Experiences of Male Counselor Educators: A Study of Relationship Boundaries

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This study surveyed male counselor educators regarding the impact of being male upon their professional relationships. Participants (*N*=163) were surveyed about their attitudes concerning the influence of gender on their relational behavior, as well as their relationship practices with students and colleagues. Mixed-methods analyses revealed a majority of respondents believed being male influenced their relationship behavior and reported experiencing relationship challenges unique to male counselor educators. Male counselor educators shared strategies to avoid the perception of impropriety when engaging in teacher–student relationships. Consultation, engagement in group activities and avoidance of being alone with students were cited as common strategies to ensure appropriate teacher–student boundaries.

Keywords: **male, gender, counselor educators, teacher–student relationships, boundaries**

The vast majority of graduate students in the social sciences, especially in mental health fields, are females (Crothers et al., 2010; Healey & Hays, 2012). In a recent report on counseling programs, an average of 76% of students admitted and graduated yearly from entry-level counseling programs were women (Schweiger, Henderson, McCaskill, Clawson, & Collins, 2012). Although counseling is one field that attracts mostly female graduate level students, a historical review indicates that males made up approximately 80% of counselor education faculties in the 1980s (Anderson & Rawlins, 1985). In recent years, as the number of females who seek doctoral degrees in counseling has increased, so has the number of female counselor educators, correlating to fewer males entering the field of counselor education. Currently, the average number of males admitted and graduated yearly from doctoral-level counseling programs has been reported at a meager 25% (Schweiger et al., 2012). As counselor educators strive to build best practices for working with diverse populations, it seems relevant to explore the experiences of male counselor educators as well as suggest practices that improve conditions for male counselor education faculty.

In the preparation of counselors, counselor educators are encouraged to build relationships with students that lead to greater self-awareness, personal development and interpersonal learning, which inform their work as counselors. Literature cites the importance of the relationships between counseling faculty and students as "paramount" (Dollarhide & Granello, 2012, p. 290), suggesting that it "stands out above all other factors" (McAuliffe, 2011, p. 32) in the education of adults. It seems reasonable to assume that if counselor educators espouse the importance of the relationship between client and counselor, they extend this value to their students, building relationships that facilitate learning. Thus, a belief that the relationship between teacher and student leads to mutual support and growth comprises the hallmark of humanistic education (Dollarhide & Granello, 2012).

Although the American Counseling Association (ACA) *Code of Ethics* (2014) asserted that counselor

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educators are restricted from sexual or romantic relationships with students, universities and counselor education programs typically do not clearly articulate boundaries when approaching the multiple roles adopted by faculty members (Owen & Zwahr-Castro, 2007). In the absence of guidelines and open discussion regarding faculty–student relationships, legal concerns can permeate the university environment. Sexual harassment suits have increased, and many universities have responded by going beyond sexual harassment policies and adding additional policies that restrict sexual or romantic consensual relationships between faculty and students (Bartlett, 2002; Kiley, 2011). Male faculty members seem especially affected by the legal environment and Nicks (1996) reported males had significantly higher concerns than females regarding unjust accusations of harassing a student. In the current environment of legality and ambiguous ethical guidelines, Kress and Dixon (2007) cautioned that counselor educators might choose to distance themselves from students to avoid the appearance of impropriety or placing themselves in complex ethical situations. However, there is a dearth of literature regarding issues of relationship dynamics based on sexuality and gender in academia over the last 20 years.

Further complicating the issue of faculty–student relationships is that female professors and students are more likely to perceive complex relationship issues as unethical when compared to their male counterparts. In a comparison between female and male counselor educators and counselor education students, Bowman, Hatley, and Bowman (1995) found that females were significantly more likely to rate activities outside the traditional student–teacher relationship as unethical. This finding has been supported in multiple studies regarding undergraduate students (Ei & Bowen, 2002; Oldenburg, 2005; Owen & Zwahr-Castro, 2007). Female undergraduate students were more likely to rate a relationship scenario as unethical when the professor was identified as a male as compared to scenarios with female professors (Oldenburg, 2005) and more likely to be negative than males about questionable scenarios such as sexual relationships, doing favors for a professor, and doing things alone with an instructor (Ei & Bowen, 2002). Owen and Zwahr-Castro (2007) found that female undergraduate students judged approximately one-third of faculty–student interaction scenarios as significantly more inappropriate than male students, identifying nonacademic-related interaction that occurred off campus as most inappropriate. Although not specifically explored, the tendency of females to find behaviors unethical when compared to the perceptions of males has been attributed in the literature to sensitivity of women to power differentials and potential for exploitation based on cultural experience (Ei & Bowen, 2002; Owen & Zwahr-Castro, 2007). In the context of current ratios in counselor education of a majority number of female faculty to a minority number of male graduate students, it is difficult to ascertain the perception of power dynamics based on gender.

The changing context of counselor education may present unique challenges for male faculty to navigate with little guidance. A review of the literature highlights a complex environment where male counselor educators engage in faculty–student relationships within a context of power differences and potential legal complications. The current study was conceived in a doctoral level clinical course in which male and female doctoral students processed their teaching experiences with master's students. During the discussion, male doctoral students serving as instructors shared experiences regarding relationships with their students that appeared uniquely different from experiences shared by female colleagues. Concerns emerged regarding practices of male counselor educators when entering a female-prevalent field as a person in a position of power. As a result, we proposed that the following factors might influence the interactions of male counselor educators on a daily basis in their roles with students: majority of female graduate students, decreasing number of male faculty, increases in legal action, ambiguity of ethical guidelines, possible attraction between professors and students, and a contextual field that values human relationships. The purpose of this study was to discover attitudes and practices of male counselor educators regarding faculty-

student relationships. Our research questions included: (a) what are the practices and attitudes of male counselor educators related to relationships with students and colleagues? and (b) what specific practices do male counselor educators employ to maintain boundaries with students?

Methodology

Participants and Data Collection

Using Schweiger et al.'s (2012) compilation of counseling program information, a member of the research team identified names typically attributed to males among listed faculty names, resulting in the identification of 330 males within the United States. The research team then matched the names with e-mails on university Web sites. An initial recruitment e-mail was sent to the identified sample asking for participation. Following the initial recruitment e-mail, 41 of the identified original sample responded as ineligible (22 contact e-mails were immediately returned as unavailable; 6 identified as female; and 13 identified as no longer working as a counselor educator or having never worked as a counselor educator). This resulted in a potential sample of 289. Two more e-mails were sent as reminders regarding participation. The final sample consisted of 163 male counselor educators who completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 56%.

A summary of demographic characteristics of the 163 male counselor educators who completed the survey is presented in Table 1. In this sample, male counselor educators were mostly White, non-Hispanic (n=125). African American (n=14) and Hispanic (n=11) males also were represented, but only in small numbers, and Asian males (n=4) were few. Most of the sample identified as married/partnered (87%) and heterosexual (89%), with gay or bisexual males represented by approximately 10% of participants. The sample was more diverse in areas of age, rank, child status, and years as counselor educators.

Survey Development

We developed our survey in two phases. The research team brainstormed issues that emerged during discussion, such as the possible attitudes of male counselor educators, including feeling isolated or unsupported due to fewer numbers of male colleagues, or practices that might emerge in working with students of the opposite gender with the intent of ensuring a sense of safety. Based on discussion and an extensive literature review, the research team created a list of quantitative items surveying demographics, attitudes and practices of male counselor educators. We distributed the survey to a pilot group of six male counselor educators who represented diversity in age, experience, ethnicity and sexual orientation. The pilot participants reviewed each question and commented on its usefulness, acceptability and clarity. Based on pilot feedback, the research team modified the survey to include 22 demographic questions, 32 attitude and practice questions, and four open-ended questions. The survey was formatted for the Survey Research Suite (Qualtrics) and final quantitative data was transferred into SPSS for analysis.

Demographic questions included items regarding personal, family and program characteristics of the faculty members, and questions regarding the faculty members' professional designations and teaching assignments. Attitude items (Cronbach's α = .66) consisted of questions related to the impact of being male on both collegial and student relationships. Practice items (Cronbach's α = .64) consisted of questions related to the participant's actual practices in relating to students (e.g., private meetings, lunch/dinner, after class). For the full scale, Cronbach's α was calculated at .70. Four open-ended questions addressed ethical challenges, thoughts related to being male, ways the counselor educator might act differently, and strategies used to avoid complications with students.

Table 1

Demographic Characteristics of Male Counselor Educator Participants

Variable	*N*	%	*M*	*SD*	Mdn	Range
Age	155		51.61	11.08	53	27–76
Ethnicity						
African American	14	8.6				
Asian	4	2.5				
White, Non-Hispanic	125	76.7				
White, Hispanic	11	6.7				
Self-Identified as Other	8	4.9				
Relationship Status						
Single	14	8.6				
Married/Partnered	142	87.1				
Divorced/Separated	5	3.1				
Widowed	1	.6				
Sexual Identity						
Gay	13	8.0				
Heterosexual	145	89.0				
Bisexual	3	1.8				
Status Regarding Children						
No Children	30	18.4				
Adult Children	74	45.4				
Minor Children in Home	55	33.7				
Minor Children Part Home	1	.6				
Minor Children Not in Home	2	1.2				
Years As Counselor Educator	161		15.07	10.85	12	1–45
Faculty Rank						
Assistant	38	23.3				
Associate	50	30.7				
Full	58	35.6				
Lecturer/Interim	4	2.5				
Other	13	8.0				
Total Number of Male Faculty	156		4.04	1.81	4	1–10
Total Number of Female Faculty	155		4.27	2.27	4	0–13
Estimated % of Male Students	163		18.21	11.24	16	0–78
Estimated % of Female Students	162		77.66	18.55	80	0–99

The first three open-ended questions were used for qualitative analysis and the final question was used to create a list of strategies employed by male counselor educators to aid in their student relationships.

Analysis and Results

The research team used a parallel mixed-methods design (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009) to explore the experiences of male counselor educators. We utilized qualitative thematic analysis for data generated from three open-ended questions and optional comments following each quantitative survey question and quantitative statistical analysis for multiple-choice survey questions. By conducting independent quantitative and qualitative analyses in a parallel simultaneous nature, we allowed the separate analyses to inform one another and provide a more integrated understanding

of the data (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Due to overlap in analysis and results consequential from a mixed-methods approach, we chose to present analyses and results categorized by method (qualitative and quantitative) in the following section.

Qualitative Analyses

Responses to the three open-ended questions and optional comments were analyzed from a perspective of transcendental phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of participants (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Within this qualitative tradition, we worked to bracket or set aside our own preconceptions about the phenomenon as much as possible to remain focused on the views of participants (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). The research team, consisting of two male doctoral students and one female tenured faculty member, discussed our student–teacher relationship experiences regarding gender and power differences. Through reflection and discussion, we developed greater awareness of how our experiences have influenced our views of being and working with male counselor educators. Team discussion allowed us to understand and bracket our positions in the development of data collection and analysis methods.

Because the experiences of male counselor educators have received little attention in literature and research, a phenomenological approach allowed for understanding to emerge from participants' written reports as data was broken down into smaller units of meaning and reconstructed into broader themes that were clearly defined (Creswell, 2007; Giorgi, 1985). Following data collection, we independently coded responses to three open-ended questions, a smaller portion of the data, to identify initial concepts. Next, we met to review and compare our concepts. Silverman and Marvasti (2008) identified the appropriate use of smaller portions of data to establish preliminary categories. We discussed each unit of meaning in the text that was relevant to the focus of study (Giorgi, 1985), compared each concept to previous statements and discovered an initial list of broader themes suggesting common experiences among participants (Creswell, 2007). The research team clarified category definitions by comparing data units within each category for similarities and differences. Responses to optional comments sections in the survey were reviewed for inclusion in the text. Comments that offered information beyond the scope of the survey question referenced were included in the text for qualitative analysis. Then individual team members independently examined the entire text and coded each unit of meaning under the appropriately perceived category. Finally, we met as a group to develop consensus on final categories and to assign textural excerpts to appropriate themes. As suggested by Potrata (2010), research team members focused on exploring potential differences in coding rather than focusing on consistency when coming to consensus in order to illuminate complexities of the male counselor educator experience. Frequencies were tabulated to represent the magnitude of each category within the sample, and verbatim illustrative quotes were selected to clarify the meaning of each category. Saldaña (2013) suggested that magnitude coding adds supplemental texture to provide richer results in qualitative analysis.

Qualitative Results

In order to address our first research question regarding practices and attitudes of male counselor educators, participants were asked to respond to three open-ended questions to address their experiences and practices as male counselor educators. Seventy-one responses were recorded for the first question, "What ethical challenges, if any, are related to being male in counselor education?" One hundred responses were recorded for the second question, "What are your thoughts related to being male in counselor education?" Ninety-six responses were recorded for the third question, "What are the ways you act differently in student relationships because you are male?" We also coded additional comments of significance that followed each survey item. In all, qualitative analysis included the coding of 359 answers of varying lengths. During qualitative analysis, the research team

discovered that participants' answers appeared to be addressing similar themes across all questions. Hence, all answers were collapsed into one analysis.

The research team identified 10 distinct themes expressed by participants regarding the experiences of being a male counselor educator. We identified "modify behavior" as the most predominant theme, magnified by frequency (32%). This theme included intentional changes in action or interpersonal expression related to being male in professional relationships. Another major theme, "no difference" (frequency 23%) included beliefs and experiences that no unique relationship challenges exist in counselor education related to being male. Expressions of feeling "isolated or lonely" (frequency 11%) described participant experiences of feeling a lack of support as well as awareness of being a minority in the profession. Responses regarding "sexual attraction" (frequency 11%) involved experiences of sexual attraction in professional relationships. A theme of "perception of impropriety" (frequency 10%) included attention to the perception of others regarding appropriate behavior. Expressions of "prejudice or discrimination" (frequency 9.5%) involved experiences of negative beliefs or actions of others related to one's gender. Additionally, qualitative data revealed themes related to participants' "awareness" of professional relationships, "awareness of power difference" in relationships, the importance of a "caring or safe environment," and "ethnicity or orientation" as part of one's identity as a male counselor educator. A comprehensive presentation of all themes is included in Table 2.

Our second research question regarding specific practices of male counselor educators was addressed through our fourth open-ended survey question, which indicated participants cited over 40 different strategies they used to structure their relationships with students. In general faculty–student interactions, respondents indicated that they did not meet alone with students; only met with students on campus; interacted in groups when others were present; avoided jokes, conversations or language that could be perceived as too friendly; referred to family/significant others in class and conversation; avoided sharing too much personal information; made no physical contact; and avoided being overtly interested in students' relationship issues. When meeting with students, respondents reported that they kept their doors open, structured meetings with an agenda, met in classrooms, ensured others were around, and avoided engaging in counseling with students. Participants also indicated that they consulted with colleagues regarding student relationships, had colleagues present for potentially problematic student interactions, addressed student relationship issues as soon as they arose, notified department chairs of any concerns and documented interactions. On a personal level, participants reported that they focused on having a balanced personal life, increased self-awareness of interactions, reminded self of boundaries, and engaged in honest and transparent interactions.

Quantitative Analyses

We used results from qualitative analysis to inform decision making regarding variables of interest for quantitative analysis. Due to the extensive data resultant from the 32-question survey of practices and attitudes and need for manuscript brevity, we narrowed survey data results to the survey items that matched qualitative theme results. We chose to explore one survey item per qualitative theme that appeared to closely match the qualitative analysis. Following final coding discussion, the research team identified five attitude and practice questions from the survey that appeared to be related to content evolving from the qualitative analysis. The qualitative theme of modifying behavior appeared most closely linked to the survey item, "I interact differently with female students than male students." The theme represented by some respondents, that there were no differences related to being male, most closely aligned with the item, "I have unique ethical challenges related to being male in counselor education." The item linked to the qualitative theme of avoiding the appearance

of impropriety, "I structure my individual interaction with students to avoid the appearance of impropriety," was further explored. The qualitative themes of isolation and discrimination were matched to two items: "I feel isolated in my faculty because I am male," and "I feel discriminated against by faculty members because I am male." Although most respondents did not agree with these final two statements, we chose to explore them further due to the distinct voices of some respondents related to ethnicity and sexual orientation within the data.

Table 2

Themes Related to Male Counselor Educators' Experiences

Theme	Definition	Freq.	Responses	Sample Statements
Modify Behavior	Intentional changes in action or interpersonal expression related to being male	32%	115	". . . crucial to make sure distinct boundaries are established" ". . . have to focus on being appropriately relational" "must balance being supportive with providing clear boundaries"
No Difference	No unique challenges in counselor education related to being male	23%	82	"No specific challenges related to my gender" "Ethics are ethics, male or female" "How I act has little to do with being male"
Awareness	Indicating awareness or self-awareness regarding professional relationships	13%	47	". . . we need to be very aware of situations and interactions with female students" "Know one's self" "I am now more aware of how I interact"
Isolated or Lonely	Experiencing lack of support and awareness of being a minority in profession	11%	39	"I feel a bit like an endangered species" "There are simply some things I can only talk with other men about" "I recognize males are a minority in the field"
Sexual Attraction	Experiences of sexual attraction in professional relationships	11%	38	"Dealing with feelings of attraction with students and colleagues" "I am attracted to female students but do not act on it" "I have to refocus my thoughts if I feel an attraction to a student or colleague"
Perception of Impropriety	Attention to the perception of others regarding appropriate behavior	10%	37	". . . don't want to give the impression of being unethical" "Avoiding any appearance of misconduct" ". . . vigilant in protecting myself from false accusations"
Awareness of Power Difference	Awareness of the impact of privilege and power in relationships	10%	35	"Being aware of my male privilege and not abusing it" "I can be male without being dominating" "I do see the same gender politics and gender roles in my profession as I see in society…"
Prejudice or Discrimination	Experiences of negative or devaluing beliefs or actions of others related to being male	9.5%	34	"tendency to view males as the victimizer" ". . . uniquely male issues that could arise in counseling situations are downplayed" "I sometimes experience sexism against men in the comments of my female colleagues"
Caring or Safe Environment	Intention to provide support and safety to students	6%	21	"We want to provide a caring environment" "I want students to feel comfortable around me." ". . . do not want any female to feel anxious"
Ethnicity or Orientation as Part of Identity	Influences of ethnicity and sexual identity upon male professional experiences	4%	15	"Being a male and an ethnic minority is challenging and often lonely" ". . . being Black and male is more of a challenge than being male alone" "I feel isolated not because I am male but because I am a gay male"

Note: Frequency = Number of participants who shared theme-related statements

Quantitative Results

Descriptive results for the five survey items are presented in Table 3. In order to explore relationships between survey items of interest, we employed Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient analyses on the five variables. There were statistically significant positive correlations between perception of unique ethical challenges and the four other variables: feeling isolated ($r = .290$, $n = 149$, $p < .001$); interacting differently with female students ($r = .317$, $n = 147$, $p < .001$); structuring interactions to avoid appearance of impropriety ($r = .190$, $n = 148$, $p = .021$); and feeling discriminated against ($r = .217$, $n = 150$, $p = .008$). The more a male counselor educator felt there were unique ethical challenges related to being male, the more likely he was to feel isolated and discriminated against, structure interactions with students to avoid the appearance of impropriety, and interact differently with females than males. Additionally, there was a statistically significant positive correlation between feeling isolated and feeling discriminated against ($r = .371$, $n = 149$, $p < .001$). The more isolated a male counselor educator felt, the more likely he was to feel discriminated.

Table 3

Survey Items Related to Relationships for Male Counselor Educators

				Percent of Responses				
Survey Item	*N*	$\bar{x}$	Σ	SD 1	D 2	N 3	A 4	SA 5
I feel isolated in my faculty because I am male.	149	1.89	.94	36.8	36.8	11.7	5.5	1.2
I interact differently with female students than male students.	147	2.90	1.02	6.7	29.4	21.5	30.7	1.8
I structure my individual interactions with students to avoid the appearance of impropriety.	148	3.76	.92	1.8	9.2	13.5	50.9	15.3
I have unique ethical challenges related to being male in counselor education.	150	2.79	1.03	9.2	30.7	23.9	26.4	1.8
I feel discriminated against by faculty members because I am male.	150	2.05	1.06	31.9	39.9	6.1	12.3	1.8

Note: SD=Strongly Disagree, D=Disagree, N=Neutral, A=Agree, SA=Strongly Agree

We further explored ethnicity and sexual orientation in relationship to the dependent variables of isolation and discrimination based on qualitative findings that indicated these characteristics impact the views of male counselor educators. We conducted four separate one-way between-groups analyses of variance to explore the impact of ethnicity and gender on isolation and discrimination. There was a statistically significant difference in ethnicity for isolation, $F(4, 144) = 5.78$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .14$. Means for ethnicity included Asian $\bar{x} = 2.0$; African American $\bar{x} = 1.71$; White/Non-Hispanic $\bar{x} = 1.84$; White/Hispanic $\bar{x} = 1.64$; Self-Identified as Other $\bar{x} = 3.43$. There was a statistically significant difference in ethnicity for discrimination, $F(4, 144) = 5.25$, $p = .001$, $\eta^2 = .13$. Means for ethnicity included Asian $\bar{x} = 2.0$; African American $\bar{x} = 2.23$; White/Non-Hispanic $\bar{x} = 1.94$; White/Hispanic $\bar{x} = 1.91$; Self-Identified as Other $\bar{x} = 3.71$. There was a statistically significant difference in sexual orientation for isolation, $F(2, 145) = 3.81$, $p = .024$, $\eta^2 = .05$. Means for sexual orientation included Gay $\bar{x} = 2.58$; Heterosexual $\bar{x} = 1.83$; Bisexual $\bar{x} = 1.67$. There was no statistically significant difference in sexual orientation for discrimination, $F(2, 145) = .70$, $p = .50$, $\eta^2 = .01$.

Discussion

The sample in this study reasonably represents the current population of male counselor educators in CACREP-accredited programs. Although the sample reported equivalent numbers between male

and female faculty, they also reported a disproportionate number of female students (78%) to male students (18%), as indicated in previous literature (Schweiger et al., 2012). The sizeable response rate to this survey, as well as its representativeness, lends credibility to findings.

Themes and Characteristics Related to Being a Male in Counselor Education

Qualitative analyses indicated that participants expressed diversity of attitudes and practices regarding the impact of being male upon professional relationships. The most predominant theme, "modify behavior," indicated that being male influenced choices made by male counselor educators in their interactions with students. Conversely, the second dominant theme, "no difference," indicated that some counselor educators do not feel that there is any difference in interactions with students or colleagues related to being male. A lack of consensus existed among male counselor educators regarding the influence of being male upon their professional relationships.

When male counselor educators acknowledged there were differences related to being a male in the field, qualitative analysis revealed additional themes related to isolation, discrimination, fear of appearing inappropriate, interacting differently with females than males and need for awareness. We wanted to explore characteristics related to these feelings, which prompted the correlational analyses.

Quantitative and qualitative analyses indicated that the appearance of impropriety was of considerable concern for male counselor educators. A majority of participants agreed or strongly agreed that they structured their interactions to avoid appearance of impropriety. Results revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between expressing a perception of unique ethical challenges for males and structuring interactions to avoid appearance of impropriety. Participants who perceived unique challenges as males also tended to take steps to avoid appearing inappropriate in their professional relationships. This finding supports qualitative themes of male counselor educators' concerns regarding the appearance of impropriety and fear of the cultural myth of the *lecherous professor* (Bellas & Gossett, 2001).

Sexual attraction emerged as a relevant issue through qualitative analyses. A vast majority of respondents reported that they had experienced being attracted to a student, with frequency of feelings ranging from rare to a regular occurrence. Also, a majority of the sample reported experiencing a student being attracted to them. These results suggest that sexual attraction was experienced as a common phenomenon in male teacher–student relationships. However, participants often described their feelings of attraction as natural reactions that posed no threat if not acted upon.

When addressing the influence of student gender upon their behavior with students, male counselor educators reported diverse perspectives. Participants were asked if they interacted differently with female students than male students. Responses were about evenly distributed from "disagree" to "agree." The variance in responses may reflect the larger disagreement among participants regarding the influence of gender upon professional relationships. The qualitative themes of "modify behavior" and "no difference" may provide context for understanding diverse results regarding this question. Correlational analysis revealed that the more a participant perceived unique challenges as a male counselor educator, the more he reported interacting differently with female students compared to male students.

Some participants also reported experiencing isolation related to being a male counselor educator. Qualitative data revealed unique experiences of isolation related to ethnicity and sexual orientation. Although there were a small number of participants who identified as gay, bisexual, African American, Latino, Asian, or other ethnicity, we chose to conduct quantitative analysis to

further explore their voices, which were clearly articulated as unique in qualitative analyses. Further quantitative analysis indicated that participants who self-identified as "other" for ethnicity were more likely to feel isolated in comparison with other ethnicities. Likewise, gay male counselor educators also were more likely to feel isolated in the profession. However, gay males did not report higher levels of feeling discriminated against as compared to heterosexual males. Previous research indicates gay males may experience isolation related to not being out to co-workers, often motivated by fear of discrimination (Wright, Colgan, Creegany, & McKearney, 2006). Another possible interpretation could be that gay male counselor educators feel isolated due to interacting with fewer colleagues who are similar to them, but who they experience as accepting or non-discriminatory.

Linked to isolation, we also asked male counselor educators if they had faculty colleagues with whom they could discuss challenges. This point seemed especially salient due to qualitative results indicating male counselor educators rely on consultation as one intervention for dealing with student relationship issues. A majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed to having a colleague on their faculty with whom they could discuss male-related issues. Qualitative and quantitative analyses identified ethnicity as an important contributor to the experiences of male counselor educators. Qualitative data included a small but consistent voice of African American male counselor educators who expressed increased isolation due to a combination of ethnicity and gender. Quantitative analysis also indicated that participants who identified as African American reported more frequent experiences of discrimination in their professional environment. These findings coincide with research indicating that African American males experience prejudice and discrimination in higher education due to stereotype images of African American males as underachieving, disengaged and threatening (Harper, 2009). Brooks and Steen (2010) discussed concerns related to the lack of African American male counselor educators and the obstacles they face in the academic setting. Participants who self-identified as "other" on ethnicity also showed increased experiences of discrimination as well as isolation. Correlational analysis confirmed the co-occurrence of these two themes, revealing a positive relationship between feeling isolated and feeling discriminated against. Asian males were more likely to feel isolated and structure their interactions to avoid appearances of impropriety, which reflects previous accounts of Asian professors in the literature (Culotta, 1993) in which they experienced isolation from their colleagues and increased student mentoring demands because of their minority status.

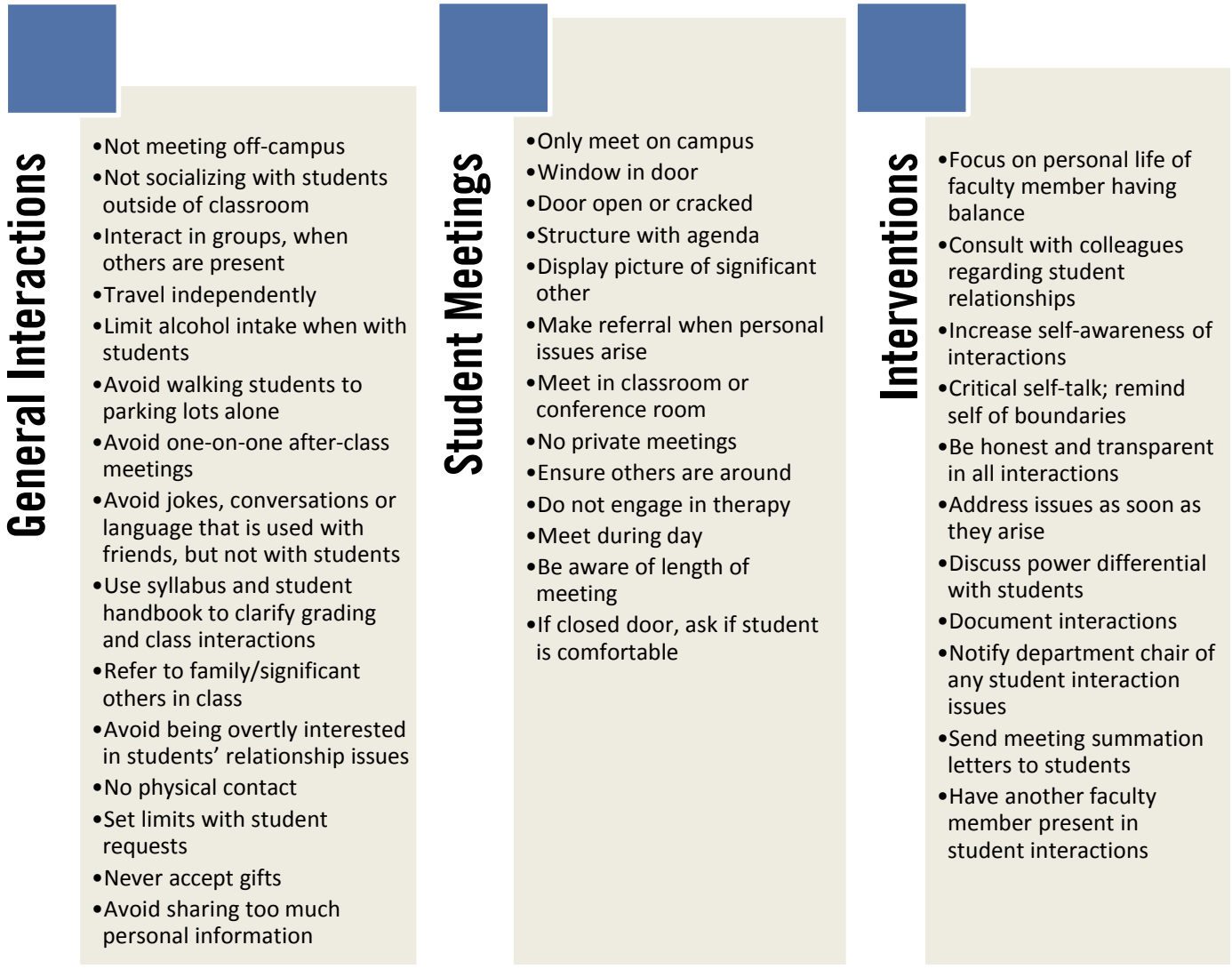
In returning to the issue of concern related to practices of male counselor educators in building humanistic and growth-inspiring relationships with students, the results of the current study provide some insight. Many male counselor educators appear to be aware and concerned that being male may influence how they are perceived by students and how they approach their relationships with students. However, results indicate that participants sought methods and strategies that allowed them to pursue relationships while also being sensitive to students' perceptions of safety. Figure 1 provides specific strategies highlighted by participants that allow male counselor educators to engage in student–teacher relationships that recognize the power differential between student and teacher, inherent challenges with sexual attraction, and yet still allow the student and teacher to benefit from an accepting, inspiring relationship that mirrors the therapeutic relationship.

Limitations

The survey method used for this study was selected for exploratory purposes and did not involve the use of a rigorous assessment designed to interpret results through reliability and validity procedures; hence, results must be interpreted with caution. Additionally, the survey sample may not represent the views of the entire population of male counselor educators.

Figure 1.

Strategies Used by Male Counselor Educators to Build Student Relationships.



Note: General Interactions = strategies used in everyday interactions; Student Meetings = strategies used when having to meet with students individually; Interventions = strategies used when complications arise.

Due to the extensiveness of collected data, we were unable to report all findings related to the uniqueness of the sample. Respondents reported rich qualitative narratives and variations in their attitudes and practices. The variations are not fully represented in this report. The use of a one-time open-ended questionnaire precluded use of qualitative interviews that would reveal further depth of themes. Additionally, minority groups, such as specific ethnicities and those who identified as gay and bisexual, appeared to have a distinct voice in this survey. However, due to low representation, data analysis was limited in representing their experiences. We attempted to rectify this limitation by voicing those narratives in the qualitative analysis.

Implications

The purpose of this research was to reveal attitudes and practices of male counselor educators, allowing the reader an understanding of how the experience of being male influences the daily choices of male counselor educators. Implications of this research study include better understanding of the experiences of counselor educators that lead to enhanced job satisfaction for males, best

practices to improve faculty–student relationships and possible areas for further investigation. Additionally, in Figure 1, we provide a list of behaviors used by male counselor educators to ensure appropriate student–teacher boundaries. This list offers male counselor educators possible strategies to address perceptions of impropriety or misconduct.

If male counselor educators experience greater job satisfaction, then more males may choose the counseling field, as they observe possible role models with whom they identify. Substantial variables identified by this study that might influence job satisfaction are feelings of isolation, discrimination, fear of appearing inappropriate and hypervigilance to behavioral interactions with students. Qualitative data revealed a desire by male counselor educators to offer a safe, caring environment, qualified by some respondents as an authentic relationship. Findings indicate that if male counselor educators feel limited by personal loneliness or concern for appearances, this will most likely interfere with their student and faculty relationships. Consultation with and support of colleagues appeared to be a process regularly utilized by many of the male counselor educators in this study. Counselor education departments would benefit from engaging in practices that promote collegiality and support among faculty members as well as formalizing mentoring processes.

Male counselor educators revealed that they take measures to modify their behaviors with students, especially female students. Our results indicate that fear of impropriety, awareness of cultural power differentials, desire to create safe relationships with students and realistic awareness of potential sexual attraction prompt male counselor educators to engage in behaviors that will provide safety for students and for themselves. These strategies reveal concrete behavioral actions taken to ensure the maintenance of boundaries with students. Kolbert, Morgan, and Brendel (2002) concluded that faculty must consider student perceptions of a relationship as the primary criterion in making decisions regarding their interactions with students. This conclusion requires considerable awareness from male counselor educators related to how they present themselves and how students perceive them. One common strategy used by male counselor educators and commonly supported in the literature (Ei & Bowen, 2002) is engaging in group activities, as opposed to one-on-one activities, in order to establish authentic relationships in a safe environment.

The most cited strategy among this sample was not being alone or out of sight from others when engaging in personal interactions with students. In a field where confidentiality is the base of intervention, this particular strategy seems incongruous, especially for professionals who value relationship in teacher–student interactions. Additionally, students may question a faculty member's authenticity if intimacy is avoided in the relationship. However, contextual, legal and cultural considerations appear to encourage these types of restraints. Counselor education departments may benefit from discussion of these issues of behavior, relationship, philosophy and safety in an open forum among faculty and with students.

The relational experiences of male counselor educators have gone virtually unexamined in literature and research, leaving many opportunities for further inquiry. Some participants indicated that ethnicity influenced their experiences and relationships, yet sample size prevented meaningful exploration. Further research may investigate the unique experiences of African American, Latino and Asian male counselor educators. Likewise, sexual orientation emerged as a major influence for some participants. An exploration of experiences of gay male counselor educators is needed to enhance understanding of their relational experiences and the influence of gender.

Participants expressed concerns about perceptions of impropriety with students, feelings of isolation within the profession, and experiences of prejudice and discrimination in their work

environments. These elements require further exploration to better understand the nature of these experiences and investigate causal factors to heighten sensitivity and identify appropriate measures for creating a safe environment for faculty and students. Participants also indicated that they alter behavior in student relationships to avoid the appearance of impropriety and maintain professional boundaries. Further research could explore the implications of those decisions for the quality of relationships with students. A study of student perspectives would greatly enhance understanding of these relational dynamics. Additionally, a study of ways in which female counselor educators approach their relationships with students, in regard to feeling restricted or limited in intimacy, is warranted.

This study provides an enhanced understanding of male counselor educators' perceptions and experiences of their relationships with students and colleagues. Male counselor educators shared a unique voice of experience. Further research may expand understanding of male counselor educator experiences, provide insights to improve the quality of faculty–student relationships and assist in developing male role models for the future of our profession.

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