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## Person-Centered Approach to Introduce Working with Clients who Sexually Offend

Jessie Huebner

Northern Illinois University, [jhuebnerlcsw@gmail.com](mailto:jhuebnerlcsw@gmail.com)

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## Person-Centered Approach to Introduce Working with Clients who Sexually Offend

### Abstract

Individuals who have sexually offended and individuals who are sexually attracted to minors are often met with adversity, even by those in the helping profession. Currently counselor educators have limited guidance on the need, benefits, and potential approaches for introducing counselor trainees to working with this client population. A person-centered approach to teaching, in which the instructor communicates unconditional positive regard, empathetic understanding, and congruence to their students is presented. Potential benefits to trainees and their future clients are identified.

### Keywords

Counselor Education, Person-Centered, Sex Offender

Clients who have engaged in sexually abusive behaviors are frequently met with aversive and judgmental perceptions and reactions (Harper et al., 2018; Jahnke, 2018; Socia & Harris, 2016). These negative opinions and biases are even present amongst the counseling profession, a career based on helping others (Clarke, 2011; Guiffrida, 2015; Hunt, 2018). Additionally, the same expressions of disdain are also directed towards individuals with sexual attractions to minors who have not acted upon these urges (Farrenkopf, 1992; Guiffrida, 2015; Nelson et al., 2002). Both practicing counselors and counselors-in-training have endorsed stigmas and punitive attitudes towards individuals included in this client population (Chassman et al., 2010; Farrenkopf, 1992; Hunt, 2018; Walters & Spengler, 2016). While counselors advocate for empathy and compassion for their clients (Cochran & Cochran, 2015), the client population of individuals who sexually offend and individuals with sexual attraction to minors are sometimes not granted these core counseling techniques (Jahnke, 2018; Jahnke et al., 2015; Levenson & Grady, 2019) and disdain for this population may be vocalized through claims to refuse to work with individuals in this group (Nelson et al., 2002).

This article proposes the use of a person-centered approach to introduce counselor trainees to this client population and enhance preparation to work with clients who have sexually offended or those with sexual attraction to minors. While there is not an expectation that all counselor trainees upon graduation be prepared to provide specialized treatment to address sexually offending behaviors, there should be an expectation that counselor trainees are, at minimum, prepared to: (a) work with clients who have previously received treatment for sexual offending and are now seeking supportive counseling to maintain a pro-social life, (b) provide reintegration support for clients recently released from incarceration and reintegrating into the community, and

(c) interact with clients using an ethical approach to client disclosures of sexual attraction to minors while making appropriate referrals if necessary.

Many scholars have called for counselors and other helping professionals to receive education and training to be prepared to meet with clients with minor attraction and those who have committed sexual abuse (Cohen et al., 2017; Dombert et al., 2016; Harper et al., 2018; Levenson & Grady, 2019). More importantly, such training needs to prepare counselors to interact with these clients in a competent, caring, nonjudgmental, and client-centered manner (Levenson & Grady, 2019). Working with clients who have perpetrated sexual abuse and those with sexual attractions to minors has long been viewed as a specialty niche which may, in part, explain the lack of formal training specific to counseling this client population in counseling programs (Nelson et al., 2002). Training programs have incorporated curriculum for the entry-level specialty area of addiction counseling (Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, 2015) which may target some of the individuals in this client population if the material in the courses specifically addresses sexual addictions; however, this does not encompass the totality of the population of individuals who have perpetrated sexual abuse, such as those without addiction-driven behaviors.

Counselors in general practice have will potentially interact with clients who have previously perpetrated sexually abusive behaviors or clients presenting with clinically significant distress due to problematic sexual behavior (Gola et al., 2016; Olver et al., 2020; Walters & Spengler, 2016). Counselors may work with individuals who have sexually offended since outpatient counseling services may be recommended to maintain client's treatment success and a pro-social life after completion of intensive treatment for sexually abusive behaviors (Olver et al., 2020). Additionally, individuals with no history of treatment for sexually abusive behaviors may

seek counseling to address problematic pornography use or potential resulting symptoms connected to their pornography use (e.g., negative impact on everyday life, lack of enjoyment of sexually intimate behaviors with a partner, frequent distraction by sexual thoughts, sexual boredom in relationships; Gola et al., 2016).

Individuals who have previously completed treatment for sexually abusive behaviors may also seek counseling services for non-sexual needs (Jahnke, 2018; Levenson & Grady, 2019) as well as needs related to the social stigma and biases frequently experienced by those with criminal charged sexual offenses or those sentenced to placement on the public sexual offender registry (e.g., poor mental health, difficulty coping with emotions, and social isolation; Jahnke, 2018). In a study of 293 participants with sexual attraction towards minors who have not engaged in sexually offending behaviors, participants noted treatment priorities of understanding and reducing sexual attractions towards minors, learning to have a healthy and satisfying life with close and authentic relationships, and addressing symptoms of depression, anxiety, and low self-esteem (Levenson & Grady, 2019).

### **Bias and Stigma Associated with Individuals who have Perpetrated Sexual Abuse**

A *bias* is defined as a tendency, inclination, or prejudice about something, someone, or a specific group; biases are frequently driven from stereotypes and not derived from factual knowledge based on observations of the specific individual, group, or circumstance (Psychology Today, 2020). *Stigmas* encompass four social-cognitive processes of cues, stereotypes, prejudice, and physical appearance and can be distinguished between public/social stigma and self-stigma (Corrigan, 2004). *Public stigma*, or *social stigma*, is the phenomenon of social groups endorsing biases and stereotypes and acting on these views against a specified group (Corrigan, 2004; 2005). *Self-stigma* describes what members of the stigmatized do to themselves if they internalize the

biases and stereotypes endorse by others (Corrigan, 2004). Perceptions of individuals who have sexually offended and individuals with sexual attractions to minors can be impacted by social influences (e.g., friends, family, co-workers; Livingston et al., 2011) whose beliefs and opinions may have been skewed by mainstream media and efforts towards crime control (Budd & Mancini, 2016; Socia & Harris, 2016). Frequently, counselors-in-training present with predisposed ideas of others and outside groups, predisposed ideas of why and how individuals' problems present, and predisposed ideas of their own role as a helper (Guiffrida, 2015). Often, counselors-in-training may cling to existing ways of knowing (Guiffrida, 2015) which could include biases and stereotypes towards individuals who have sexually offended and individuals with sexual attractions to minors (Clarke, 2011; Guiffrida, 2015; Hunt, 2018; Nelson et al., 2002).

If counselors allow their negative perceptions about individuals in this client population to affect their work and client interactions, the impact may be significant (Jahnke; 2018; Janke et al., 2015; Levenson & Grady, 2019). Due to the confidential nature of counseling and therapy, individuals with sexual attraction to minors may turn to the counseling space to disclose these thoughts and attractions (Jahnke, 2018). However, individuals in this client population identified hesitation in seeking counseling due to prior experiences of inappropriate treatment methods, stigmatization, breaches of confidentiality, and judgmental attitudes by helping professionals (Jahnke, 2018; Levenson & Grady, 2019). Additionally, some individuals who have heard about these incidents from others, avoided seeking support or treatment from helping professionals altogether due to fear of similar circumstances (Jahnke, 2018; Jahnke et al., 2015). The existing deficits in social and emotional functioning connected to the stigmatization already experienced in other areas of clients' lives may be exacerbated by poor responses of helping professionals (Jahnke et al., 2015).

## **Existing Recommendations and Trends for Counselor Training**

Currently, counselor training programs lack content specific to counseling those with sexual attractions towards minors, those who have sexually offended, and specific content related to individuals with sexual issues such as problematic pornography use (Chassman et al., 2010; Walters & Spengler, 2016). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) is an accrediting body for master's and doctoral degree programs in counseling in the United States and internationally. The CACREP standards offer direction to clarify the accreditation requirements to promote a unified counseling profession (CACREP, 2015). CACREP standards govern counseling programs with a variety of specialty areas, including addiction counseling. Students are expected to be educated on theories and models of addiction related to substance use as well as behavioral and process addictions. This training may, therefore, include discussion about clients seeking support for sex addiction or addiction to pornography; however, the standards do not specifically highlight inclusions of sexual-related addictions. The standards also lack any guidance for work with individuals who have perpetrated sexual abuse or those with sexual attraction to minors. The lack of specific guidance related to this client population only sustains perceptions that counselors are not expected to be prepared to work with individuals with sex-addiction, individuals who have a history of sexual offending, or those experiencing sexual attraction to minors.

Formal training about this client population, however, has been found to increase positive attitudes towards those who have sexually offended, increase confidence in possessing the skills to work with this population, strengthen beliefs that counseling would stop offending acts, and decrease perceptions of the need for more information about the population (Hogue, 1995). When counselors feel more prepared to work with this client population from their training, they

experienced increases in their positive attitudes towards persons who have sexually abused (Nelson et al., 2002). Simple adjustments, such as using person-first language (someone who has sexually offended, someone who has sexually offended against children) instead of labeled language (sex offender, child sex offender) when describing these clients, has resulted in more willingness to volunteer with this population (Lowe & Willis, 2020) and improvement in empathy, unconditional positive regard, and the development of a strong therapeutic relationship (Litam, 2017).

### **Teaching Moral Dichotomies and Difficult Topics**

Though there may not be specific guidance or direction for counselor educators on teaching about this client population (Chassman et al., 2010; Walters & Spengler, 2016)), some inferences can be made by reviewing how counselor training programs broach other controversial topics and client behaviors that may go against trainees' personal values. Educators in the fields of counseling and social work have been warned of the difficulties when trainees are asked to learn about seeing clients who present with behaviors and beliefs that compete with the trainee's presenting moral and religious beliefs (Guiffrida, 2015). The American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (ACA, 2014) notes that counselors are expected to be "aware of—and avoid imposing—their own values, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors" and should seek training in areas where they are at risk of imposing their own values onto their clients. Counselor educators are specifically challenged when teaching students about topics or client issues that students categorize as the *other* compared to their *norm* (Walters & Spengler, 2016).

Overarching suggestions for teaching moral dichotomies and difficult topics include ensuring a safe classroom environment that allows for sharing, processing, and reflective learning (Guiffrida, 2015). Specifically, these environments should offer space that honors confidentiality,



suspends judgement, and offers active listening while trainees examine their own assumptions and are encouraged to learn about different perspectives (Dessel et al., 2019). Educators are also encouraged to include clinical judgement education within training programs to address possible heteronormative biases (Walters & Spengler, 2016). This education, with a specific emphasis on decision-making, can allow trainees to consider different hypotheses and can lead to a reduction in bias. Weighing differing hypotheses may impact trainees' initial perceptions and reduce the tendency to dismiss information or explanations that are not congruent with their initial perspectives (Smith & Vasquez, 2008; Walters & Spengler, 2016). Educators that promote the use of a seminar format in their classroom can offer various ways to integrate information into the actual experience of the trainee (Carney & Hazler, 2013). Seminars are different than traditional lectures by potentially being less structured and strongly encouraging interactive dialogue amongst the students and educator. Specific benefits of seminar classroom format include depth of discussion, critical thinking, shared knowledge and experience, exposure to the topic, consideration of student developmental level, and group process).

### **Person-Centered Theory**

A person-centered approach can be used introduce counselor trainees to this client population and enhance preparation to work with clients who have sexually offended or those with sexual attraction to minors. Carl R. Rogers (1989) was the founder of the therapeutic theory, approach, and practice of person-centered counseling. Initially named client-centered theory, a person-centered approach is guided by Rogers' belief that if a person is provided a certain type of relationship by another, this person will be able to discover the capacity within themselves to use that relationship for growth and change. Rogers identified three proper conditions needed in this relationship as unconditional positive regard, empathetic understanding, and congruence. To be

meaningful, these conditions cannot only exist within the counselor, they also need to be communicated in some way by the counselor so that they can be experienced or perceived by the client.

### **Unconditional Positive Regard**

Rogers (1989) defined *unconditional positive regard* as the condition that occurs when the counselor is experiencing a warm, positive, and accepting attitude toward the client. These feelings are not conditional; the counselor experiences these positive and genuine feelings towards the client no matter what is going on in the client at that moment and no matter what the client's behaviors. The counselor accepts both the client's expression of positive feelings and their expression of any painful, fearful, and abnormal feelings. This also involves the counselor accepting and caring for the client as a separate person and permitting the client to have their own feelings and experiences that can support their search for their own meaning.

### **Empathetic Understanding**

A counselor is experiencing *empathetic understanding* when they are able to sense the feelings and personal meanings of their client in the moment, perceive these personal meanings as they seem to the client, and successfully communicate this understanding in some way to their client (Rogers, 1989). Rogers cautioned that it is important that during this exchange, the counselor does not ever lose the separateness of their own identity.

### **Congruence**

*Congruence* occurs when the counselor is: in a relationship with their client that is genuine, presenting without any façade, and is openly experiencing the feelings and attitudes that are occurring at that moment (Rogers, 1989). In this relationship, the counselor means exactly what they say, and their internal feelings are matching what they are expressing to the client. Rogers

noted that it is not possible to fully achieve congruence; however, the more the counselor is able to be aware of what is going on within themselves and experience these feelings, without fear, the higher the degree of their congruence.

### **Person-Centered Approach to Teaching**

Rogers (1989) highlighted that these experiences of growth and change found within person-centered counseling, can also occur outside of the therapeutic relationship, in other interpersonal relationships, including those between the teacher and students. Rogers was first asked to present his perspectives on teaching and learning in April 1952 at a conference hosted by Harvard University. In this presentation, Rogers highlighted the importance of learning that influences behavior and noted that this kind of learning needs to be self-discovered or self-appropriated noting that this self-discovered learning is not fostered through direct communication from teacher to student but instead must be personally experienced by the student. In 1958, Rogers presented his reformulated thoughts on education at a workshop at Goddard College in Plainfield, Vermont (Rogers, 1989), highlighting the need to rely on the self-actualizing tendency of students in which students that are in real contact with life problems, have within themselves: the wish to learn and grow, the hope to master, and the desire to create. Rogers saw the educator's role as developing a personal relationship with their students and creating a climate in the classroom in which the students' natural tendencies can present. According to Rogers (1969), for significant learning to occur, the educator needs to present with genuine trust in the learners, attempt to develop an accepting and empathic climate, be flexible in their teaching methods, present with collaborative student self-evaluation, and provide human and learning resources.

Rogers' person-centered approach to teaching has been implemented by a variety of educators, including one of Rogers' own students (Rogers, 1989). This educator, who experienced

this form of teaching through a workshop led by Rogers, later shared his experiences in a letter written to Rogers. This educator expressed how he was overwhelmed by what he observed in his own classroom when he embraced Rogers' person-centered teaching practices. The educator noted that never before had he "found in the classroom so much of the whole person coming forth, so deeply involved, so deeply stirred" (Rogers, 1959, p. 313). Cornelius-White (2007) presented a synthesis including 119 studies that incorporated interventions using the learner-centered model. This model is rooted in 14 learner-centered principles and focuses both on the individual learners and learning. Overall, this meta-analysis found that the person-centered teacher variables were associated with positive student outcomes. Specifically, while the core conditions of the person-centered approach could be separated and their effects alone could be beneficial, together they were more effective (Cornelius-White, 2007).

### **Person-Centered Approach to Teaching about Clients who Sexually Offend**

Many counselors-in-training have been found to hold personal negative or biased perceptions and beliefs about individuals who have sexually offended or those with sexual attraction to minors (Guiffrida, 2015; Nelson et al., 2002). If these negative perceptions continue to present in practice when a client with these concerns enter their office, the client is at risk of negative treatment experiences (Jahnke, 2018; Levenson & Grady, 2019). To introduce trainees to individuals within this client population, counselor educators should provide a safe space for trainees to identify, understand, and process these biases and perceptions that can foster development and potential growth and change (Cucco, 2020; Hedley & Markowitz, 2001; Jahnke, 2018; Rogers, 1989). The classroom discussions and material may include addressing presenting misconceptions about this client population, treatment expectations, and the counselor's role in the therapeutic relationship.

The intense nature of the learning that is required for counselors-in-training when they are first introduced to working with individuals who have sexually offended and individuals with sexual attraction to minors appears to support an educator's use of a person-centered approach to teaching. This approach suggests that if students are provided the necessary conditions, they have the potential to find their own meaningful answers which, in turn, fuels the process of learning (Guiffreda, 2015). Separating clients from their behaviors and helping clients make the distinction between themselves and their behaviors will have a positive impact on treatment success (Serran et al., 2003). Educators can assist students in understanding that working with this population does not suggest acceptance or support of the client's past behaviors (Ponder, 2019; Slater and Lambie, 2011); instead, providers are encouraged to identify to the client that their behaviors were problematic and unacceptable, and they hope to work together to prevent any reoccurrence of these behaviors (Slater & Lambie, 2011).

### **Unconditional Positive Regard**

An educator that encompasses unconditional positive regard in their classroom has full confidence in their students' ability to develop and grow (Guffrieda, 2015). In addition, communicating unconditional positive regard with students models how these conditions can be set by the students with their future clients. When introducing counselors-in-training to the consideration of seeing clients who have sexually offended or those with sexual attractions to minors, educators need to express their acceptance and understanding of their students during this process. This not only involves accepting the student when they are expressing openness to working with these clients, but also warmly accepting the student even as they are presenting with negative, biased, or fearful reactions to this client population. This does not suggest that educators must agree with the thoughts and feelings presented by the student, but instead accept that the

student, their thoughts, and the classroom environment simply is what it is and that this is the best that the student can be in that moment (Cochran & Cochran, 2015).

The person-centered view, however, does not guard educators from hoping or wishing for change in the student. It is believed that change is inevitable, and our students have the capacity within themselves to change if they are provided the proper relationship and environment (Cochran & Cochran, 2015; Rogers, 1989). The educator can show their students that they genuinely trust the students enough to allow them to carefully question the educator's positions without challenging the students' legitimacy as experts regarding their own experiences, feelings, and perspectives (Rogers, 1989). Guided by the basic principles of change within person-centered theory, is the belief that the student's vast resources for self-understanding and for altering their self-concept, attitudes, and self-directed behaviors can be utilized if the necessary climate and conditions can be provided (Rogers, 1989).

### ***Understanding Students' Individual Meaning Making***

Counselor educators need to offer a space for counselors-in-training to process their presenting reactions, perceptions, and current insight into this client population (Guffrieda, 2015). This involves seeking to understand all forms of knowledge and current perceptions presented by students. For the counselor educator to be *with* the classroom at that moment, they should seek to understand all forms of knowledge and current perceptions on this topic presented by students in the space. A core condition of person-centered counseling is that the client is coming into the space with an identified problem (Rogers, 1989). However, counselor trainees may not immediately identify their lack of knowledge or potential bias in this area as a problem. The counselor educator first needs to assist students in understanding the potentiality of interacting with this client population in future practice so that the students perceive their presenting level of knowledge and

potential biased perspective in this area as a problem and issue which they want to resolve. Processing potential biases and negative perspectives can assist students in addressing personal reactions or beliefs that could impede the counseling relationship (Jahnke, 2018).

To support trainees in their experience in the moment, counselor educators should seek to join the students in ways that help them observe and understand these processes without any efforts to combat the students' perspectives or pathologize (Guiffrida, 2015). The counselor educator can model unconditional positive regard in these moments by joining the trainee in seeking compassion for individuals in this client population and contemplating ways that each of us can attempt to dismantle, overcome, or own the perspectives that one identifies as not useful (Cucco, 2020). Counselor educators should consider the variety of values and beliefs that each student possesses and how these may interfere with their capacity to accept and empathize with this client population (Cochran & Cochran, 2015).

### ***Positive Regard is not Conditional***

The safe, open, affirming, and mutual curious space offered to trainees as they are introduced to this client population can allow students to feel safe to experience any of their presenting reactions and responses (Cucco, 2020). The positive regard offered by counselor educators through this process is, therefore, not *conditional* on the type of feelings, perspectives, or potential biases that the students experience (Rogers, 1989). At the same time, the educator reminds the student that this is space where the student can feel open to evaluate, discuss, and process their reactions and perceptions. This unconditional positive regard provided by the counselor educator can facilitate the modeling experience in which students accept themselves as they feel the acceptance from their educator (Cucco, 2020).

One of the most meaningful aspects of this unconditional positive regard for the trainees is their reception of this regard even when their educator is seeing the less ideal parts of themselves (Cucco, 2020). In these moments, the trainee is finding that even though the educator is seeing the imperfect thoughts and perceptions that the trainee holds, the educator still regards them as a valuable counselor. The trainee, therefore, experiences how affirming and supporting it can feel to experience this truly unconditional positive regard, which may provide some relief to these potentially unsettling areas of themselves.

### **Empathetic Understanding**

Counselor educators engage in empathetic understanding for their students by communicating their empathy as students go through the challenging process of learning about a diverse and potentially difficult client population, admitting to potential negative perceptions, and processing these biases and the potential impact on their clients (Guiffrida, 2015). Students are likely to have difficulty through this experience since it requires them being vulnerable in front of their teachers and peers. Admitting to these negative thoughts and feelings about a specific client population is especially troubling as their expectations of what an ideal counselor is *supposed* to think are challenged (Cucco, 2020). As counselor educators become in tune with the trainees' reactions to this process, they should periodically offer the opportunity for trainees to check-in with their thoughts and emotions, especially when the trainees may appear to be particularly troubled (Guiffrida, 2015). When trainees experience their educator's empathetic understanding for them through this process, they are encouraged to accept their own feelings, reactions, and potentially mistakes with curiosity, openness, and compassion (Bernard & Luke, 2013; Cucco, 2020).



Having empathetic understanding for trainees involves being open to understand the common discomfort that trainees, and even practicing counselors, have in response to sexual topics in general (Walters & Spengler, 2016). As the topic of pornography use and other sexual issues commonly leads to therapist discomfort-based barriers (Walters & Spengler, 2016), it is not surprising that these feelings of discomfort may also exist and will likely be exacerbated when discussing sexual offending behaviors and sexual attraction to minors (Jahnke, 2018; Nelson et al., 2002) as these behaviors oppose the trainee's underlying worldview, values, and morals (Guiffrida, 2015; Hedley & Markowitz, 2001). When trainees are asked to think about clients who have engaged in thoughts or behaviors that go against these underlying views, they may experience fear and this may even remind the trainees of their own thoughts and feelings that are difficult for them to accept (Cochran & Cochran, 2015).

Counselor educators can support trainees with acknowledgement that negative perceptions and biases towards this population group are common, even amongst those working in the helping profession (Jahnke, 2018; Nelson et al., 2002). Counselor educators can also assist trainees by understanding and normalizing the fear and anxiety that will likely present while they engage in the troubling experience of exploring these biases (Guiffrida, 2015). By normalizing trainees' potentially imperfect thoughts, biases, or mistakes and prioritizing reflection and processing as they arise, trainees may be more comfortable to share potential biases, mistakes, or ethical dilemmas with this educator or in other settings in the future, such as clinical supervision (Cucco, 2020; Guiffrida, 2015).

### **Congruence**

A person-centered approach to learning suggests that congruence occurs when the educator is genuine in their positive regard and empathy for their students (Rogers, 1989). Congruence

occurs when the educator openly experiences the feelings and attitudes that present for them in the moment and pulls away from any façade they could present, thus accepting that they are not the expert and they may still make mistakes (Guiffrida, 2015; Rogers, 1989). A counselor educator presenting with congruence is being real and genuine within the classroom (Rogers, 1989). This includes being openly aware of the attitudes and beliefs they hold. However, while the educator accepts their feelings as their own, there is no need to impose them on their students or insist that the students feel the same way (Rogers, 1989). The concept of congruence suggests that the counselor educator is aware of the potential to make mistakes in the classroom and that they are willing to admit to these mistakes as they arise (Rogers, 1989).

### **Potential Classroom Activities**

Guided by a person-centered approach to teaching, counselor educators have the opportunity to foster safe classroom environment for sharing, processing, and reflective learning when introducing counselors-in-training to working with clients who have sexually offended and those with sexual attraction to minors (Guiffrida, 2015). Using seminar format which encourages interactive dialogue amongst trainees and the educator, counselor educators can implement activities to prompt discussion, processing, and learning (Carney & Hazler, 2013) while taking opportunities to praise active involvement and in-depth discussions amongst trainees. Classroom discussions and activities can be chosen and modified in consideration of the developmental level of the counselor trainees.

Decision-making activities can be used by the counselor educator and may allow for trainees to consider different opinions and hypotheses and lead to a reduction in bias (Walters & Spengler, 2016). An initial activity that can be used to promote discussion about this client population may involve asking trainees to write a list of their initial thoughts and reactions that

present when they are broached with the topic of individuals who have sexually offended, individuals with sexual attraction to minors, and working with individuals in this client population. After trainees independently write down their reactions, the trainees can be asked to share with the class. The counselor educator can aid in encouraging trainee sharing by offering common initial reactions and biases that have been reported by helping professionals. The educator can also take this opportunity to share their own personal experience (Carney & Hazler, 2013) by offering examples of their own initial responses and reactions. During this activity, it is important that educators display empathetic understanding for their trainees by communicating their empathy as trainees go through this challenging process of admitting to potential negative perceptions (Guiffrida, 2015). After the initial sharing, trainees can be separated into small groups, potentially assigned specific statements or reactions, to weigh differing hypotheses (Walters & Spengler, 2016) about the source, accuracy, and potential benefits or harm of these beliefs and perspectives. The activity can conclude by returning to the large group to share and process the small groups hypotheses.

Counselor educators can support trainees through the process of assessing their personal biases and perspectives by guiding them into discussion of the potential origins of these beliefs. This includes offering students the range of resources available to them, but not forcing resources upon them (Rogers, 1989). In alignment with Rogers' ideal view of the provision of resources, the counselor educator would offer themselves as a resource by sharing the special experience and knowledge they have in the field and inform the trainees that, if they choose, they can call on the counselor educator's knowledge on this topic. The environment of the classroom and the relationship between educator and trainees would be that the educator can freely offer their feelings on the topic without the trainees feeling that these feelings are imposed on them. Additionally, the

counselor educator can make themselves available as a resource-finder and offer to secure resources trainees feel would aid in their learning.

Resources to support the trainees' understanding of the origins of biases and mythic narratives may include offering facts about this client population to dismantle the commonly referenced myths. This may include informing trainees that this is a heterogeneous group of individuals, treatment for this population has proven to be successful, and that residence restrictions and the sex offender registry have not been shown to reduce recidivism and instead make it more difficult for clients to pursue a pro-social life (Budd & Mancini, 2016; Harris et al., 2019; Kernsmith et al., 2016; Kim et al., 2016; Langan et al., 2003). Counselor educators can also offer resources on the phenomenon of crime control theater in which public policies (e.g., sex offender registry, residence restrictions) are implemented as a response to mythic narratives presented by the public in an effort to portray crime control without actually proving to be effective (Socia & Harris, 2016).

Counselor educators may have the opportunity to foster additional empathetic understanding of individuals in this client population by developing connections with a community program and asking for willing individuals to participate in a panel in the classroom. A potential panel could include treatment providers in this field to share their experiences of working with this client population (Clark, 2011; Farrenkopf, 1992). An additional panel could include individuals from this client population that would be willing to volunteer to meet with counselors to share their personal experiences of treatment, interactions with helping professionals, and their general life experiences and future hopes and dreams. After completion of panels and once panel participants have left the room, the trainees should be asked to reflect as a large group and in individual reflective journaling.

Introducing individuals in this client population on a personal level can support trainees' processing of their thoughts and perspectives. Providing trainees the opportunity to watch or listen to documentaries or read memoirs or case histories that are told from the perspective of someone with a history of sexual offending or someone with sexual attraction to minors can introduce a heterogeneous and diverse perspective. The documentary series *Our America with Lisa Ling* (2011) presented the episode "A housing solution for sex offenders?" offering a personal view into the devastating impacts of being sentenced to sex offender registration. The episode of *This American Life* (Malone, 2014) titled "Tarred and feathered: Help wanted" is an audio recording in which a teenager describes his experience as an individual with sexual attraction to minors that is determined to avoid offending and his struggles seeking counseling support for his deviant attractions. Harper et al. (2016) found that a narrative perspective (an individual with pedophilia who discussed his sexuality) and informative perspectives (experts who were interviewed on pedophilia) both led to reduction of dehumanizing stereotypes, perceived dangerousness, and punitive attitudes against individuals with pedophilia. However, the positive effects were stronger from the narrative perspective and this was the only condition that led to participants reducing their negative implicit bias and beginning to humanize the men and see them as individuals who are struggling with sexual interests that they do not wish to experience.

Lastly, the trainees can be offered reflection activities that can assist them in focusing deeper into their understandings, their internal reactions and feelings, their presenting beliefs about their role in interacting with this client population, and their own ability to weigh the strengths and limitations of their current perspectives and potential treatment approaches (Guiffrida, 2015). Trainees can be encouraged to complete reflective writing activities through class exercises or personal reflective journaling. In these activities, the counselor educator may encourage the

practice of critical incident analysis in which trainees are provided a case scenario describing a potential dilemma that could present when interacting with this client population. The counselor educator would then ask trainees to reflect on their own meaning making of the scenario, identify presenting thoughts and feelings, compare with other dilemmas they may have experienced in the past, and list any questions that remain as they attempt to understand the presented dilemma (Guiffrida, 2015). Reflective writing exercise entries can potentially be shared with their educator or other trainees. The involvement of others in this processing, assists trainees in generating new understandings and can encourage the development of changing perspectives.

The introduction of this client population to counselor trainees can ultimately conclude by reminding trainees that there will always be areas where continued growth and development can occur. A final activity or independent assignment can involve asking trainees to develop goals identifying how they hope to continue to work towards improving potential biases, educating themselves on unknown topics, and developing skills to work with difficult clients. Trainees can be asked to identify objectives of how they can achieve their identified goals, offering suggested objects such as continued training, personal reflection, peer support, and processing with mentors and supervisors.

### **Implications for Clients**

As counselors have the potential to see clients in their office who have previously engaged in sexual offending behaviors and clients with sexual attractions to minors (Gola et al., 2016; Olver et al., 2020; Walters & Spengler, 2016), preparing counselors-in-training for working with this client population is of high importance. Counselor educators are encouraged to include discussions about this client population and process presenting thoughts and perceptions into their program curriculum. Decreases in negative biases and beliefs among counselors results in benefits to the

client-counselor relationship and overall treatment success (Bedi et al., 2012; Jahnke, 2018; Levenson & Grady, 2019; Ryan et al., 2019). While there is some support of the use of supervision as a tool for correcting clinical errors related to this population, this is retroactive (Walters & Spengler, 2016). Counselor educators, instead, can prevent potential errors and problematic interactions through early intervention in counselor training programs.

Additionally, processing presenting biases and beliefs through a person-centered classroom environment may be potentially beneficial for counselor trainees' overall development even if they have no interaction with this client population in the future. This article presents one potential approach to introducing this client population to counselors-in-training. Counselor trainees that experience these person-centered techniques, strategies, and perspectives in the classroom may, in-turn, implement these with future clients (Rogers, 1989). Rogers (1989) identified that even in a limited amount of time in a person-centered relationship, an individual becomes more integrated and begins to develop more characteristics of the healthy, well-functioning person. This development includes changes in their perception of themselves, growth towards the person they wish to be, increased value in themselves, greater self-confidence and self-direction, and increased openness to their experience. Lastly, one of the characteristics of change identified by Rogers that is most beneficial to future interactions with this client population, is that the recipient becomes more accepting in their attitudes towards others resulting in seeing others as more similar to themselves. If trainees are provided with the classroom climate and educator-trainee relationship described, there is potential for a trickle-down impact on this client population.

### **Conclusion**

Current counselor educator guidelines do not require programs to teach counselors about individuals who have perpetrated sexual abuse or clients with sexual attractions to minors

(CACREP, 2015; Chassman et al., 2010; Walters & Spengler, 2016). Therefore, introducing this client population to trainees involves independent initiative on the part of the counselor educator. Counselor educators are in the position to advocate for the inclusion of this population in dialogue and training materials in order to support trainees in understanding that this population deserves empathy, kindness, and positive regard.



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