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## Promoting Queer Competency Through An Experiential Framework

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### Abstract

Many counselors report feeling under prepared to effectively work with queer persons. Arguably, this can be mitigated through early intervention within training programs. However, many counseling programs do not adequately prepare their students to work with queer persons. To eliminate this gap in training, this article combines endorsed counseling competencies and experiential learning as an approach to enhance counselor queer training and preparation. This approach primarily framed through the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, and further supported through the Competencies for Counseling with LGBQQIA Individuals, and the ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients can create an encompassing curricula and pedagogical framework for counselor educators.

### Keywords

Queer Persons, Experiential Learning, Queer Competency, Multicultural Pedagogy, LGBT Training

Counselor educators are well-suited to promote cultural competency working with diverse populations (Brubaker, Puig, Reese, & Young, 2010; Frank & Cannon, 2010; Odegard & Vereen, 2010), specifically queer persons, often overlooked in counseling curricula (Burnes & Stanley, 2017). As a result, counselor education programs are positioned to alleviate the lack of competencies, and promote cultural competency through their use of pedagogy (Fawcett & Evans, 2012). One such approach includes experientially focused pedagogy. An experiential learning approach provides students the opportunity to actively reflect on their own biases and worldviews, learn foundational content, practice skills, and challenge content in a controlled academic environment (Kolb, 1984). Thereby, developing necessary competence, which will enhance their ability to serve in a diverse and culturally complex society.

The importance of multicultural counseling competency has been widely supported by professional associations (e.g., American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014; Association of Multicultural and Counseling Development [AMCD], n.d.), and accrediting bodies (e.g., Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2015) in the counseling profession. The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (MSJCC; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016), further reinforced by the Competencies for Counseling with LGBQQIA Individuals (Harper et al., 2013), and the Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling (ALGBTIC) Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (Burnes et al., 2009) provide a comprehensive framework for working with queer persons prior to any direct counseling experience, as they grew out of a need for more comprehensive and up-to-date standards in working with marginalized and underserved populations. These frameworks, when used collectively, complement standards and address gaps in both ACA (2014) and CACREP (2015)

standards in counselor training and practice. Importantly, the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) promotes a more complex understanding of the multiplicitous, intersectional, and contextual nature of identity, along with an increased focus on knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, skills, action, the impact of privilege and oppression on the therapeutic alliance, and social justice advocacy-based interventions, which are imperative towards ethical and effective clinical practice with queer persons. As a result, this article applies the aforementioned cultural competencies with the well-documented experiential learning framework as a vehicle for counselor educators to enhance counselors-in-training (CITs) queer competence. Thereby, addressing a current gap in the counseling literature.

### **Queer Persons in Counseling**

For this article, queer will be utilized to denote lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender expansive, and queer/questioning (LGBTGEQ+) persons. Importantly, this umbrella acronym represents both affectional orientation (e.g., lesbian, gay, bisexual), sexuality (e.g., asexual), and gender identity and expression (e.g., transgender, gender expansive), which are often confused and inappropriately interchanged in clinical and academic settings (Goodrich & Luke, 2015). Affectional orientation encompasses a person's mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual human relationships, while gender identity and gender expression involves a person's personal core gender identity and expression of such identity (Harper et al., 2013). Gender identity involves one's innermost sense of identifying with gender, which may or may not be known by others, aligned with their sex, fluid, and observed in their expression of gender (Harper et al., 2013). Gender expression reflects the observable and behavioral manifestation of a person's gender identity expression through clothing, appearance, upkeep, mannerisms, and characteristics (Harper et al., 2013). Each identity, whether singular or intersectional, is represented in the LGBTGEQ+

community (Cavanaugh & Peters, 2019; Luke & Peters, 2019). Thus, it is vital that mental health professionals and educators understand the many identities subsumed into the LGBTGEQ+ umbrella (Cavanaugh & Peters, 2019; Luke & Peters, 2019).

Historically, mental health professionals have been inadequately trained to work with the queer population (Committee on LGBT Health Issues and Research Gaps and Opportunities, 2011; Ginicola, Smith, & Filmore, 2017; Goodrich & Luke, 2015; Killian, Peters, & Brottem 2019; Peters, 2018). This is a major concern, given that queer individuals have higher rates of psychological distress, and more frequently seek out mental health resources than their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts (Grella, Greenwell, Mays, & Cochran, 2009). For example, queer persons have higher rates psychological distress, suicidal ideation, substance use and abuse, and comorbidity than their non-queer counterparts (Bostwick, Boyd, Hughes, West, & McCabe, 2014; Mustanski, Garofalo, & Emerson, 2010). However, that does not include multiple intersecting identities, as those with additional marginalized identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, disability) have even higher rates of psychological distress (Bostwick et al., 2014). In addition, many of these mental health concerns result from external societal factors faced daily by queer persons (Kelleher, 2009; Sutter & Perrin, 2016). Such concerns include but are not limited to (a) heterosexism, sexism, and genderism; (b) marginalization and oppression; (c) microaggressions; (d) emotional, physical, and sexual violence; (e) non-acceptance and/or rejection from family; and (f) discriminatory or non-affirmative laws, statutes, and regulations (Bostwick et al., 2014; Goodrich, Sands, & Catena, 2015; Peters, 2018).

Although counselor-training programs are continuing to recognize the importance of queer-competent training and its influence towards eventual practice, much is still needed in the areas of queer competent training and services. One area of utmost importance is that of queer

affirming counseling, which provides a positive and confirmatory view of queer identity (Harper et al., 2013; Luke & Goodrich, 2015). This approach is further supported and enforced through the social justice advocacy movement in the field of professional counseling, which acknowledges the role and impact of the external environment on identity development and mental health (Ratts et al., 2016).

There has been an increased focus on queer competency training and practice within the counseling literature in the areas of counseling curricula, ethical standards of practice, accreditation benchmarks, and clinical competencies (Burnes & Stanley, 2017; Frank & Cannon, 2010). This development has provided increased acknowledgment in the importance of knowledge of queer identity and issues, expanding self-awareness, and culturally relevant interventions within counselor training and clinical practice (Israel & Selvidge, 2003). While great strides have been made in promoting and supporting queer persons, it is arguable that more attention is needed in the areas of competent counselor training and practice.

Therefore, counselors must be equipped for working with queer issues; however, queer persons often report dissatisfaction with mental health support and resources (Liddle, 1997; Palma & Stanley, 2002), often due to a solely intrapsychic perspective or a unidimensional lens perspective in client focus. This lack of competency and often-unconscious bias could be challenged in counselor preparation programs; however, many counselor-training programs do not sufficiently focus on queer issues and competency in their training (Israel & Selvidge, 2003). An experiential training approach to queer competency would help fill this gap, and, in fact, this content is advocated by both CACREP (2015) standards and the ACA Code of Ethics (2014). Experientially focused pedagogy can provide a comprehensive and efficacious model for promoting an academic environment where CITs can learn to effectively and competently work

with queer persons, through addressing the multiplicitous, intersectional, and contextual nature of identity, with attention to knowledge, attitudes and beliefs, skills, action, the impact of privilege and oppression on the therapeutic alliance, and social justice advocacy.

### **Experiential Learning Theory**

Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory promotes a pedagogical process affording engagement in active self-reflection through direct contact with the central phenomenon learned. Kolb (1984) outlines four actions necessary for this pedagogical method, which include concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation. Concrete experience is the learner's direct exposure to the phenomenon being learned (Kolb, 1984). The learner seeks to understand this phenomenon using abstract conceptualization (Kolb, 1984). The learner uses reflective observation following exposure (Kolb, 1984). Finally, through active experimentation, the learner attempts the observed learned phenomenon (Kolb, 1984).

This approach provides the opportunity for learners to take ownership of learning through reflection, innovative idea development, idea assimilation, and idea promotion through action (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). It promotes the infusion of self-awareness through learning, focuses knowledge acquisition, and provides occasion for exhibiting recently attained skills (Kolb, 1984). Use of this pedagogical approach facilitates the acquisition of the multicultural competency needed for working with queer persons. This has been supported through counseling literature that has addressed the roles of knowledge, awareness, skills, relationship, privilege and oppression, and social justice advocacy.

Multicultural counseling competency has been well documented in literature. However, the understanding of competency has tended to focus on the older, narrower Multicultural Counseling Competencies of knowledge, awareness, and skills (MCC; Sue et al., 1982; Sue,

Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). Studies on MCC attainment in counselor training have observed mixed results. However, evidenced based studies are lacking in queer pedagogy (Israel et al., 2017) and the use of Competencies for Counseling with LGBQQIA Individuals (Harper et al., 2013) and the ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (Burnes et al., 2009) for work with queer persons can serve as a helpful didactic and foundational part of instruction, as a framework work understanding development, wellness and intersections.

Multicultural counseling competency acquisition for CITs has pedagogical implications. Some study results have highlighted attainment in multicultural knowledge (e.g., Cates, Schaeffle, Smaby, Maddux, & LeBeauf, 2007; Coleman, Morris, & Norton, 2006; D'Andrea, Daniels, & Heck, 1991; Dickson, Argus-Calvo, & Tafoya, 2010; Greene, Barden, Richardson, & Hall, 2014; Kuo & Arcuri, 2014), multicultural awareness (e.g., Castillo, Brossart, Reyes, Conoley, & Phoummarath, 2007; Coleman et al., 2006; D'Andrea et al., 1991; Dickson et al., 2010; Green et al., 2014; Kuo & Arcuri, 2014), multicultural skills (e.g., Coleman et al., 2006; D'Andrea et al., 1991; Dickson et al., 2010; Green et al., 2014; Kuo & Arcuri, 2014), and multicultural counseling relationship (e.g., Kuo & Arcuri, 2014; Swan et al., 2015) from an experiential approach. These studies highlight the value of counselor educators intentionally utilizing experiential frameworks aimed at promoting cultural competency attainment for CITs.

Even fewer studies have focused on the inclusion of social justice advocacy (e.g., Caldwell & Vera, 2010; Kuo & Arcuri, 2014; Miller & Sendrowitz, 2011; Nilsson & Schmidt, 2005; Nilsson, Schale, Khamphakdy-Brown, 2011; Odegard & Vereen, 2010; Singh et al., 2010) and privilege and oppression (e.g., Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; Hays, Dean, & Chang, 2007) in counselor preparation, concepts critical to better understanding the newer definition of multicultural competency. Studies (e.g., Bemak, Chung, Talleyrand, Jones, & Daquin, 2011; Fawcett & Evans,



2012; Steele, 2008) focusing on the role of social justice advocacy in counselor training, using an experiential approach, had encouraging results. Studies showed similarly promising results when using an experiential approach for increasing understanding and awareness of privilege and oppression in counseling training (Chizhik & Chizhik, 2002; Hays et al., 2007), and underscore the need for integrating social justice advocacy and the function of privilege and oppression when addressing cultural competency attainment.

These studies, however, failed to address the newer understanding of identity-embracing intersectionality, multiplicity of identity, and socioecological perspective. These portions of identity construction are imperative, as each provides a more advanced and comprehensive multicultural definition and conceptualization of marginalized individuals' identities, and are necessary for cultural competency. These studies either identified working broadly with all cultural groups or limited specific groups, not specifying queer persons (Burnes & Stanley, 2017) which further acknowledges the dearth of research in this area. Future empirical investigation in this area is highly encouraged.

### **Didactic and Experiential Learning**

In pedagogy, a didactic approach is a passive form of learning in which knowledge is primarily imparted to the learner from the expert (Ducharme, Ducharme, & Dunkin, 2002). Conversely, experiential pedagogy is a more active form of learning in which students are provided the format to construct new knowledge by building from foundational content explored in the academic environment (Evans et al., 2010), which encourages the expansion of critical thinking skills (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Kim & Lyons, 2003). Developmentally, both approaches are necessary, as learners need both the foundational knowledge promoted through didactic

instruction, and the opportunity to actively reflect and build from academic content (Wood et al., 2016).

Within counselor education, counselor educators have traditionally used a didactic pedagogical means as a way of imparting information to CITs (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). However, as an adjunctive tool, experientially focused pedagogical approaches provide a more effective way to promote knowledge acquisition and increase for CITs' cultural competency within a classroom setting (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Kim & Lyons, 2003; Robinson-Wood, 2017). Thus, counselor educators can combine the strengths of both approaches in order to further cultivate queer competence. Beyond content, skill development, and proper language use, the delivery method of multicultural material also leads to powerful change in students (Celinska & Swanzo, 2016).

Furthermore, within multicultural counselor education, a didactic approach has been predominantly used in the knowledge procurement process. Contrarily, an experiential approach has been employed with a focus on a variety of activities such as discussions, case studies, multicultural genograms, journal writing, films, games, and guest lectures (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011): a valuable means for multicultural preparation, often connecting abstract theoretical concepts with applied practice (Heppner & O'Brien, 1994; Pope-Davis, Breauz, & Liu, 1997). Experiential learning delivers course content in an often disarming, engaging, and active way, encouraging student reflection on the impact of numerous cultural contexts on their own cognition, affect, and behavior, while fostering the essential contemplation toward professional identity and practice (Robinson-Wood, 2017). In teaching about queer issues and competencies, the combination of both approaches would allow for students to apply lessons learned through lectures

and course readings to problem-solving opportunities, active reflection, and peer consultation (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Troutman & Packer-Williams, 2014).

### **Queer Competencies for Counselors**

The ALGBTIC has developed competencies specifically for the LGBTGEQ+ population, approved by the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014). In addition, separate competencies for transgender persons have been addressed in the past (Harper et al., 2013). The theoretical foundation for ALGBTIC counseling rests on strength, resiliency, wellness, and a queer focused and affirmative approach to support LGBTGEQ+ persons in living a fully functional life (ACA, 2014). As opposed to pathologizing clients, a more contemporary and accurate view of counseling queer persons is from the lens of health, well-being and intersectionality. Focused training on context and wellness, and respect for individual intersections is in-line with the counseling profession's stance on working with clients (ACA, 2014; CACREP, 2015; Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014) and can serve as a foundation when teaching students about queer persons.

In terms of skills used in counseling, competent and prepared counselors must recognize the importance of implementing proper language use, of affirming marginalized persons, and acknowledging the multiple levels of oppression afflicting queer clients' lives. In ALGBTIC competencies, a CIT should emphasize human development, social and cultural understanding, knowledge about the helping relationship, group counseling, professional issues, career and lifestyle challenges, appraisal and research (Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2013). The authors recommend acknowledging, in the classroom, through large group discussion, the differences between the ALGBTIC and transgender competencies, to ensure students understand the

implications that those differences may have for various client life stages (Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2013).

### **Curricula in Multicultural Counselor Education**

Historically, while having a limited focus just as in the literature, multicultural counselor education curricula has incorporated both didactic and experiential approaches, but has failed to adequately address queer issues and identity (Ginicola et al., 2017). An expanded focus on queer cultural identity is imperative for professional practice, given this population's needs (Frank & Cannon, 2010; Renn, 2010). In terms of curriculum, using an experiential medium, counselor educators should incorporate a wider-lens perspective of multiculturalism, acknowledging multiplicity of identity, intersectionality, and a socioecological perspective. This is vital, as the once held notion of a singular focus on identity is no longer considered best practice (Ratts et al., 2016). In its place, identity is seen as complex, multiplistic, and synergistic (Ratts et al., 2016).

Multiplicity signifies an individual's multiple identities, yet queer persons are often labeled by society primarily by their affectional orientation or gender identity (Pope, 1995; Stirratt, Meyer, Ouellette, & Gara, 2008). In line with the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016), the theory of intersectionality indicates the way multiple identities interact within individuals (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991, 1996; Robinson, 1999), and acknowledges that multiple identities within us interact to create a single unique individual's identity, which then interact with others' identities, impacting interpersonal relationships. Intersectionality also considers the social, cultural, historical, political, and economic factors, privileges, and oppressors that influence and complicate an individual's identity (Collins, 2000; Crenshaw, 1991, 1996; Ratts et al., 2016). Therefore, focusing solely on affectional orientation or gender identity can lead to a false assumption that each individual within that cultural group has had similar experiences and has the same worldview as the others in that

group. A socioecological perspective focuses on the contextual, fluid nature of identity and its interface with the external environment (Jones & McEwen, 2000; Ratts et al., 2016), promoting the understanding that identity can change status from privileged to oppressed or vice versa, based on time, circumstance, or geographic location (Renn, 2010; Robinson-Wood, 2017). These considerations expand the definition of multiculturalism and the aspirational nature of competency (Ratts et al., 2016), and must be incorporated into multicultural curriculum that addresses queer issues and identity.

### **Intersectional Queer Identity**

Possessing many identities simultaneously makes a person multiplicitous (Pope, 1995; Stirratt et al., 2008), and each identity may be privileged or oppressed (Adams, 2016), and can reverse status based on temporal and/or physical location (Chun & Singh, 2010; Julian, Duys, & Wood, 2014). This may cause an internal intersection greatly impacting an individual's worldview and, subsequently, view of self (Adams, 2016), and mental health (Robinson-Wood, 2017). Queer persons, like others, have multiple identities. For example, an individual may identify as gay (e.g., oppressed) Christian (e.g., privileged), African-American (e.g. oppressed), cisgender (e.g., privileged), and male (e.g. privileged), and, therefore, has two oppressed identities and three privileged identities, all of which have differing and often conflicting statuses in our society. Therefore, the internal intersection negotiation between these identities can cause psychological dissonance. Assuming comparable experiences for similarly affectional and gender identifying individuals is erroneous.

Counselors must understand the complexity of identity, view clients as multidimensional over unidimensional, and understand clients within their individual contexts, giving attention to all queer identities and their impact on each other (Ratts et al., 2016). A potential for harm lies in

counselors a) primarily focusing on affectional and gender identities or assuming that presenting problems solely result from affectional and gender identities, and a) pathologizing affectional and gender identity. Thus, queer identity should be addressed in the academic environment, prior to direct exposure, promoting a holistic and ethical view of identity through experiential learning, challenging students to disregard harmful and biased views.

### **Experiential Learning: Connecting Theory with Practice**

Early in experiential learning, CITs are encouraged to build both from lived experiences and from the foundational knowledge acquired in the classroom environment (Mezirow, 1997). This approach promotes expansion on didactical foundational knowledge and evolves to interactive and action-oriented processes within the classroom setting (Adams, 2016). CITs test new ideas and, conversely, protect a vulnerable population prior to counseling contact within the community. Action-oriented learning puts the responsibility for learning on the CIT (Adams, 2016), and supports a learning environment of active, engaging instruction and expansion of cognitive complexity (Borders et al., 2012), engaging in dialectic exploration and challenge of worldviews, biases, and values (Adams, 2016), and promoting vicarious learning, with feedback from peers and instructors (Chang, Minton, Dixon, Myers, & Sweeney, 2012).

### **How Experiential Learning Facilitates Cultural Competency**

An experientially-focused approach allows counselor educators to facilitate queer cultural competency. By understanding the dimensional aspects of the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016), the Competencies for Counseling with LGBQQA Individuals (Harper et al., 2013), and the ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (Burnes et al., 2009), counselor educators can provide a more comprehensive framework on which they can base pedagogical practice and curriculum. Thereby, expanding a CITs' cultural competency, attitudes and beliefs,

knowledge, skills, and action in working with diverse queer populations (Ratts et al., 2016), encouraging CITs to examine multiplicitous identity's complexities, explore individual unique experiences and the intersection with the counseling relationship (Ratts et al., 2016).

Counselors must not only learn their clients' many cultural identities that interact with their queer identity but also their own multiplicitous cultural identities (Adams, 2016; Ratts et al., 2016). Students should be first provided with didactic foundational knowledge, given many students' inadequate cultural knowledge (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Murray, Pope, & Willis, 2016). Such, as providing CITs with information from the LGBQQIA (Harper et al., 2013) and transgender (Burnes et al., 2009) competencies, as the competencies cover issues related to queer history, language, skills, and mental health. Students can then build on didactic instruction coupled with active self-reflection, as students learn through both passive and active means (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). While an increase in didactic approaches can increase knowledge and awareness in students, this does not equate to increased counseling skills with queer clients (O'Shaughnessy & Landany, 2017; O'Shaughnessy & Spokane, 2013). Increasing experiential pedagogy techniques can facilitate deeper learning for trainees and help apply new knowledge and awareness (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). Potential experiential activities include cultural genograms, videos, dissection of the systemic history of the queer community, and discussion of the role of language.

The attitudes and beliefs competency explores biases, values, and worldviews and how each can impede work with diverse clients (Ratts et al., 2016). This domain's experiential learning fosters dialectic, other-driven self-reflection (Robinson-Wood, 2017). This exploration occurs prior to contact with vulnerable persons. Experiential activities promoting awareness include group discussion, reflection papers, and journaling about values, biases, and worldviews. Students should be encouraged to take implicit-association test (IAT) (Greenwald, Poehlman, Uhlmann, &

Banaji, 2009) and cultural competency tests (see Boroughs, Bedoya, O'Cleirigh, & Safren, 2015; Rutter, Estrada, Ferguson, & Diggs, 2008) regarding queer persons and discuss pre and post results.

The skills competency relates to the abilities counselor possess in gaining knowledge and awareness of self and others and engaging in necessary cross-cultural discussions (Ratts et al., 2016). Experiential learning is active, with students practicing the skills necessary for cultural competency in a classroom environment (Robinson-Wood, 2017), promoting awareness and knowledge of queer issues. Role-plays, observing others, and direct feedback are learning activities (Lee & Greene, 2004).

The action competency focuses on the specific actions counselors can take in order to increase awareness of personal and clients' worldviews, values, biases, and social identities, understand the intersectional dynamics within the therapeutic relationship, and expand knowledge and awareness of external factors and barriers in mental health and daily functioning for clients (Ratts et al., 2016). Students can interact with vital community resources, combating external barriers to a client's healthy functioning (Singh, 2010). Activities include guest lecturers from community resources, queer-identifying individuals speaking about their barriers, and brainstorming about alleviating those barriers in counseling practice. However, counselor educators should be cautious of tokenizing or presenting the queer narrative in a singular fashion, as well as ensuring the pedagogical interventions are mutually beneficial for the queer person/community and the class. As counselor educators do not want to further marginalize or perpetuate the need for those within the queer community to educate those with a privileged affectional orientation or gender identity (Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2013).



The multiplicitous intersections with and between counselors and clients impact the therapeutic alliance (Ratts et al., 2016), and the counselor educator must impart this relationship to the student. Experiential activities include mapping out multiplicitous identities, discussing identities as privileged or oppressed, comparing them, and discussing interactional impact. Such activities can address intra-personal and inter-personal processes and dynamics, within-group and between-group differences, and identity and community specific competence (Luke & Peters 2019).

### **Building Queer Competencies in the Classroom**

Future counselors must learn the contextual and developmental influences in queer persons. As a first step, instructors can assign readings from the MSJCC, ALGBTIC, and LGBTQQIA competencies (Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2013; Ratts et al., 2016), providing a didactic foundation for discussions and assignments (McAuliife & Eriksen, 2011) to ensure that instruction is built on competency standards and not personal biases (Burnes & Stanley, 2017). Depending on the course or topic (e.g., multicultural counseling course, queer children, research with queer persons), instructors can assign and/or cover sections that relate to the specific context. Additional articles can be assigned as an adjunctive tool, as the MSJCC, ALGBTIC, and LGBTQQIA competencies (Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2013; Ratts et al., 2016) provide a synthesized overview and framework to engage in culturally responsive and socially such practices. However, depending on the classroom context, instructors should be prepared to assign and/or present more concrete and context specific content.

Instructors can also provide case studies for student reflection, and developmental and contextual considerations allow students to practice thinking about identity development in multiple ways. Small or large group discussion and a reflection paper can assist students in thinking

about multiple facets of a client instead of sexuality in an isolated way. Contextual understanding could be broadened by discussing pertinent current events, drawing out student's blind spots for further reflection. Instructors offer case studies specific to the transgender and gender expansive population as well, helping students to address gender identity concerns. Through scaffolding, students slowly build their skill and conceptual ability (Chang et al., 2012), and language use allows practice of phrases and dialogue about the importance of stymieing oppression perpetuation. For immersion, the students have direct contact with a member of the queer community and engage in semi-structured conversation or interview questions. Involving the whole class in question choice effectively uses correct language and creates awareness of the question's biases.

Counselor educators should be attuned to the newer understandings of multicultural competency and its relationship to the Competencies for Counseling with LGBTQIA Individuals (Harper et al., 2013), and the ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (Burnes et al., 2009). This approach, while more complex, provides a comprehensive framework. The student-development focus is important as students enter the classroom with differing and unique identities and experiences (Brubaker et al., 2010; Frank & Cannon, 2010; Odegard & Vereen, 2010). The didactic foundational-content should be followed with an experiential approach, as students learn new and innovative content and then build from it prior to working with vulnerable persons.

### **Experiential Activities**

Experiential pedagogy can increase competency specific to working with the queer population in a variety of ways, as well as a personal and meaningful learning experience (Burnes & Stanley, 2017). Meaningful and deep learning is possible when students are engaged in the

classroom (Burnes & Stanley, 2017). Facilitating personal self-reflection is an important aspect of culturally responsive teaching and sharing one's identities in a classroom can help facilitate the student engagement that is crucial for meaningful learning (Burnes & Stanley, 2017). Culturally responsive counselors understand their client's unique perspective and understand their own social and cultural location (Robinson-Wood, 2017). Key concepts for CITs to learn is resilience and social justice "related to gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation" (Singh & Hughes, 2017, p. 87). An instructor can share their own reflections of their identities in order to spark interest, conversation, and reflection in the classroom. Small group and class discussion can engage students in identifying people who supported their own gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation developments on individual as well as societal levels. If done well, issues of social justice and a broad understanding of CITs own beliefs and biases can come to light through experiential activities (Singh, 2010). Rather than a didactic form of receiving information, CIT engagement is facilitated to deepen understanding of oneself by participating in activities where the answers are not readily available, and new awareness must be synthesized (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). For example, Singh (2010) recommends using the metaphor of a quilt, to help CITs piece together their own lived experiences of oppression and privilege through photography, magazine and other images that represent them. While didactic teaching is imperative for foundations such as ethics and legal issues, an experiential approach can help bridge the gap when teaching about difference (Whitman & Bidell, 2014), giving students the opportunity to reflect stereotypes and myths they may hold about the queer community as individuals and as members of a larger society.

Experiential activities expand learners' cognitive complexity by building on foundational knowledge and challenging current understanding (Dewey, 1938), best joining the areas of

theoretical concepts with applied practice (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). However, CITs must be provided the necessary foundational knowledge of the queer community didactically, prior to the introduction of an experiential approach, incorporating language identification and understanding of cultural subgroups, history, and traditional barriers to societal access.

Specifically, counselor educators can promote queer competency through the implementation of cross-cultural exchanges within the classroom environment, such as using guest lectures or queer panels as sources of information (Burnes & Stanley, 2017). Following the introduction of foundational content through didactic instruction (e.g., lectures and course readings), this supplemental experience can afford students the opportunity to directly interact with queer guests using thoughtful and sensitive questions (e.g., vetted by the instructor) meant to facilitate open dialogue between CITs and guest speakers (Burnes & Stanley, 2017). Concluding this group discussion, counselor educators can require a reflective paper that specifically focuses on the intersectional, multiplicitious, contextual nature of queer identity in relationship to the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016) (i.e., attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action competencies). From the experience, counselor educators can afford CITs with unique opportunities to a) gain knowledge and awareness of queer issues informed by the unique perspective of the guests; b) expand self-awareness of personal biases and growth areas; c) learn the skills needed to inform culturally competent counseling practice and expand personal awareness and knowledge of queer issues; and d) increase awareness and knowledge of the external barriers of access through this cross-cultural exchange used to inform clinical practice.

Another example includes Luke and Peters (2019) transtheoretical LGBTQ\* Responsive Sand Tray model, which is an adaptation of multiple models. The authors discuss the utility of using creative arts as an experiential learning tool to foster CITs queer competence. More

specifically, they outline and use a case study to situate the benefits, processes, procedures, and ethics associated with their model and creative arts. In doing so, the authors discuss using this experiential and creative arts activity to address multiple points of entry (i.e., intra-personal, interpersonal, group-as-whole, and supra-group), multicultural and LGBTGEQ+ foci (i.e., attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action competencies), roles (i.e., teacher, counselor, and consultant), and the four phases of sand tray (i.e., temporal, building, experiencing, and connecting). Although the present example only documents one type of experiential activity, counselor educators can integrate a range of activities to promote CITs queer competence (Luke & Peters, 2019).

As a third example, counselor educators can increase CITs' broader and queer cultural competency by de-centralizing their attitudes and beliefs through a combined social group membership and cultural de-centering activity (Marbley, Steele, & McAuliffe, 2011). As a first step, in order to increase self-awareness, CITs are asked to identify a range of personally held cultural identities, such as their race and ethnicity, socioeconomic and class status, gender identity and expression, dis/ability, affectional orientation, and religion or spirituality (if comfortable sharing and classroom safety has been established). Next to each identified cultural variable, the CIT will state the general statuses of their separate group identifications, such as "dominant" or "nondominant". Initially in small group formats and then followed by a larger class discussion, CITs are encouraged to share their responses in which the instructor processes any emerging issues and themes. With the assistance of the instructor, hierarchies and labels are introduced and emphasis is placed on the social construction of such labels. Next, CITs re-examine the values each learned within their various communities (e.g., home, school, work, etc.) across their lifespan.

Furthermore, CITs label the origin of these values, countered by an alternate position, and then followed by processing any potential perspective changes.

### **Implications and Future Research**

While scholars have explored the impact of pedagogy within counselor training programs (e.g., Brubaker et al., 2010; Burnes & Stanley, 2017; Frank & Cannon, 2010; Odegard & Vereen, 2010; Wood et al., 2016), the extant scholarship is in need of further investigation (Wood et al., 2016). These areas of exploration, whether qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods in nature can include further developing or comparing pedagogy (e.g., didactic, experiential, community service learning) or experiential techniques towards queer competency acquisition within counselor training programs. Such empirical investigations would provide the counseling profession with evidence towards effective pedagogical instructions and interventions towards effective cultural competency attainment for CITs.

Another implication and area for future research involve the integration of each of the aforementioned counseling competencies (Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2013; Ratts et al., 2016) as a mean of promoting queer competency. Given each of these competencies, as well as their integration remains mostly conceptual, future research and outcome studies, are needed. Such research is warranted given the scholarship has traditionally addressed cultural competency using the older MCCs (Sue et al., 1982; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992) rather than the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016). As the professional has shifted towards an intersectional, multiplicitous, and socioecological understanding of identity, as well as the role of social justice advocacy-based interventions within cultural competency attainment (Brubaker et al., 2010) the profession's pedagogy, has not adequately reflected such developments.

Furthermore, there is a lack of depth of coverage of queer issues within counselor training programs (Burnes et al., 2009; Harper et al., 2013). The gap is even more evident when considering the intersections of queerness with other marginalized communities (Ratts et al., 2016). Due to this lack of queer training, counselor educators should focus on intersectional queer identity (e.g., race, ethnicity, dis/ability, nationality), as white and cisgender queer narratives tend to dominate counseling and psychological literature. Overall, it is arguable that counselor educators utilization of the MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016), the Competencies for Counseling with LGBQQIA Individuals (Harper et al., 2013), and the ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (Burnes et al., 2009), as theoretical foundations for the guidance of curricula construction and pedagogy within counselor training programs is the best practice for developing CITs queer competence.

### **Conclusion**

Queer persons exist in a heteronormative and cisgender-privileged society, which aggressively decreases access for these marginalized individuals. Because of this lack of access, many queer persons develop psychological distress and urgently need counseling services (Luke & Goodrich, 2015). However, queer persons often report feeling underserved by mental health professionals (Luke & Goodrich, 2015; Murray et al., 2016). This may be a result of professionals who are undertrained for successful and ethical work with queer issues. To assist in closing this gap in training, an experiential approach provides an effective pedagogical means connecting theory with practice in a classroom setting, and CITs are afforded the opportunity to challenge biases, worldviews, and values. In fact, MSJCC (Ratts et al., 2016), further supported by the Competencies for Counseling with LGBQQIA Individuals (Harper et al., 2013) and the ALGBTIC Competencies for Counseling with Transgender Clients (Burnes et al., 2009) will form a broad

approach for endorsing cultural competency in working with queer persons within a safe academic setting prior to direct counseling experience with these vulnerable persons.



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