Chapter 8
A Feminist Approach to Gatekeeping in Counselor Education:
Andragogy and Theory in Action

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gatekeeping is an essential yet challenging prospect for counselor educators to undertake. Furthermore, research seems to suggest a perceived lack of preparedness among counselor educators to engage students in the gatekeeping process. While standards in the counseling profession require programs to have policies and procedures surrounding gatekeeping, putting those policies and procedures into practice can be fraught with uncertainty and laden with subjectivity. In this chapter, the authors not only propose a trauma-informed, feminist framework to help guide gatekeeping practice but also assert that gatekeeping can be conceptualized as developmental mentorship, with principles of andragogy infused throughout. A case study is offered to illustrate putting principles into practice.

INTRODUCTION

Gatekeeping is often constructed in binary terms, either unlocking the door that leads to counseling practice or barring student access to the profession. Certainly, in some cases it may not be the time for a particular student to enter the counseling field; however, we posit a more expansive narrative of gatekeeping and all it can entail from a feminist perspective. This chapter infuses feminist theory and feminist principles into the gatekeeping process in counselor education. We discuss practical applications of feminist theory and feminist principles to showcase andragogical gatekeeping considerations in action for counselor educators.

While intersectional feminist approaches to counseling are recognized and researched (Toole, 2023), there is a lack of literature regarding feminist approaches to counselor education (Fickling et al., 2022). The study of student counselor impairment, gatekeeping, and educators' experiences and attitudes toward gatekeeping is a burgeoning area within counselor education research (Black et al., 2004; Chang & Rubel, 2019; Schuermann et al., 2018). Moreover, this field has yet to fully explore specialized approaches, such as feminist perspectives on gatekeeping and mentorship, leaving the feminist approach as a largely under-researched and untapped resource. Spotlighting feminist gatekeeping draws attention to useful methods that engage students in a trauma-informed manner, enhance student experiences, centralize social justice, and prepare counselors to enter the field.

Gatekeeping in counselor education is a frequently overlooked opportunity for mentorship as it has often been constructed as merely an uncomfortable necessity of the profession. Revisioning the approach to gatekeeping in counselor education programs through a feminist lens not only encourages mentorship but may increase counselor educator gatekeeping self-efficacy as it can provide a structured approach to gatekeeping strategies and practices. Furthermore, we are concerned that gatekeeping without a feminist approach might not only perpetuate the very harmful systems counselors acknowledge can negatively impact our clients but also leave the gatekeeping process inadequately trauma-informed.

Gatekeeping is not without its challenges. When practicing gatekeeping, counselor educators must acknowledge that systemic oppression continues to permeate learning spaces. Historically, higher education was not created for all students. This notion also rings true for those who choose to pursue counselor education. Just as we espouse the need for cultural humility and amplification of marginalized voices in counseling sessions, so too must this occur in gatekeeping. Promoting social justice is a core value of the counseling profession as outlined by the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014), necessitating the examination of power dynamics present within our training programs. The application of feminist theory stretches far beyond narrow constructions of gender. Foundational to feminist theory and

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