Chapter 11
Triadic Trauma–Informed Gatekeeping:
A Relational Cultural Approach

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Gatekeeping in counselor education is a core ethical responsibility of counselor educators and supervisors to ensure the beneficence and maleficence of clients, but also the promotion of a strong counselor identity and career. Most gatekeepers see this role as critical and make efforts to make gatekeeping a growing experience rather than purely disciplinary. Nonetheless, counseling students enter the field with trauma only to have it compounded in gatekeeping scenarios. More holistic approaches to gatekeeping provide mentorship of the whole counselor and focus on internal and external growth rather than punitive action. When holding both the need to provide effective gatekeeping strategies and also support student's identity and emotional growth, relational cultural theory provides a good structure to help navigate this terrain. Relational cultural theory provides guidelines that support multiple gatekeeping relationships, such as triadic gatekeeping and support best practices and relational building in gatekeeping relationships.

INTRODUCTION

Gatekeeping in counselor education is a core ethical responsibility of counselor educators and supervisors to ensure the beneficence of client care, but also promoting a strong counselor identity and career. Most gatekeepers see this role

as critical and make efforts to make gatekeeping a growing experience rather than purely disciplinary. Nonetheless, counseling students enter the field with unresolved trauma experiences that impact their work as clinicians. More holistic approaches to gatekeeping provide mentorship for the whole counselor and focus on internal and external growth rather than punitive action. When holding both the need to provide effective gatekeeping strategies and support students' identity and emotional growth, relational cultural theory provides a good structure to help navigate this terrain. Relational Cultural Theory provides guidelines supporting multiple gatekeeping relationships, best practices, and relational building in gatekeeping relationships.

TRADITIONAL GATEKEEPING

Gatekeeping, as an element of counselor education and supervision, refers to how supervisors ensure that counseling interns and students meet the professional standards required to practice effectively and ethically (CACREP, 2024; Ziomek-Daigle & Christensen, 2010). Early efforts at gatekeeping best practices emerged in the 1970s as a response to issues of professional competence with counselors (Bernard, 1975). Gatekeeping as a practice in counselor education arose more specifically in the 1990s to mitigate harm to clients from counselors who violated boundaries about counseling knowledge, skills of counseling, or attitudes (Teixeira, 2017). Problems of professional competence, a phrase coined by Lamb (1987) outlined some specific challenges:

(a) an inability and/or unwillingness to acquire and integrate professional standards into one's repertoire of professional behavior; (b) an inability to acquire professional skills to reach an acceptable level of competency; (c) or an inability to control personal stress, psychological dysfunction and/or excessive emotional reactions that interfere with professional functioning (Lamb, 1987, p. 598).

In general, counseling students are admonished and taught to uphold ethical guidelines; however, when students do not, counselor educators bear the responsibility (Teixeira, 2017). Often, counselor educators are pressed to alleviate the potential problem rather than understand the causes or background of the behavior (Teixeira, 2017). Further, empirical research has improved in this area over the last five years, but scientifically affirmed interventions are still sparse (Teixeira, 2017). This leaves counselor educators with more transactional ways of dealing with problematic professional competence rather than attending to trauma or experience behind the behavior. A transactional example in this case is a counselor educator deciding that a student should continue with a problematic client despite the student's emotional countertransference. Unless counselor educators and supervisors create supportive relational spaces for their students and trainees, they run the risk of gatekeeping new

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