Introduction:

- Alternative sexual behaviors are defined as practices such as polyamorous relationships, casual sex, swinging, BDSM, kink, and pornography use.
- Normative or traditional values refer to conservative values of monogamy, heterosexuality, and gender roles.
- Researchers note that “by nature, sexuality and relationships involve personal and professional values” (McCarthy and Ross, 2019) and should, therefore, encourage all clinicians, novice or seasoned, to be pro-sexual.

Discomfort due to Personal Conflict:

- Refers to a scenario in which a client participates in a specific sexual practice (such as BDSM, pornography, polyamory, etc.)
- The clinician feels that their personal values contrast with that of the individual’s decision to practice sexuality in such a way.
- Misinformed therapists may erroneously pathologize those with “non-conventional” (Freeburg and McNaughton, 2017) sexual lifestyles as inherently deviant.
- This personal conflict can stem from many places: misinformation, erroneous assumptions, values, personal life history, or internalized biases (Girard and Brownlee, 2015).

Discomfort due to lack of competency:

- Researchers suggest that many clinicians stray from asking pertinent sexual questions simply because they accompany uncomfortable feelings (P.A. Rutter et al., 2010).
- Less than 50% of graduate school training programs report having specific courses centered around sexuality (Spengler and Walters, 2015).
- The therapist could offer competent care by empowering the individuals “to make wise decisions so that sexuality has a positive role in their lives...as well as work emotionally and practically in the short and long term” (McCarthy and Ross, 2019).

Self-Assessment Topics to Consider:

- Do my own values contrast those of my client?
- Do I have biases against people whose sexual practices differ from my assumed norm?
- Am I comfortable bring concerns of sexuality and incompetence to my supervisor?
- How can I deepen my understanding of sexual practices to better help my clients?
- How can I ask sensitive questions about sexual preferences to my client?

Ethical Practice:

- Regardless of the source of potential discomfort, the clinician needs to be able to provide competent care or refer to a clinician that might be a better fit due to specialties or extra training (McGeorge et. al., 2015).

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