

# Chapter 7

## Ethical Boundaries Reimagined: A Feminist Approach to Gatekeeping

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### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*This chapter takes the readers into the application of feminist theory to ethical gatekeeping practices within the framework of trauma-informed counselor education. Grounded in the principles of empowerment, intersectionality, and social justice, feminist theory offers a unique lens through which to understand and address ethical dilemmas in counseling. The chapter explores how feminist perspectives can inform ethical decision-making processes, particularly in the context of trauma-informed care. Through case examples, discussion questions, and reflective exercises, the chapter encourages readers to critically evaluate their own beliefs and biases, while also equipping them with tools to navigate ethical challenges with sensitivity and compassion. Ultimately, the chapter aims to inspire counselors-in-training to embrace a feminist perspective as they engage in trauma-informed gatekeeping practices, fostering ethical and culturally responsive care within the counseling profession.*

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# **INTRODUCTION TO GATEKEEPING IN COUNSELOR EDUCATION**

## **Definition and Importance of Gatekeeping**

Counselor educators have multiple roles in developing future counselors and carry a significant responsibility. Counselor educators are responsible for counselors-in-training (CITs) and clients (Bowers & Hamlet, 2019; Crawford & Gilroy, 2013). Kaplan and Martz (2014, as cited in Bowers & Hamlet, 2019) discussed the responsibilities of counselor educators, and it highlighted the commitment to gatekeeping. In simple terms, gatekeeping is trying to ensure that students, also addressed as CITs, meet standards and try to help students who may need to improve. The counselor education accreditation body, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP, 2024), sets the standards, and faculty evaluate the students, deciding who will and will not enter the counseling profession based upon skill acquisition and behavioral observations. The 2014 American Counseling Association's (ACA) Code of Ethics discussed the responsibilities of the counselor educator and the counselor educator's need to integrate those standards into the curriculum and training. Gatekeeping in counselor education is crucial. First and foremost, it ensures that individuals entering the counseling profession meet the necessary standards of competence, ethics, and professional conduct. By rigorously evaluating candidates' academic performance, clinical skills, and personal suitability, gatekeeping processes help safeguard the quality of care provided to clients (DeCino et al., 2020). This is vital in maintaining the integrity and credibility of the counseling profession.

Furthermore, gatekeeping protects clients from potential harm by ensuring that CITs possess the requisite knowledge, skills, and dispositions to work effectively and ethically with diverse populations (Kimball et al., 2019). It helps identify areas where additional training or support may be needed, promoting ongoing professional development and competency enhancement among future counselors. Additionally, gatekeeping supports the maintenance of ethical standards within the counseling profession. It reinforces adherence to ethical guidelines and codes of conduct, emphasizing the importance of ethical decision-making, confidentiality, and respect for client autonomy. By instilling these values early in counselor education programs and assessing candidates' commitment to ethical practice, gatekeeping contributes to cultivating a responsible and trustworthy counseling workforce. Overall, gatekeeping plays a crucial role in upholding the quality, ethics, and professionalism of counseling practice, ensuring that individuals who enter the field are well-prepared to meet the diverse needs of clients and contribute positively to society's mental health and well-being.

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