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Across the Curriculum: Teaching LGBTQ+ Competencies in Counselor Education

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Across the Curriculum: Teaching LGBTQ+ Competencies in Counselor Education

Abstract

In the U.S., the number of people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other sexual/gender minority identity (LGBTQ+) is increasing. LGBTQ+ individuals utilize counseling services twice as much as individuals in the general population. They are at a higher risk of experiencing depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and relationship issues. This population also faces discrimination and marginalization due to the stigma of their gender identity and sexual orientation. Thus, there is a high likelihood that counselors will provide counseling services to LGBTQ+ clients during their careers. Unfortunately, many masters-level counselor education programs do not provide sufficient training. Ethical, effective, and affirmative strategies counselor educators can use when teaching LGBTQ+ competencies are offered.

Keywords

LGBTQ+, Counselor Educators, Competencies

Author's Notes

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Across the Curriculum: LGBTQ+ Competencies for Counselors

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Abstract

In the U.S., the number of people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other sexual/gender minority identity (LGBTQ+) is increasing. LGBTQ+ individuals utilize counseling services twice as much as individuals in the general population. They are at a higher risk of experiencing depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, and relationship issues. This population also faces discrimination and marginalization due to the stigma of their gender identity and sexual orientation. Thus, there is a high likelihood that counselors will provide counseling services to LGBTQ+ clients during their careers. Unfortunately, many masters-level counselor education programs do not provide sufficient training. Ethical, effective, and affirmative strategies counselor educators can use when teaching LGBTQ+ competencies are offered.

Significance to the Public

This article will assist counselor educators in teaching LGBTQ+ competencies to counselors in training, thus ensuring evidence based, ethical care.

Keywords: LGBTQ+, Counselor Educators, Competencies

The urgency and need to robustly prepare future counselors to work with LGBTQ+ individuals is palpable. The LGBTQ+ community is increasing in the United States (Powell, 2021). Further, people who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community seek counseling at higher rates than the general population and they also experience higher rates of mental illness than the general population (Hong et al., 2016; Pachankis et al., 2023). Unfortunately, the education related to LGBTQ+ competencies has fallen short (Ginicola et al., 2017). Counselors in training and entry-level counselors report feeling unprepared to work with LGBTQ+ clients (Bishop et al., 2022; Carrington & Sims, 2023). This gap in education can translate to clients feeling unsupported, clients being dissatisfied with

counseling services, and clients terminating counseling services early (Bishop et al., 2023).

To ethically treat and serve the LGBTQ+ population, this perceived lack of knowledge and training must be addressed by counselor educators and LGBTQ+ competencies must be addressed throughout the curricula. Gaps exist in the literature regarding efficacious competency models, as they relate to counselor education and the LGBTQ+ population (Pereira et al., 2019). The authors will highlight the existing competency models and examine the gaps and shortcomings associated with current models. The authors are proposing a conceptual framework and practical training suggestions for counselor educators.

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A Growing Community

The number of people identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or other sexual/gender minority identity (LGBTQ+) is increasing in the United States. According to the U.S. Census Bureau's Household Pulse Survey in 2021, eight percent of the respondents, or approximately 20 million adults, self-identify as LGBTQ+ (Powell, 2021). This number is significantly higher than a previous estimate of four million in 2012 (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Additionally, two percent of the respondents report having a different sexual orientation (for example, pansexual, asexual, or other sexual orientation). Over one percent of the population identifies as transgender (Powell, 2021). This equates to approximately two million adults. Of the respondents, two percent have a gender identity other than cisgender or transgender (for example, genderqueer, non-binary, or gender fluid) (Powell, 2021). It is highly probable that most people in the U.S. have a family member, friend, or acquaintance or know someone from the LGBTQ+ community (Nichols, 2021). Therefore, counselors will also likely provide counseling services to at least one (but probably more than one) LGBTQ+ client throughout their careers (Nichols, 2021). For this reason, it is important that counselors receive training in graduate counselor education programs to provide ethical, effective, and affirmative treatment to LGBTQ+ clients (Ginicola et al., 2017).

Clinical Considerations

Historically, LGBTQ+ people have been marginalized and the counseling profession has often mirrored the dominant culture's values (Ginicola et al., 2017; Nichols, 2021). In fact, homosexuality as a diagnosis remained in the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) until 1973, and the decision to remove it was not popular among mental health professionals, at the time (Nichols, 2021). Further, conversion therapy, a harmful, unethical practice consisting of electric shock treatments and other

severe methods, was used by counselors to attempt to change a person's sexual or gender identity (Gess & Horn, 2018). While conversion therapy is increasingly being banned by states and has been denounced by most mental health associations and organizations, it is still practiced today by some counselors (Nichols, 2021).

Moving to the modern-day treatment landscape, it is important to note that LGBTQ+ individuals utilize counseling services twice as often as the general population (Pachankis et al., 2023). The needs of LGBTQ+ clients are different from the needs of those who are heterosexual and cisgender (Ginicola et al., 2017). LGBTQ+ individuals have a unique variety of developmental and affectional differences, along with societal and political oppression and stigma, also known as minority stress, that non-LGBTQ+ individuals do not experience (Ginicola et al., 2017). LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to face acts of violence, discrimination, and oppression because their sexual/gender minority status is often judged and rejected by others (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Most LGBTQ+ young people are frequently bullied, harassed, and physically assaulted in school because of their identity (Earnshaw et al., 2016). LGBTQ+ people are also at a higher risk for experiencing depression, suicidal ideation, anxiety disorders, substance abuse, interpersonal problems, and relationship issues (Hong et al., 2016; Johnson et al., 2013; Kulick et al., 2017; Pachankis et al., 2023; Puckett & Levitt, 2015).

When supporting LGBTQ+ clients, counselors must also be educated on the process of coming out. The term 'coming out' is used by LGBTQ+ individuals to describe the act of disclosing their sexual and gender minority identity to themselves and other people (Dziengel, 2015; Guittar, 2013; Magee & Spangaro, 2017; Nichols, 2021; Solomon et al., 2015; Sylliboy, 2022). Although there is a wide variety of reasons LGBTQ+ individuals might seek counseling services, many LGBTQ+ people seek the help of a counselor when they are considering coming out or in the process of coming out (Hill, 2009). Coming out can be a life-changing process for LGBTQ+ people, and counselors are

sometimes the only support the client has in navigating this process (Nichols, 2021). It is a process that has no equivalent for non-LGBTQ+ individuals (Guittar, 2013; Hill, 2009). Coming out is not a singular, one-time event (Sylliboy, 2022). LGBTQ+ individuals come out to others repeatedly throughout their lifetimes (Hill, 2009). Coming out can help LGBTQ+ individuals live authentically and honestly and is associated with higher levels of psychological well-being (Kosciw et al., 2015). Researchers have found that coming out can improve mental and physical health (Dziengel, 2015). Coming out is often necessary for honest self-expression and self-discovery, and it can feel exciting and liberating (Nichols, 2021).

Despite the many benefits sexual orientation/gender identity disclosure can have for LGBTQ+ people, this decision can also negatively affect social relationships, self-perception, and societal structures (Dziengel, 2015). Researchers have found that LGBTQ+ clients need counselors who understand the positive and negative consequences of coming out (Solomon et al., 2015). Coming out can heighten anxiety and distress and each instance of coming out poses a risk of rejection with the possibility of facing discriminatory and heterosexist treatment from others (Hill, 2009). Because it is not always safe or advisable to come out, there are many considerations counselors must help clients process when they are considering coming out, including family attitudes and reactions, financial dependence on parents (for clients who are minors or living at home), risk of abuse, and work environments, to name a few (Nichols, 2021). People assumed to be supportive may not be, and they can have adverse reactions when an individual comes out, underlining the need for thoughtful considerations before coming out to significant people or family members (Solomon et al., 2015). Coming out and being out can be complicated. It is common for LGBTQ+ individuals to be out to some people in their lives but not out to everyone, so it should never be assumed that someone is 'out' (Nichols, 2021).

Some individuals struggle with coming out to themselves and accepting their own LGBTQ+

identity. This is known as internalized stigma (Puckett & Levitt, 2015). Internalized stigma is a common challenge for LGBTQ+ individuals and is defined as having a negative attitude regarding one's own or others' LGBTQ+ identity (Cass, 1979; Puckett & Levitt, 2015; Troiden, 1979). Internalized stigma can also be described as an internal conflict between one's sexual orientation or gender identity and it is related to overall sexual minority stress (Sullivan et al., 2023). Researchers have found that internalized stigma negatively affects identity formation; it can hinder or even halt the entire process (Szymanski et al., 2001).

Internalized stigma has origins in society's negative views on sexual and gender minorities, which are then absorbed and believed by the LGBTQ+ individual (Frost & Meyer, 2009). Researchers have found that internalized stigma negatively influences identity formation and development and can prevent clients from discussing sexual orientation or gender identity with their counselors (Puckett & Levitt, 2015). Internalized stigma also leads to relationship problems and increased depressive symptoms (Frost & Meyer, 2009). Clinicians who understand the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ clients may be able to provide better care to their clients (Farmer et al., 2013). Training can support these clinicians in bolstering their awareness, skills, and knowledge (Sue et al., 1992).

In addition to the necessary skills, knowledge, and awareness mentioned above, it is also essential that counselors know how to support transgender and gender nonconforming clients (TGNC; Yoon et al., 2014). TGNC clients often face some of the highest rates of discrimination, microaggressions, and violence in the LGBTQ+ community (Lefevor et al., 2019). Further, TGNC clients often have less access to care and often have negative experiences with mental health professionals, in comparison to cisgender clients (Mizock & Lundquist, 2016). Counselors must cultivate cultural competence so they can support clients in their gender identity journey and serve as advocates and allies, avoiding doing harm (Singh & Dickey, 2017). Counselor educators can support budding clinicians by

highlighting the intersectionality that exists within the LGBTQ+ community (Cor et al., 2018).

LGBTQ+ Competent Counseling

Counselors are called to provide counseling treatment guided by a multicultural and social justice framework and advocate for clients (Ratts & Greenleaf, 2018). Counselor educators have an ethical responsibility to ensure that counseling students are competent to treat clients from complex and diverse backgrounds, including sexual and gender minorities (Frank & Cannon, 2010; Gess & Horn, 2018). Researchers have found that the outcome of counseling is more successful for LGBTQ+ clients when their counselors provide LGBTQ+ affirmative and competent care (Ginicola et al., 2017). Clients' satisfaction levels with counseling are strongly determined by counselors' levels of multicultural competency (Frank & Cannon, 2010).

There have been various models and definitions of what LGBTQ+ competency means in the context of counseling (Harper et al., 2013). Ethical and professional guidelines regarding LGBTQ+ competencies for counselors and counselor educators have been provided by the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities (SAIGE, formerly ALGBTIC), for inclusion throughout counselor education program curricula (American Counseling Association, 2014; Harper et al., 2013). In a study done by Gess and Horn (2018), the researchers developed a counseling-centered definition of competency that includes awareness, knowledge, and skills specific to LGBTQ+ populations, advocating with and on behalf of LGBTQ+ communities, and following the *ALGBTIC Transgender Competencies* (2010) and the *ALGBTIC LGBTQQIA Competencies* (2013).

Multicultural competency also requires counselors to be aware of the variations in people's mental health status, ability status, religion, spirituality, indigenous heritage, immigrant status,

race, ethnicity, socioeconomic level, and age (Ginicola et al., 2017). Many LGBTQ+ individuals have a complex interconnection of a number of these identities and statuses, known as intersectionality (Harper et al., 2013; Cor et al., 2018; Ginicola et al., 2017; Nichols, 2021). Individuals with multiple minority statuses and identities, for example, LGBTQ+ people of color (LGBTQ+-POC), often experience increased discrimination and marginalization (Cyrus, 2017; Ginicola et al., 2017). Understanding intersectionality is understanding how identities can be connected to marginalization and oppression (Cor et al., 2018). To ensure that counselor education programs are competent and affirming, counselor educators must constantly evaluate the cultural atmosphere within departments and ensure that LGBTQ+ competencies are taught to students. It is also imperative that counselor educators continuously work on their own LGBTQ+ competencies due to the constant growth and evolution of issues, language, and identities within the LGBTQ+ community (Gess & Horn, 2018; Speciale & Speedlin, 2015). This ongoing task is never completely achieved (Frank & Cannon, 2010).

Despite these ethical and professional guidelines, researchers have found that some academic instructors are still hesitant to discuss sexual and gender minority issues, and many masters-level counselor education programs do not provide sufficient training for counselors to work with LGBTQ+ clients (Bidell, 2012; Cor et al., 2018; Gess & Horn, 2018; Ginicola et al., 2017). As a result, harm may be done to clients (Ginicola et al., 2017). Many counseling students have positive attitudes toward LGBTQ+ people and want to work with them; however, they may lack the knowledge and skills to do so effectively if they are not adequately trained in counselor education programs (Bidell, 2012; Farmer et al., 2013). Many practicing counselors in the field report that they felt inadequately trained in their counselor education programs on treating LGBTQ+ clients (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014).

Accredited counselor education programs must incorporate standards set by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in their coursework. CACREP standards are not clear regarding LGBTQ+-specific competency training within counselor education programs (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Over the years, CACREP has revised its accreditation standards to keep up with society's continual increase in diversity. This effort to be more diverse and inclusive has resulted in more general wording that excludes gender identity or expression. The current CACREP (2016) standards do not contain the terms 'sexual orientation,' 'gender identity,' or 'gender expression' in the section on social and cultural diversity for counselor education programs (CACREP, 2016, II.F.2.; Cor et al., 2018; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Instead, it includes the term 'multicultural,' which is defined in the glossary (CACREP, 2016) as a "term denoting the diversity of racial, ethnic, and cultural heritage; socioeconomic status; age; gender; sexual orientation; and religious and spiritual beliefs, as well as physical, emotional, and mental abilities" (p. 46). This is the only time the term 'sexual orientation' is mentioned in CACREP standards (Cor et al., 2018). The words 'sexual' and 'sexuality' are used only regarding human development as sexual beings and only appear three other times in the entire 52-page standard and the word 'gender' can be found two more times but is used within the context of traditional, binary gender roles (Cor et al., 2018). The *ACA Code of Ethics* (2014) supplements CACREP standards and includes wording specific to sexual identity in the section on multicultural codes (American Counseling Association, 2014; Toomey & Carlson, 2022). The exclusion of wording regarding gender identity and expression within CACREP standards is salient (Cor et al., 2018; Toomey & Carlson, 2022; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). This omission can be interpreted as a signal that LGBTQ+ issues are unimportant and learning about LGBTQ+ identities is not required for the education of counselors (Cor et al., 2018; Toomey & Carlson,

2022; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). As a result, LGBTQ+-specific content is often minimized or removed from multicultural counselor education curricula (Cor et al., 2018; Toomey & Carlson, 2022; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014).

Teaching Effective Strategies for Increasing LGBTQ+ Competencies

There are some practical and theoretically based strategies, techniques, and methods counselor educators can utilize to ensure that counseling students receive LGBTQ+ competencies in counselor education programs that will allow them to provide affirming and effective counseling treatment to their future clients. As important as it is to be accepting, validating, and to provide a safe environment for clients, there are also specific skills counseling students need to learn to become LGBTQ+ competent counselors (Ginicola et al., 2017; Nichols, 2021; Skerven & de St. Aubin, 2015).

Infusing Competencies Throughout Coursework

One method of ensuring that counseling students become LGBTQ+ competent is to infuse LGBTQ+ competencies throughout all coursework in counselor education programs (Cor et al., 2018; Gess & Horn, 2018; Speciale et al., 2015; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Because of the complex identities and needs of the LGBTQ+ population, one brief class session covering LGBTQ+ issues in the context of a multicultural course is not enough (Ginicola et al., 2017; Speciale et al., 2015). Counselor education programs also should not make LGBTQ+ training the job of just one faculty member (Gess & Horn, 2018). These practices can indicate a lack of commitment of the institution and faculty to making an entire program LGBTQ+ competent (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). It is suggested that all instructors in a counselor education program should be able to find ways to

infuse LGBTQ+ competencies into their counselor education classes, regardless of the topic (Cor et al., 2018; Gess & Horn, 2018; Speciale et al., 2015; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014).

While most programs focus LGBTQ+ competencies in their Multicultural Counseling course, it would also make sense to infuse these competencies throughout the curriculum. For example, newly proposed anti-LGBTQ+ legislation could be discussed in the Legal and Ethical Aspects of Counseling course. Students could discuss how legal codes conflict with their guiding ethical codes. Students could utilize an ethical decision-making model as well as the ethical codes and process case studies centered on the impact of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation. In Multicultural Counseling, students could conduct a semi-structured interview with a person in the LGBTQ+ community about counseling needs and then provide brief class presentations. In Theories and Techniques, feminist theory could be explored when working with marginalized clients. In the Diagnosis and Treatment course, it could be discussed that the DSM used to include homosexuality as a diagnosis and that conversion therapy still exists in some pockets around the world (Nichols, 2021). Case studies could be utilized in all these courses to proactively think about best practices and best care. This is only a small sampling of the courses that could be infused with LGBTQ+ competencies.

Intentional Use of Language

Researchers have developed various techniques for counselor educators to use in coursework and supervision (Gess & Horn, 2018; Speciale et al., 2015; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). The first step is creating a safe physical and psychological space where language is used intentionally (Gess & Horn, 2018). Counselors in training should be instructed to have an inclusive mindset with clients, especially during the intake session (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). An example of using intentional language is, instead of asking clients whether they have a boyfriend or a girlfriend, asking clients if they are dating anyone (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Using

LGBTQ+-affirming language on client intake forms is helpful because it sends an initial message that the counselor is accepting and safe (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Counselor educators can also help students pay attention to whether binary or exclusionary language is used in textbooks and course materials readings (Cor et al., 2018; Frank & Cannon, 2010).

Whose Voice is Being Heard?

In addition to examining the use of language, counselor educators can also help students pay attention to whose voices are represented or left out in coursework readings (Cor et al., 2018; Frank & Cannon, 2010). Cor et al. (2018) suggest that counselor educators critically examine counselor education coursework included in syllabi. They further recommend LGBTQ+ inclusive case studies in supervision and coursework. This inclusion normalizes LGBTQ+ experiences and promotes empathic understanding (Gess & Horn, 2018). Counselor educators can put much thought and intention into what histories and contexts are included in certain classes and they can also examine their own potential biases and get feedback from each other on syllabi and coursework development (Cor et al., 2018). In addition to syllabi considerations, it would also be fruitful to assign readings from authors who are part of the LGBTQ+ community. Amplifying the voices of those with lived experience is one way to increase visibility and intentionality.

LGBTQ+ History

Discussing aspects of LGBTQ+ marginalization history is also helpful for infusing LGBTQ+ competencies in counselor education classes (Gess & Horn, 2018). For example, instructors can discuss the past existence of homosexuality as a diagnosis in the DSM and the stigma LGBTQ+ people endured due to being seen as mentally ill (Nichols, 2021). Conversion therapy can be another helpful topic for class discussion (Gess & Horn, 2018). Knowing the history of this harmful and unethical treatment, once regularly practiced by mental health

professionals, can effectively address the extent to which LGBTQ+ people have been marginalized within the mental health profession (Ginicola et al., 2017).

Mentoring

Mentoring is another technique that can be used to infuse LGBTQ+ competencies in counselor education curricula (Cor et al., 2018). Research has shown that mentorship at the college level creates an affirming experience that may translate to better learning outcomes (Sarna et al., 2021). Counselor educators who are members of the LGBTQ+ community might consider being out, and those not in the community could consider being out as an ally. Gess and Horn (2018) suggest that being out as a faculty member can normalize being LGBTQ+ to students. They also highlight that being out as an LGBTQ+ faculty member should only be considered if the university or college environment is safe.

Current Events

Including current events related to the LGBTQ+ community in the classroom and supervision is another helpful infusion technique (Gess & Horn, 2018). It is crucial that counselor educators be reflexive teachers and continually address their own biases and assumptions regarding LGBTQ+ people (Frank & Cannon, 2010; Speciale et al., 2015; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Using real-world examples can foster understanding and empathy and underline the need for counselors to be advocates. For example, it may be useful to discuss current anti-LGBTQ+ legislation through the lens of discriminatory practices and it may also help counseling students explore their possible biases regarding LGBTQ+ people (Gess & Horn, 2018).

For example, there has been controversial litigation involving counselor education programs remediating graduate students who refuse to treat LGBTQ+ clients for personal religious reasons (Hutchens et al., 2013; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). One of the most well-known cases

was *Ward v. Wilbanks* in 2009 (Kaplan, 2014). Julea Ward was dismissed from the counseling program at Eastern Michigan University when she refused to comply with remediation requirements for her refusal to treat a gay client. She sued the program, citing First Amendment rights, freedom of speech, and freedom of religion (Burkholder et al., 2014; Kaplan, 2014). The judge sided with the university, stating that counselors can harm clients when they cannot set aside their personal beliefs and values and the judge also noted that Julea Ward's behavior violated the *ACA Code of Ethics* (Kaplan, 2014). Julea Ward later appealed, and there was a settlement in her favor (Kaplan, 2014). Highlighting this case and processing the implications could be a fruitful class exercise.

Legislative Awareness

Counselors must be aware of current political events directly affecting their sexual and gender minority clients (Horne et al., 2022). Anti-LGBTQ+ legislation is spreading across the U.S., with over 520 anti-LGBTQ+ bills being introduced in state legislatures in 2023 (Peele, 2023). Not only do these bills affect the LGBTQ+ community, but many also directly affect counselors. For example, Ohio House Bill 8, called the 'Parent's Bill of Rights,' would force school counselors to out LGBTQ+ youth to their parents and report anything students share during counseling, directly violating counselor-client confidentiality (Schneck, 2023). Similar policies have been passed in North Carolina, forcing school counselors to follow the law or break it by following their personal and professional ethical codes and protecting client confidentiality and counselor-client trust (Wall, 2023). In Texas, a recent bill allows schools to bypass hiring licensed school counselors and employ chaplains to counsel students (Peele, 2023). Although these chaplains would have to undergo background checks, they would not be required to apply for state board licenses or certifications (Schneck, 2023). In Tennessee, there is a state law that allows counselors and therapists to refuse treatment to LGBTQ+ clients due to their religious or personal beliefs (Grzanka et al., 2020; Wagner, 2016).

Awareness of these bills may increase legislative advocacy of future counselors.

Legislation Related to Mental Health

Another reason counselor educators and counselors should keep up with state and national legislation that pertains to LGBTQ+ people is that the mental health of this population is directly connected to politics (Grzanka et al., 2020; Horne et al., 2022; Hughto et al., 2022; Nichols, 2021). Researchers have found that transgender individuals who are fearful of their rights being taken away have increased depression, anxiety, and PTSD (Hughto et al., 2022). Researchers have also found that the current sociopolitical atmosphere in the U.S. is causing higher levels of depression, anxiety, and concerns about increased discrimination among all LGBTQ+ people, not just transgender, non-binary, and gender-expansive people (Grzanka et al., 2020; Horne et al., 2022). Counselors and counselors-in-training who are equipped with the tools to provide empowerment, encouragement, affirmation, assistance, and refuge for LGBTQ+ individuals may provide more responsive care (Hill, 2009).

Difficult Conversations

Another part of the process of becoming LGBTQ+ competent is to engage in difficult conversations and discussions in the classroom and be able to challenge students' assumptions and biases (Cor et al., 2018; Gess & Horn, 2018; Speciale et al., 2015; Toomey & Carlson, 2022). It is common for counseling students to feel uncomfortable talking about LGBTQ+ issues in classroom settings, whether for personal or religious reasons (Gess & Horn, 2018). In fact, many practicing counselors avoid working with LGBTQ+ clients due to their religious beliefs or personal biases (Bayne et al., 2022). However, counselors are expected to be prepared to treat clients from diverse backgrounds, regardless of their belief system (Herlihy et al., 2014). When counseling students examine and work on their own biases, they can lower the potential of unintentionally harming a client by doing or saying something discriminatory or offensive (Troutman &

Packer-Williams, 2014). Engaging in difficult conversations and being aware of biases and assumptions are essential for learning and growth, allowing students to challenge and change their thinking and become more comfortable working with LGBTQ+ clients (Gess & Horn, 2018; Toomey & Carlson, 2022). This is a type of peer education; students can learn from one another during these interactions (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). There are times when learning is more effective when challenging dialogues happen among peers in the classroom, moderated by a counselor educator willing to manage these conversations (Toomey & Carlson, 2022). Doing so is a form of advocacy (Gess & Horn, 2018) that counselors are called to do (American Counseling Association, 2014, Section A.7.a.).

Experiential Activities

Facilitating experiential activities in supervision and in the classroom that are LGBTQ+ inclusive is also helpful when infusing competencies (Cor et al., 2018; Gess & Horn, 2018; Speciale et al., 2015). Counselor Educators can ask students to do counseling role plays portraying a same-sex couple or a client who is transgender (Gess & Horn, 2018). Inviting LGBTQ+ guest speakers and assigning community engagement activities are ways to immerse students in the LGBTQ+ community. This can lead to a greater understanding of LGBTQ+ culture and possibly challenge students to engage beyond their comfort zones (Gess & Horn, 2018; Speciale et al., 2015).

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Practicum/Internship Sites

Forming partnerships with practicum and internship sites that offer counseling students experiences of counseling diverse clients can be one of the best ways for new counselors to build and improve their LGBTQ+ counseling skills (Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014). Counselor education faculty can partner with their university's LGBTQ+ student groups, which might provide counselors with training opportunities to help facilitate Safe Zone or

similar trainings on campus. Faculty might also help counseling students connect with LGBTQ+ groups in local communities, which could offer various real-world experiences and immersion in LGBTQ+ culture (Gess & Horn, 2018).

LGBTQ+ Inclusive Theories

Various pedagogical components, such as feminist theory and queer theory approaches, can be used by counselor educators who want to infuse LGBTQ+ competencies in their coursework (Cor et al., 2018; Frank & Cannon, 2010). Counselor educators can use feminist theory approaches to teach LGBTQ+ competencies from a social justice standpoint (Frank & Cannon, 2010). Students might advocate for the LGBTQ+ community as a personal and professional social justice act, and counselor educators might draw from feminist theory to address and reduce the power differential they hold as professors and supervisors (Gess & Horn, 2018). Queer theory can also offer a framework that counselor educators can use to help students question traditional definitions of sexuality, gender, identity, and psychopathology (Frank & Cannon, 2010). Queer theory emphasizes social justice, disrupts the status quo, and challenges the idea that having a non-LGBTQ+ identity is normal and that all other identities should be marginalized (Cor et al., 2018; Frank & Cannon, 2010).

LGBTQ+ Specific Course

Although every faculty member within a counselor education program should be able to find ways to infuse LGBTQ+ competencies into their counselor education classes and are ethically guided to do so (Cor et al., 2018; Gess & Horn, 2018; Speciale et al., 2015; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014), the fact remains that many professors continue to be uncomfortable including LGBTQ+ content in their coursework and counselor education programs still do not provide sufficient training for counselors to work with LGBTQ+ clients (Bidell, 2013; Cor et al., 2018; Farmer et al., 2013; Gess & Horn, 2018; Ginicola et al., 2017). An alternative to LGBTQ+ competency infusion across all counselor educator

program curricula is to teach LGBTQ+ competencies in a stand-alone graduate course. Researchers have found that taking an LGBTQ+-specific course can significantly improve the LGBTQ+ competencies of counseling students (Bidell, 2013). In a study by Bidell (2013), researchers found that students who completed a course scored higher on LGBTQ+ competency assessment tests than students in the comparison group who were not enrolled in an LGBTQ+ class.

Future Considerations

By infusing the curriculum as well as creating a stand-alone LGBTQ+ specific course, counselor educators can better prepare students to uplift, empower, and validate clients in the LGBTQ+ community. Programs may need to review their curriculum, vision, and mission to ensure that coursework aligns with necessary competencies. Further, it may be useful to research specific learning opportunities to make more robust program recommendations. For example, using films to increase LGBTQ+ competencies in counselors in training (Frick et al., 2017). Essentially, it is fruitful to create an engaging learning environment where there is an appropriate balance of challenge and support (Yoon et al., 2014).

Future research may also center around the utilization of critical learning pedagogy developed from social theories of learning, which asserts that learning is always socially organized and aspires to give students a voice to challenge oppression (Köseoğlu et al., 2023). Moreover, critical learning pedagogy frames learning that is mindful and attentive to marginalized students, such as LGBTQ+ students (Gin & Hearn, 2019). Research does not exist on the integration of critical learning pedagogy in counselor education for LGBTQ+ students or how it may impact LGBTQ+ clients. However, it can be hypothesized that critical learning pedagogy can cultivate LGBTQ+ self-advocacy and that safety established within the classroom can empower students to work with

marginalized populations, namely LGBTQ+ clients (Chi, 2009).

In summation, it is vital that LGBTQ+ competencies are infused across the counselor education curriculum. Examples such as discussing ramifications of anti-LGBTQ+ legislation, incorporating more robust internship opportunities to increase student exposure to working with LGBTQ+ clients, and incorporating more opportunities for experiential learning are all recommendations that could both increase student competence and increase quality of future care. These points of infusion and intentional strategies can be implemented by programs and assessed for efficacy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is vital that counselor education departments review and bolster their LGBTQ+ curriculum. As the number of people who identify as LGBTQ+ increases and as anti-LGBTQ+ legislation continues to increase, there is a need for counselor educators to take a proactive rather than reactive approach. Essentially, it is imperative that LGBTQ+ competencies are thoughtfully, thoroughly, and intentionally designed and infused throughout counselor education programs to prevent further marginalization and harm.

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