SEXUAL JUSTICE AND SOCIAL WORK IN THE UNITED STATES: AN INTERSECTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE, MICROAGGRESSIONS, AND SEXUAL LITERACY

George W. Turner, PhD, MEd, MSW
Lisa Meyers, PhD, MEd, MSW
Michelle G. Thompson, MS, LMHC
Michael Pelts, PhD, MSW
TRANSGRESSING BOUNDARIES AND THE INTERSECTION OF SEXUALITIES IN SOCIAL WORK

18-19 August 2016
WELCOME

Introductions
Introductions

• George Turner
• Lisa Meyers
• Michelle Thompson
• Michael Pelts
BIO: George Turner

- Associate Professor of Practice at the University of Kansas School of Social Welfare (KU).
- Prior to KU - taught at Washburn University in the social work department.
- Teaches undergraduate courses (Human Sexuality, Practice) and graduate courses (Multicultural Practice, Psychopathology, Interfamilial Sexual Trauma).
- Certified sex therapist (AASECT) and has an active private practice specializing in sexual health, personal wellness, and relationship enhancement.
BIO: Lisa Meyers

- Field Liaison and Field Instructor at University of Kansas School of Social Work practicum program
- Full-time Private Practice
- AASECT Certified Sex Therapist
- LCSW/LSCSW
BIO: Michelle Thompson

- Licensed Mental Health Counselor in the state of Florida, U.S.A.
- Has taught undergraduate level Psychology courses.
- 4th year doctoral student in Social Welfare
- Research focus:
  - Discrimination (Microaggressions)
  - Psychological distress
  - Racial/ethnic sexual minorities (LGBQ)
BIO: Michael Pelts

• Teaches undergraduate and graduate students at The University of Southern Mississippi.

• History of practice with in-patient, forensic mental health; and administration in non-profit organizations.

• Research: Impacts of stigmatization on mental health & physical health of LBGTOQ people.

• Applied research: Testing culturally informed training related to serving LBGTOQ populations across disciplines.
Today’s Format

- Introductions/ Opening (5 min)
- 3 Topical Presentations (20 min)
  - 15 Min: Presentation
  - 05 Min: Specific Presentation Q&A
- Summary of Themes: (15 Min)
- Panel Discussion & Group Questions: (10 Min)
Presentation Topics

1. “Between the academy and queerness: Microaggressions in SW education explored through the lens of queer theory”
   
   *Pelts, Turner, Thompson*

2. “Sexually silenced no more - adults with intellectual disabilities speak up: A call to action for social work to frame sexual voice as a social justice issue”
   
   *Turner*

3. “Sexual literacy is essential for social workers:
   A) Part I - review of social work CEU opportunities related to sexuality”
   B) Part II - using a CEU model course to bridge the gap”
   
   *Meyers, Turner, Pelts*
OPENING

Dr. Michael Pelts
Sexuality in the United States

• Same sex marriage is legal in all states
• Adoption by same sex couples is now legal in all states
• No protections nationally for LGBTQ people in housing & employment
• Military and LGBTQ
  • Since 2011 - LGB people can serve openly
  • Effective July 1, 2016 – Transgender people can serve openly
Sexuality in the United States

• Sexuality education in public schools
  • Content varies
  • Lack of comprehensive education

• Matters related to sexuality used to divide people politically and socially
Sexuality in Social Work

• Social workers play a large & varied roles in the U.S.

• NASW Code of Ethics

• CSWE Accreditation standards
BETWEEN THE ACADEMY AND QUEERNESS: MICROAGGRESSIONS IN SW EDUCATION EXPLORED THROUGH THE LENS OF QUEER THEORY

Turner, Meyers, Pelts
Background

• Microaggressions are “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial, gender, sexual orientation, and religious slights and insults to the target person or group.”

• Microaggressions have a negative impact on overall well-being.

• There is a dearth in the literature on microaggressions in SW:
  • Research
  • Education
Problem Statement:

• Microaggressions present in social work education negatively impact the experiences of queer scholars (QS) and students considering the academy as a career.

Research Question:

• Qualitatively, what are the microaggression-related experiences of queer-identified, emerging scholars in social work academe?
Method

• Data collection
  • Autoethnographic approaches

• Data analysis
  • Thematic analysis
  • Concept mapping
Tips for Schools of Social Welfare

1. Queering the learning
2. Explore the intersectionalities
3. Provide queer-ally mentors
4. Customize your welcome
5. Check-in
Tips for Schools of Social Welfare

1. Be you – be Queer
2. Select Queer mentors
3. Celebrate the Queer scholar within
4. Engage in Queer disruption
5. Embrace the uncomfortable
Sexually silenced no more - adults with intellectual disabilities speak up: A call to action for social work to frame sexual voice as a social justice issue

Dr. George Turner
Abstract

• Case studies of five adults with learning difficulties
• Based on two in-depth interviews and a home observation
• Revealed five key elements needed to have a sexual voice:
  1. Sexual self-advocacy,
  2. Sexuality education,
  3. Sexual script,
  4. Sexual vocabulary, and
  5. Sexual-relational support.
Research Questions

1. How do adults with learning disabilities describe their subjective experience and expression of romantic, and/or sexual relationships?

2. What are the responses and abilities of adults with ID to the use of qualitative interviewing which asks them to share their stories?
**Methodology: Participant Inclusion Criteria**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Inclusion Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Guardianship</td>
<td>– Own legal guardian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diagnosis</td>
<td>– Mild mental retardation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>– Verbalization skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– English</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>– 21 – 70 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System Support</td>
<td>– Receiving support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent</td>
<td>– Participant Consent Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant</td>
<td>Age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Milton</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Terri</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kristy</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodology: Theoretical Traditions

1. Case study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Yin, 2003)
   In depth descriptions highlight differences

2. Narrantology (Informed By)
   People live their lives by stories or the narrative” (Kurtz, Tandy, & Shields, 1999, p. 177).
   A person’s story has meaning, reflecting one’s experiences and influencing one’s behaviors; thus, a
   person’s story actively persuades actions (White, 1993).
   “Broken”, “immoral”, “ugly”, “child-like”, “retarded”

3. Heuristic Inquiry (Patton, 2002)
   Inserting “Me” into the study
Methodology:
Data Production

- Two Semi-structured Interviews
  - (McCabe, Cummins, & Deeks, 1999)

- Home & Interview Observation
  - (Siebelink et al., 2006)

- Field Notes
  - (Patton, 2002)
Methodology: Data Production

- **Open Ended/The Interview Guide** (Appendix A) Timmers, DuCharme, and Jacob (1981),
- **SIX Categories**
  1. Attraction
  2. Dating, boy/girlfriend
  3. Romantic love
  4. Sex
  5. Sex education
  6. Seeking help
Methodology: Sampling

- Adults with intellectual disabilities receiving services from nonprofit agencies in a Midwestern metropolitan city.

- **Purposeful**
  - Information rich (Patton, 2002)

- **Chain sampling**
  - Networking within the professional ID community

- **Unit of Analysis**
  - Individuals
Methodology: Data Analysis

- Created five case studies
  - Described initial impressions/clinical profile
  - Added transcript quotes to integrate their voice (Murray, 2003)

- Cross-Case thematic analysis
  - Eleven Themes emerged (Silverman, 2001)
  - Five central conclusions
Quality

- Auditing
- Triangulation
  - Field notes
  - Two interviews
  - Observations
- Prolonged Engagement
  - 3 Meetings
  - Average 3 hours
- Peer debriefing
  - Research Assistant
  - Disability Consultant
FINDINGS:
5 Major Themes of the Cross case Analysis

1. Sexual Self Advocacy
2. Sex Education
3. Sexual Script
4. Sexual Vocabulary
5. Sexual/Relational Support
1. Sexual Self Advocacy

Express one’s own sexual needs or promote one’s own sexual interests.
2. Sex Education

Formal and informal receipt of sexual information.

• Access to sexual information was limited and participants were unaware of resources such as the library.

• Most were unaware that their primary care physician could provide sexual health information.

• When asked, Milton said that he might seek the assistance of a “preacher or a psychiatrist.”

• Of note, none listed social workers as a potential resource for sexual information.
3. Sexual Script

Sexual role expectations, Own vs. Others voice & Rehearsal

• Others: which often seemed to come from someone else, not seem fully understood or believed; Often had a rehearsed and regurgitated quality.
4. Sexual Vocabulary

Having sexual language, and understanding key concepts.

- Limited set of simplistic, one-word answers being used at times --lacked sophistication or depth.
- Incongruous descriptors for typical adult responses.
- Language patterns characterized by the overuse of words such as “nice” and “good” as sexual descriptors were common.
- Sexual default vocabulary was common.
- Street Language.
5. Sexual/Relational Support

A person-centered approach encourages participants to guide their own lives within the least restrictive environment.

• Personal pleas for assistance from staff included: more sex information, help with dating, help with acquiring sex, and talking to parents on behalf of participants.

• Asking Staff: not feeling they could talk about sex with them. Milton stated, “Well, the thing is it wouldn't be a good subject to talk about. Or it wouldn't be appropriate.”

• Richard talked about if he wanted to buy a porno, he would have to take the bus by himself, because a staff person would get in trouble if they took him.
5 Central Conclusions

1) Rich sexuality landscape
2) Experiences range from romanticized to graphic
3) While they know social-sexual joy they also experience profound loneliness
4) They desire pleasure, both physical and emotional connection
5) Adults with ID experience many barriers: ACCESS
Discussion

1. Sexual Justice is Social Justice
   • The lens of social justice provides not only a view but also a mandate to bring the sexuality of individuals with LD into the many facets of social work.

   • “In communities where people are denied self-determination and sexual pleasure, health and wellbeing are also denied. Having control over body is a building block of social change.” (Sloane, 2014, p. 454).

   • Institutional living and the medical model were routinely sexually repressed, punitive, and restrictive.

   • Because sexuality has often been a tool for discrimination against people with LD, Siebers (2008) asserted, “...sexual agency becomes central to political agency” (p. 135).
2. Implications for Social Work Education

- Challenge students to a critical audit of their own beliefs, values, and myths about sexuality and people with disabilities.

- As students unpack their bias and stereotypes, they should be supported to reframe their practice from the medicalized model typically used to pathologize people with disabilities and their sexuality, to a social model of disability lens.
3. Implications for Social Work Practice
   - Building sexuality capacity is within the scope of social work practice
Conclusion

Sexual Voice

• A strong sexual voice can assert one’s rights to amorous potential; it can demand carnal pleasure; it can showcase the erotic self; it can claim sexual desires; it can challenge conversations that diminish or misrepresent views of one as less than a full human being. A sexual voice can say “No” and “Yes.”
Abilities

Successful interviewing was augmented with proper accommodations such as:

- Graphics to aid concepts,
- Providing prompts/repeating questions
- Circling back to delicate points
- Multiple engagements & differing environments

MOST IMPORTANT...

- **Allow for Silence!**
What would I have changed?

• Asked for participant eval after each meeting
• Video recorded
• Personally attended IRB meeting
• Address gatekeeper’s sex focus
• Larger sample to “cherry pick”… inc. LGBTQ
• 4th meeting for member check/follow up
• Add 4th observation of social activity
Strengths

• Rich participant-generated stories

• Wide variety of aspects within the social-sexual lives of adults with ID

• Exploration of pleasure

• 3 interviews

• Female research assistant with experience both in disabilities and sexuality
Limitations

• Small Sample
• Lack of diversity in sexual orientation & ethnicity
• Only MILD MR
• Age
• Verbal
• English Speaking

• Self reported data
• Midwestern Suburban area
• Selection bias
• Stories not verified
• Response bias
Sexual literacy is essential for social workers:
I: Review of social work CEU opportunities related to sexuality
II: Using a CEU model course to bridge the gap

Meyers, Turner, Pelts
Common Understanding of “Sexuality”

• Default definition= the sexual behavior of intercourse (specifically PVI)

• Focus on the three “D’s”: disaster, dysfunction, and disease

• SIECUS: “a natural part of being human...having biological, social, psychological, spiritual, ethical, and cultural”
Social Workers as Sexual Health Experts

• Best positioned of the helping professionals
• Holistic view of clients
• Bio-psycho-social lens, in line with SIECUS’ definition of sexuality
Research Question

• What is the sexuality related content of the professional CEU (continuing education unit) training for post-graduate social workers?
Method

• Sampled three distinct providers of post-graduate CEUs
  • State chapters of NASW (National Association of Social Workers)
  • Five of the top 10 schools of Social Work
  • Five national providers of CEUs
Findings

• 16 topic areas related to sexuality
• Most represented topics:
  1. sexual trauma/abuse
  2. LGBTQI
  3. couples/intimacy
Discussion

• Currently no systemic and consistent way for SWs to increase sexual literacy
• A first step would be to affirm sexuality as a social justice issue, and value sexual literacy as a core SW practice skill
• Address by offering a sequencing of sexuality CEU options beginning with a foundational awareness course
Sexually Literate Social Workers

• Facilitate sexual health conversations
• Engage in medically accurate, comprehensive, age-appropriate sexuality education
• Recognize their own values, views and approach to sexuality
Sexually Literate Social Workers cont.

• Understand sexuality negativity and social-cultural norms of control where sexuality is used to bolsters systems of privilege such as heteronormativity

• Screen clients for sexual health problems so that they can get a more comprehensive picture of their client's health

• Be an *askable* sexual health provider
SUMMARY OF THEMES

Pelts
Themes:

1. No Training
2. Required Proficiency
3. Scope of Practice
4. Macro Fit
5. Puritanical Foundation
6. Review & Reflection
7. Sexual Justice is Social Justice
PANEL DISCUSSION

Audience Questions & Comments
Contacts:

George W. Turner, PhD, MSW
4010 Washington, Suite 405
Kansas City, MO. 64111 US
george@turnerprofessionalgroup.com

Lisa Meyers, PhD, MSW
4010 Washington, Suite 405
Kansas City, MO. 64111 US
lisa@turnerprofessionalgroup.com

Michelle G. Thompson, MS, LMHC
Florida International University
Robert Stempel College of Public Health & Social Work
11200 SW 8th St. AHC5-539D
Miami, FL., 33199, USA
Mthomm030@fiu.edu

Michael Pelts, PhD, MSW
The University of Southern Mississippi
School of Social Work
118 College Dr. , #5114
Hattiesburg, MS., 39406-0001. USA
michael.pelts@USM.edu