- At the end of the study or before you leave The University of Northern Colorado and are no longer a student or employee, to request your protocol be closed. *You cannot continue to reference UNC on any documents (including the informed consent form) or conduct the study under the auspices of UNC if you are no longer a student/employee of this university.
- You have received or have been made aware of any complaints, problems, or adverse events that are related or possibly related to participation in the research.

If you have any questions, please contact the Research Compliance Manager, Nicole Morse, at 970-351-1910 or via e-mail at nicole.morse@unco.edu. Additional information concerning the requirements for the protection of human subjects may be found at the Office of Human Research Protection website - <http://hhs.gov/ohrp/> and <https://www.unco.edu/research/research-integrity-and-compliance/institutional-review-board/>.

Sincerely,

Nicole Morse
Research Compliance Manager

University of Northern Colorado: FWA00000784

APPENDIX B
RECRUITMENT LETTER

Dear Colleagues,

I am seeking participants for a qualitative study exploring master's counseling students' experience of instructor use of humor in the classroom, especially in relation to the instructor-student relationship. This research dissertation research is conducted under the supervision of Dr. Jennifer Fulling-Smith.

Criteria for participation:

1. Participants must be currently enrolled in a master's program in counseling, which meets either in person or synchronously.
2. Participants must have experienced, per self-report, being a student in a classroom with an instructor who used humor within the classroom.
3. Participants must have access to Zoom or a similar audio-visual software.

Participants will be asked to participate in two qualitative interviews around an hour long each through Zoom or a similar audio-visual platform, the second interview will be a member checking meeting.

If you are interested in participating this dissertation study or have any questions, please email the primary researcher, Claire Gabrielle Critchlow, at cgcqnf@gmail.com or call/text her at (970) 400-1446. Additionally, please feel free to forward this email to anyone who fits the criteria of this study and may be interested in participating.

Thank you in your consideration and willingness to assist in the furthering of knowledge in the field of counselor education and supervision.

Sincerely,

Claire Gabrielle Critchlow

APPENDIX C
PARTICIPANT RESEARCH CONSENT FORM



CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Project Title: A Moustakas Phenomenological Analysis of How Counseling Master's Students Experience Instructor Use of Humor in the Classroom

Researcher: Claire Gabrielle Critchlow, Ed.S., LPC, NCC, Counselor Education and Supervision

Phone: (xxx) xxx-xxxx

E-mail: crit8242@bears.unco.edu

Advisor: Jennifer A Fulling-Smith, Ph.D., Counselor Education and Supervision

Email: JenniferA.Smith@unco.edu

Hello and thank you for your interest in participating in my dissertation research! I am a Counselor Education and Supervision PhD student at the University of Northern Colorado. I am a lifelong comedy nerd and huge advocate for being authentic within our role as counselors as well as counselor educators and supervisors. My hope is this study can help inform future counselor educators how they can authentically use humor effectively in the classroom.

Purpose and Description: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to investigate the lived experience of counseling students who have participated in Master's classrooms in which the instructor uses humor. This study will be conducted using two separate hour long individual semi-structured interviews and one member checking meeting. Interviews will take place virtually through Skype, Zoom, or a related telecommunication platform. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim in order to fully encapsulate your experience in your own words. You will also be asked to review transcripts and themes in order to ensure I am accurately capturing your experience.

The only anticipated risk to participants is that you may experience some discomfort or strong emotions when recalling your experiences of receiving humor in the classroom. Participants are encouraged to seek consultation, supervision, and/or counseling regarding what is discussed in the interview should strong emotions or discomfort arise. Additional resources will also be provided upon request. Additionally, the only known inconvenience of participating in the study is related to time spent completing the study. Moreover, you could benefit from

participating in this study by experiencing catharsis related to exploring previous experiences with humor in the classroom, as well as potentially learning more about yourself and your experiences as a counselor in training. Your participation in this study also benefits the field of counseling and counselor education and supervision by providing information that addresses gaps in the literature.

I will make all possible efforts to keep your identity and the information you share confidential. You will be choosing a pseudonym, so your name will not be included in the reporting of the data. Additionally, the recordings of our interview will not be identified with your name. Moreover, any potentially identifying information will not be included in the reporting of our interviews together. Data will be stored on my password protected computer. The recordings of our interview will be erased from my computer following data analysis. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary, you may withdraw from the study at any time. If you agree with all of the above information and would like to participate in this research, please sign below. A copy of this form will be sent to you for future reference.

Participant's Signature

Date

Researcher's Signature

Date

APPENDIX D
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND PROTOCOL

Open-Ended Individual Interview Questions and Protocol

Interviews will be scheduled at least one week in advance. Consent form will be sent via email through the email provided by participants during the recruitment process prior to the first meeting. The consent form will also be reviewed verbally with participants in the first interview. Participants will be instructed that they can decline to answer any question at any time or withdraw from the study at any time. Participants will be informed through their consents both in writing and verbally that these interviews will be recorded and transcribed verbatim.

First-Interview prompt:

Think about a time during your master's in counseling experience when an instructor utilized humor in the classroom. Take a moment to situate yourself both emotionally and physically in that place. Let me know when you've situated yourself and feel comfortable beginning exploring some questions with me.

Main Interview Questions:

1. The definition I've been using for the purpose of this study is "A social mechanism with definite social functions" which "is conceived generically to be any communicative instance which is perceived as humorous by any of the interacting parties" (Martineau, 1972, p. 114). Humor can be transmitted through many ways, some examples include through speech, writing, action, images, and music (Bremmer & Roodenburg (1997).
 - a. I'm curious what your definition of humor is.
2. Describe what you were experiencing in that moment in the classroom.
3. Describe what you're experiencing now as you reflect on the experience.
4. How were you experiencing your instructor in that moment?
5. What feelings were you experiencing?
6. What thoughts were you experiencing in that moment?
7. What body sensations were you experiencing?
8. What changes, if any, did you associate with the experience of being a student in a classroom with an instructor who utilizes humor?
9. How did you experience your relationship with your instructor in that moment?
10. How did you, if at all, experience change in your relationship with your instructor in that moment?

11. What else would you like to share about this experience?
12. Have you shared everything that feels significant to you about this experience?

Potential Examples of Follow-up questions:

- Give me an example.
- Tell me more about that.
- Can you tell me a story about that?

APPENDIX E
PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

DEMOGRAPHICS QUESTIONNAIRE

Please complete this form about your identities to the extent that you feel comfortable. Please use your own words to describe your identities. You can choose to leave anything blank that you do not feel comfortable answering.

A pseudonym (fake name for the study): _____

Gender identity: _____

Pronouns: _____

Racial/ethnic identities: _____

Sexual/affectional/romantic identities: _____

Spiritual/religious identities: _____

Socioeconomic status: _____

Abilities and disabilities: _____

Age: _____

State: _____

Any additional identities you would like me to know:

APPENDIX F
PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

POST-INTERVIEW PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Following each interview, the researcher will explore the following questions and write her responses within her bridling journal:

- What is my intuition telling me about the interview?
- What reactions did I experience during the interview (to what was shared, to the participant, etc.)?
- How may the interview have impacted how I understand or hear the participant's experience of instructor use of humor in the classroom?
- What questions do I wish I would have asked the participant? Why didn't I ask those questions?
- What else is important to note about how I experienced the interview and/or participant?