

Professional Issues and Innovative Practice

Relational-Cultural Theory–Based Interventions With LGBTQ College Students

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Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community members can encounter daily challenges living in a heterosexist society, including the college milieu. The authors apply the tenets of relational-cultural theory (RCT) to LGBTQ college students. Furthermore, a case study is included to highlight ways counselors can infuse RCT strategies when working with this population.

Keywords: LGBTQ, college students, relational-cultural theory, college counseling, case study

College counselors have an ethical duty to provide affirming, multiculturally competent counseling services (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014). Marginalized groups, such as members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) community, face unique challenges in a heterosexist society (Meyer, 2003; Singh & Moss, 2016). According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI; n.d.), LGBTQ individuals are 3 times more likely than their heterosexual counterparts to experience adverse mental health outcomes, with suicide identified as one of the leading causes of death for LGBTQ youth. Rates of substance abuse are also higher within LGBTQ populations (NAMI, n.d.).

LGBTQ college students, in particular, face unique challenges within the higher education setting. Researchers have deemed the campus climate a hostile one for LGBTQ college students, characterized by prejudice, bias, discrimination, and harassment (R. D. Brown, Clarke, Gortmaker, & Robinson-Keilig, 2004; Rankin, 2005, 2006; Rankin, Weber, Blumenfeld, & Frazer, 2010). In addition, researchers have linked such experiences of unreceptive campus environments to heightened psychological distress (e.g., anxiety, depression, substance abuse) among marginalized college students, including those who self-identify as LGBT (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000; Franklin, Smith, & Hung, 2014; Frey, Beesly, & Miller, 2006; Frey, Tobin, & Beesly, 2004; Silverschanz, Cortina, Konik, & Magley, 2008; Woodford, Kulick, & Atteberry, 2015). Such distress leads to isolation for many LGBTQ college students, which can result in higher attrition rates and an increased prevalence of mental health concerns (Meyer, 2003; Rankin et al., 2010). Indeed, LGBTQ college students are 4 to 6 times more likely than non-LGBTQ college students to exhibit suicidal ideation (Reuters, 2018).

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Despite the occurrence of such deleterious outcomes among LGBTQ college students, there is scarce literature available for college counselors to implement contemporary theoretical frameworks with LGBTQ students. In fact, to date, only two articles have been published in the *Journal of College Counseling* in which authors applied contemporary theories (narrative theory and feminist theory) to counseling LGBTQ college students (Bayne, 2016; Szymanski, 2005). Relational-cultural theory (RCT) is one contemporary theory that has gained recent attention in the literature related to LGBTQ clients. RCT is a relational approach to counseling that prioritizes empowering clients and fostering empathy in clients within an egalitarian relationship (Jordan, 2010).

Beyond the college setting, Singh and Moss (2016) explored the use of RCT tenets with the LGBTQ community at large and featured a case vignette of an intake session with a 32-year-old Chicana lesbian client. Additionally, Crumb and Haskins (2017) suggested the integration of RCT tenets with cognitive behavior therapy when counseling college students in general. Despite the recent explorations of RCT as a potential theoretical framework well suited to meet the counseling needs of LGBTQ people, researchers have yet to explore the intentional use of RCT with LGBTQ college students.

Given that LGBTQ college students face unique challenges, including homophobic/transphobic college environments, coming-out issues, internalized shame, and lack of support systems on campus, this article serves to build on existing scholarly works to explore the use of RCT to address issues germane to the intersecting identities of a college student who self-identifies within the LGBTQ spectrum. First, we explore the tenets of RCT applied to the higher education milieu concerning the unique experiences of LGBTQ students. Next, a case study is presented to highlight adaptations of RCT techniques with a self-identified bisexual male college student who seeks assistance with coming-out issues. Finally, we address implications for college counselors seeking to apply RCT concepts specifically with LGBTQ college students.

Key Concepts of RCT

RCT arose from a need to address issues presented by women seeking psychotherapy, with an emphasis on human development “through and toward connection” (Jordan, 2010, p. 1). The tenets of RCT include connection as the ultimate goal of mature human development and chronic disconnection as the source of human dysfunction (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Haskins & Appling, 2017; Jordan, 2010, 2017). Sociopolitical forces that encourage hyperindividuality and a focus on the self as separate from others also facilitate disconnection (Jordan, 2010, 2017). Such acute disconnections occur in everyday relationships and are considered a regular aspect of human functioning (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976). Problems arise when people are stuck in patterns of disconnection that inhibit progress toward mature development (Jordan, 2010; Miller, 1976).

LGBTQ college students, unlike their non-LGBTQ peers, are more prone to condemned isolation because of their nondominant sexual and gender identities (Miller, 1976). Continuous disconnections can also lead to negative internal

schemata about the self concerning others, known as *relational images* (Jordan, 2010). For LGBTQ college students, who often face prejudice and discrimination on college campuses, the dominant relational images include invalidation and unworthiness (Russell, 2009; Shannon, 2013). A primary goal of RCT is to bring awareness to these negative relational images and to help reformulate such images into healthier, self-affirming ones (Jordan, 2010).

One RCT approach that can assist clients in the reformulation of relational images is through growth-fostering relationships within the therapeutic alliance and beyond. These relationships are based on an exchange of equally valued feelings and thoughts between two individuals (Duffey & Somody, 2011). Growth-fostering relationships can also assist clients in developing new, more positive relationships that, in turn, can serve as sources of empowerment and strength.

With an emphasis on the effects of sociopolitical and systemic influences on human development (Frey, 2013; Jordan, 2010), the use of RCT has expanded from a focus on White, heterosexual, cisgender women to other marginalized groups, such as people of color (Schmidt, Piontkowski, Raque-Bogdan, & Ziemer, 2014), lesbians (Russell, 2009), gay male couples (Shannon, 2013), and sex workers who are transgender (Patton & Reicherzer, 2010). From an RCT perspective, individuals of marginalized groups living in a nation steeped in systems of oppression often face chronic disconnection from their authentic selves and others (L. S. Brown, 2010). RCT counselors highlight the context in which disconnection occurs along with sociopolitical forces that contribute to client disconnection (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Jordan, 2010). Thus, one of the main goals of RCT is helping clients to recognize and overcome psychosocial manifestations of systemic oppression and to foster change by empowerment. As a feminist, social justice-oriented counseling approach, RCT can serve as a culturally responsive framework to address LGBTQ college student issues.

RCT in Action With LGBTQ College Students

College counselors have a responsibility to meet the needs of diverse college students using valid counseling theory (Crumb & Haskins, 2017). In a society that can deny equitable power and privilege to LGBTQ college students when compared with their non-LGBTQ peers, an RCT approach includes the sharing of power between college counselors and LGBTQ clients by establishing an egalitarian relationship. RCT counselors use the counseling relationship as the primary agent of change in therapy and are authentic in the establishment of an egalitarian relationship (Crumb & Haskins, 2017; Frey, 2013, Haskins & Appling, 2017). To counter the reported hostile college climate for LGBTQ college students (R. D. Brown et al., 2004; Rankin, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010), college counselors using RCT can serve as affirming partners as clients engage in choices around identity disclosure. Elements of an RCT approach as applied to work with LGBTQ college students that remain unexplored in the literature include (a) disconnection within the campus community, (b) sources of connection, (c) internalized shame and internal schemata, and (d) relational competence and growth-fostering relationships.

Disconnection Within the Campus Community

LGBTQ individuals can experience heterosexist oppression at various levels: societal, institutional, and interpersonal (Singh & Moss, 2016). Similarly, LGBTQ college students face oppression within the college setting in multiple environments, such as in the classroom and residence halls (Rankin, 2005, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010), which can limit opportunities for daily, positive connections for LGBTQ students residing on campus. Such exposure to subjugation at multiple levels can result in a continuous state of disrupted connections to others. This cycle of rejection, including exposure to prejudice, discrimination, or bigotry, can lead to chronic disconnection and isolation (Russell, 2009).

Sociopolitical systems promoting hyperindividuality can also facilitate the manifestation of dysfunction (Jordan, 2010). Some aspects of higher education systems may perpetuate subtle forms of disconnection that can facilitate isolation and loneliness in all college students. However, for LGBTQ college students, experiences of disconnection within higher education can be exacerbated, given their sexual minority status and exposure to a heterosexist climate. Oppressive behaviors, such as targeted microaggressions, bullying, and harassment, can occur for LGBTQ students in classrooms, residence halls, and participation with clubs and organizations, as well as interactions with campus staff, faculty, and peers, which can result in limited positive campus connections.

The pervading societal message for many LGBTQ college students is inferiority due to their sexual or gender identity (Rankin, 2005, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010). This devaluation fosters chronic disconnection because these students must either hide their identity or live authentically at the risk of disconnecting from the heteronormative society (Russell, 2009). For example, transgender college students residing on campus must decide whether to disclose their gender identity to roommates. If they opt to keep their identity hidden, an authentic connection of their real selves to their roommates will be forfeit. On the other hand, disclosing their identity poses a risk of rejection or even hostility from their roommates, thus placing transgender students into a more isolating experience.

Transgender college students may further experience disconnection within the classroom, where faculty may intentionally or unintentionally use pronouns or names that do not correspond with the transgender students' gender identity. Within the broader campus culture, disconnection may take the form of a lack of inclusive university policies, such as the requirement of student names on campus electronic systems to reflect their legal names. Such examples can perpetuate dominant relational images of invalidation (Russell, 2009; Shannon, 2013) for LGBTQ students.

Sources of Connection

Unlike in the case of many traditional theoretical models, RCT counselors identify the connection with others as the primary goal of human development (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Duffey & Trepal, 2016; Frey, 2013; Jordan, 2010). This paradigm shift of connection represents a departure from mainstream, Western psychological theorists who aim to help clients strive toward independence

and autonomy (Frey, 2013). Although some counseling theories take into account the role of relationships in fostering personal change, RCT makes explicit that movement toward greater interdependence is consistent with, and necessary for, client growth (Frey, 2013). Such therapeutic movement toward greater connection also enhances client resilience (Russell, 2009), which can empower LGBTQ students situated within reported hostile campus climates (Rankin, 2005, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010).

When counseling LGBTQ college students, counselors may find it beneficial to explore how these students' connections can serve as tools of resiliency. Social support has been found to mediate effects of marginalization on psychological distress (Farrell & Langrehr, 2017; Llamas, Morgan Consoli, Hendricks, & Nguyen, 2018; Llamas & Ramos-Sánchez, 2013). The college setting can provide unique opportunities of support (e.g., offices of diversity and inclusion) for LGBTQ clients to help strengthen relational ties, maximize power derived from these supportive relationships in the face of adversity, and develop a stronger connection to the campus environment. Asking clients to discuss salient relationships can assist in identifying sources of connection. These relationships can include family members, friends, and other community members on and off campus. Prompts that counselors can use to assist clients with this exploration include (a) "Tell me about the relationships you have made with people on campus," (b) "Whom do you turn to for support or strength on campus?" and (c) "In what parts of campus do you feel safest?" Such inquiries can assist clients' understanding of various connections on campus and help clarify sources of relational support.

For LGBTQ college students, coming-out issues may damage or sever significant connections in their lives, such as when a family member or close friend rejects them. Sensitivity to exploring current connections and disconnections with the client is warranted given that such discussions can elicit painful memories of rejection, as well as resentment or confusion at the dissolution of particular relationships. Similarly, it would be helpful for counselors to explore relationships that LGBTQ clients have formed with other members of the LGBTQ community within and beyond the campus setting.

Another approach to understanding sources of connection in the lives of LGBTQ college students is the use of eco-webbing (Williams, McMahon, & Goodman, 2015). An eco-web is a visual representation of the interconnections within a client's life. By coconstructing an eco-web with LGBTQ college students, counselors can gain a deeper understanding of connections and disconnections within various areas of their clients' lives, including the "social power dynamic" (Williams et al., 2015, p. 84) of higher education. A significant component of the activity is identifying themes and patterns in clients' lives and reflecting on the meanings of these connections (Williams et al., 2015).

Internalized Shame and Internal Schemata

LGBTQ college students who experience chronic disconnection from their authentic selves and others can also encounter stagnation, self-doubt, shame,

and lack of self-esteem (Duffey & Somody, 2011). Societal messages of degradation toward LGBTQ individuals are active and invasive (Singh & Moss, 2016), which, for some, can lead to the experience of intense anxiety and shame about their sexual and gender identities. The RCT counseling approach identifies such reactions as anticipated, healthy, and self-protective (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Jordan 2010). Hence, RCT counselors do not pathologize responses to homophobia, transphobia, and heterosexism. For example, if a self-identified lesbian college student presents with an aversion to attending class because of an instructor's homophobic comment, counselors should not view the lack of attendance as pathological. Instead, missing class could be seen as a self-protective response to a hostile classroom environment. Using an RCT approach, the counselor would first reframe the situation, understanding the instructor's homophobic comment as a source of disconnection that led to the student's isolation from the classroom. The counselor and student would then brainstorm about how to reconnect to the class environment.

LGBTQ individuals who experienced rejection from their family of origin or noncollegiate peers may have expectations of similar rebuffing within the college setting, which has been reported to occur for LGBTQ college students (R. D. Brown et al., 2004; Rankin, 2005, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010). As individuals experience daily invalidations, their negative internal schemata of the world become entrenched (Jordan, 2010). Within the therapeutic alliance, clients can begin to adjust their internal schemata by engaging authentically with the counselor in this safe, nonthreatening setting. The process of reconstructing one's negative internal schema is similar to the rational emotive behavioral therapy technique of disputing one's belief. The process begins with the client describing thoughts regarding self with others. Next, the counselor and client would begin to challenge these negative thought patterns by exploring scenarios where this belief is unfounded.

Counselors using RCT principles explore topics of shame and worth by helping clients recognize the connection between negative internal schemata and negative, heterosexist societal messages about LGBTQ people. Attending to these negative external messages can help reframe internalized messages about self into ones that are more accurate and less self-defeating. College counselors can assist their LGBTQ clients, for example, to reframe negative messages received on the college campus into images of self-efficacy and empowerment.

Relational Competence and Growth-Fostering Relationships

According to RCT scholars, growth-fostering relationships involve validating experiences communicated between individuals (Duffey & Somody, 2011). Such relationships bring "increased awareness and understanding of one's own and others' thoughts and feelings" (Duffey & Somody, 2011, p. 226). RCT counselors strive to increase the number of growth-fostering relationships in their clients' lives through mutual empathy and relational competence. Mutual empathy experienced in counseling sessions serves as the foundation for clients as they learn to reformulate internalized messages of shame and guilt into more positive internal schemata characterized by positive self-worth.

Relational competence involves the reconceptualization of inaccurate schemata about personal self-worth to others (Jordan, 2010). This shift of the client's schemata provides an opportunity for increased connections with others (Duffey & Somody, 2011). RCT counselors guide clients to deconstruct inaccurate schemata by fostering self-empathy in clients as they face life's obstacles (Duffey & Somody, 2011). LGBTQ college students can experience hostile and oppressive environments that can serve as impediments to student success. Despite these obstacles, many LGBTQ college students do succeed academically, professionally, and personally. RCT counselors empower LGBTQ college clients to identify these successes and challenge negative self-images. This reframing teaches clients to be more self-compassionate, which begins the shift of reconceptualizing internal schemata (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Headley & Sangganjanavanich, 2014; Jordan, 2010). For students experiencing chronic disconnections within personal relationships, growth-fostering relationships can be a matter of actual survival. LGBTQ college students may lack family support and depend exclusively on college campus resources (e.g., housing, college counselors) for their livelihood. Helping students form relationships on campus in which they are valued and respected is critical.

Case Study

The following fictional case study provides an example of how counselors working in a college setting can use RCT tenets with LGBTQ clients. This case specifically demonstrates a college counselor exploring coming-out issues with a bisexual college man from an RCT lens.

Client and Counselor Dynamics

Geraldo is a 20-year-old college student who self-identifies as a bisexual man. He was born in a large, urban city in the southwestern region of the United States to parents who emigrated from Mexico in their 20s. Geraldo is an only child and a first-generation college student residing in campus housing. He is a junior majoring in civil engineering and is doing well academically. His Calculus III professor, who noticed Geraldo's lack of socializing with other students and his limited verbal contributions to class discussions, referred him to the university counseling center. The counselor, Jane, is a 45-year-old, self-identified White, heterosexual, cisgender woman. Jane has been working at the university counseling center for 10 years. She has undergone the university's Safe Space program aimed at teaching faculty and staff about LGBTQ issues, which has helped her feel more comfortable and knowledgeable in working with her LGBTQ clients.

During the initial session, Jane guided Geraldo carefully through the informed consent process because Geraldo had not previously received counseling services. Using the knowledge from the Safe Space training, Jane did not make assumptions about Geraldo's sexuality or gender identity. Instead, Jane inquired about identities salient to Geraldo and which pronouns he used, conveying

to Geraldo her basic knowledge of LGBTQ identity and her willingness to explore these topics with him. Through this initial dialogue, Jane explained to Geraldo that her counseling approach includes RCT, which involves engaging clients in a collaborative and egalitarian counseling relationship.

Exploring Sources of Connection and Disconnection

Geraldo's presenting problem involved his struggle with disclosing his sexual identity to family members. Although his family loved him, Geraldo remained uncertain about his parents' potential reaction to his bisexuality, given their highly religious and conservative nature. Hence, Geraldo has kept his bisexual identity hidden from them. Beyond Geraldo's previous romantic relationships (including ones in which he remained discreet when dating other men), Jane was the first heterosexual person Geraldo came out to.

Jane used the eco-webbing technique (Williams et al., 2015) to visualize sources of connections and disconnections within Geraldo's life. Jane began the activity by drawing a circle in the middle of a blank sheet of paper, which represented Geraldo, and then asked about the most significant relationships in his life. As Geraldo responded, Jane connected the circle to identified significant others in his life. Jane used the following prompts to complete the eco-web: (a) "Whom do you turn to when times get rough?" (b) "Describe your relationship with your mother, father, friends, and classmates"; and (c) "How would you describe your relationship with the campus community?"

One source of connection Geraldo mentioned was his relationship with Dr. Porto, his Calculus III professor. Although Geraldo had yet to disclose his bisexual identity to Dr. Porto, he felt genuine care from this instructor about his academic success and viewed Dr. Porto as a mentor. Regarding disconnections, Jane and Geraldo noticed within the visual representation an emotional distance between him and his parents. This disconnection was represented in the eco-web by the word bubble stating, "Distant—limited regular communication and few visits home," which connected Geraldo's circle to his parents' circle. The eco-web also revealed limited relationships Geraldo has with others within the campus community. The extent of Geraldo's disconnection from others and the fractured relationship with his parents became clear through using the eco-web. As a result, Jane identified three primary sources of disconnection for Geraldo: (a) emotional distance from his parents, (b) withdrawal from his school peers and campus community, and (c) disconnection from his authentic self as a bisexual man.

Jane wanted to readdress sources of campus connection that may not have been as obvious to Geraldo. After some thought, Geraldo expressed connection with some campus staff and faculty members, including the residence hall director and the department secretary. Jane asked Geraldo to identify aspects of these particular individuals that allowed him to develop a connection in an effort to acknowledge his capacity to forge these relationships. From an RCT standpoint, this acknowledgment could lead to an expansion of Geraldo's social support network as he is empowered to reach out and make such connections.

Addressing Internalized Shame

Equipped with basic knowledge of LGBTQ issues and the coming-out process, Jane considered possible internalized shame that hindered Geraldo's ability to connect authentically with his parents and with himself. Given Geraldo's disclosure that his parents' strict religious background would be the main reason for them to reject his bisexuality, Jane explored connections between Geraldo's religious upbringing and internalized shame. Geraldo recalled hearing, as a child, constant homophobic messages while attending church services with his family. As a result, Geraldo still harbors tremendous guilt for having same-sex attractions and has not attended church since entering college.

Jane observed internalized messages of shame received from Geraldo's church community and family manifested as general self-doubt and lack of self-esteem within Geraldo. For example, when Jane initially probed to uncover Geraldo's strengths, he focused instead on perceived weaknesses. Despite his 3.8 grade point average, Geraldo overlooked these achievements and discussed times when he "could have done better" on a course assignment or an exam. Jane also noticed Geraldo's constant identification of not being "good enough" several times in each session (e.g., not a good enough son, student, classmate). To address Geraldo's internalized shame and to challenge his negative internal schema of self-worth, Jane empowered Geraldo to help him recognize his strengths. Jane highlighted how Geraldo demonstrated resilience in the face of oppressive experiences as a bisexual man, as well as his academic success as a first-generation college student despite experiences of isolation on campus. Furthermore, Jane encouraged Geraldo to examine how his bisexual identity could be a strength, such as providing him the capacity to connect with other LGBTQ people on campus.

Fostering Relational Competency and Cultivating Growth-Fostering Relationships

Relational competence involves shifting from disconnection to the reconceptualization of relational images, which leads to an increased connection (Headley & Sangganjanavanich, 2014). Relational competence is critical for Geraldo's movement toward authentic connection with himself, as well as with others. Highlighting discrepancies between Geraldo's internal schemata (e.g., "I am not good enough") and external proof (e.g., achieving academic success, pursuing same-sex relationships) not only served to deconstruct negative schemata but also taught Geraldo how to challenge other internal schemata on his own and develop more self-affirming ones.

Having learned how to challenge negative internal schemata, Geraldo began to question his idea of bisexuality as bad by reformulating his bisexual identity as a potential strength. Jane explored with Geraldo, for example, how they were able to develop a strong rapport even though she was a heterosexual woman and he a bisexual man. Geraldo was able to see how being openly bisexual was not a limiting factor in forming a positive relationship. Geraldo expressed pride in having romantic relationships with men and women, which enhanced

his understanding of self and how he could be of support to partners. He also shared with Jane a recent visit to a local church that is receptive to the LGBTQ community. This experience served as a turning point for Geraldo to begin affirming his identity as a bisexual man.

Given Geraldo's newly reconstructed internal schema of self-worth, Jane inquired how Geraldo might develop new connections while being open about his sexual identity. Geraldo expressed plans of returning to the local church and to come out eventually with other church members. Geraldo also described a world in which he could be out to his parents and maintain a positive relationship with them. Although Geraldo and Jane acknowledged possible negative reactions that could stem from his parents' knowledge of his bisexuality, Geraldo seemed more open to the idea of coming out to them.

Similarly, Geraldo's positive experiences of coming out to Jane and engaging in a growth-fostering relationship with her motivated him to pursue other growth-fostering relationships on campus. During his final session with Jane, Geraldo shared that he had increased his visits back home to his parents in hopes of forging a stronger connection before coming out to them. He also shared that he came out to his Calculus III professor and mentor, Dr. Porto. Geraldo expressed his excitement regarding Dr. Porto's warmth and support throughout the conversation.

In reflecting on her work with Geraldo, Jane recognized how her RCT approach benefited Geraldo in three ways. First, by establishing a collaborative and egalitarian therapeutic relationship with Geraldo, she was able to model a growth-fostering relationship in which both parties shared their authentic selves and benefited from their interactions. This modeling demonstrated to Geraldo that developing an authentic and trusting relationship while being open about his bisexual identity was possible. Second, the eco-webbing technique allowed Geraldo to explore connections and disconnections in his life. This activity led Geraldo to reexamine the kinds of relationships he wanted and from which he would benefit. Finally, challenging negative internal schemata by identifying Geraldo's strengths fostered relational competence. As a result, Geraldo began to develop a more positive self-concept, which led him to come out to his professor, to attend an LGBTQ-affirming local church on a regular basis, and to enhance his relationship with his parents by spending more time with them. Although Geraldo has not yet determined when to come out to his parents, he has made significant progress.

Implications for College Counselors

Multicultural and social justice competence serves as the foundation for effective RCT practice (Frey, 2013). In keeping with the ethical duty of providing multicultural and social justice responsive services (ACA, 2014; Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2015, 2016) college counselors working with LGBTQ students should remain current with mental health issues faced by members of this community. To further one's multicultural

competence and to guard against biases in the area of LGBTQ issues, counselors can explore training opportunities on campus (e.g., Safe Space or Safe Zone training programs) and off campus (e.g., state-level professional counseling associations). The Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling, a division of ACA, provides useful resources to members and nonmembers, including online resources and professional development opportunities at biannual conferences. A strong foundation in multicultural competence will enhance college counselors' RCT work with LGBTQ college students (Frey, 2013).

Counselors seeking to infuse their practice with RCT principles can take advantage of training opportunities, including the Jean Baker Miller Training Institute at Wellesley College (Jean Baker Miller Training Institute, n.d.). Using RCT as a framework in the college setting provides a holistic understanding of psychosocial issues experienced by college students. An additional benefit of incorporating RCT tenets for the counseling center includes the opportunity for college counselors to expand their network of resources by forging relationships and making key contacts with campus and community organizations that serve the LGBTQ population. Collaborative efforts may assist counselors as they refer clients for services outside of the college counseling center's purview (e.g., housing assistance, job placement, medical care tailored toward the LGBTQ community). On-campus collaborations would serve to promote the development of connections between LGBTQ people on campus and help college counseling centers build partnerships with other campus offices in their pursuit of addressing college student mental health issues. These connections can assist LGBTQ college students to establish and maintain healthy, growth-fostering relationships.

Furthermore, it behooves college counselors to consider the efficacy of their theoretical approaches when counseling LGBTQ college students. RCT scholars have conducted empirical studies to evaluate the effectiveness of RCT with diverse client populations (Lenz, 2016). For example, short-term RCT groups are as effective as short-term cognitive behavior therapy groups in addressing issues of bulimia and depression in women (Tantillo & Sanftner, 2003). RCT groups have also demonstrated efficacy when working with adolescents in a variety of settings (Lenz, Speciale, & Aguilar, 2012; Liang, Tracy, Kenny, & Brogan, 2008). Within the higher education setting, RCT has shown promise in efforts to improve self-esteem and decrease loneliness among college women (Liang, Tracy, Taylor, & Williams, 2002).

Despite the relative growth in research on the efficacy of RCT, research studies focused on LGBTQ populations are scarce. Mereish and Poteat (2015) conducted an empirical study to determine the effect of growth-fostering relationships on LGBTQ resilience. The researchers found that participants who had a growth-fostering relationship with a close friend reported less psychological distress compared with those who did not have a growth-fostering relationship (Mereish & Poteat, 2015). This finding is promising with respect to RCT college counselors' development of growth-fostering relationships with LGBTQ college students.

Future research could explore the efficacy of RCT interventions with LGBTQ college students. Given that much of the existing RCT research has been conducted within group therapy settings, studying the efficacy of RCT interventions for individual counseling within the college setting would be useful. Finally, future research can attend to the intersection of LGBTQ and other identities, such as race/ethnicity and social class, in college students and the efficacy of RCT in addressing the unique needs that may arise.

Conclusion

Although initially developed to address the needs of women, RCT has evolved over 4 decades to address the needs of many marginalized groups. LGBTQ college students face prejudice and discrimination on college campuses (Rankin, 2005, 2006; Rankin et al., 2010). Accounting for the influence of sociopolitical factors on client problems, RCT can be useful when working with LGBTQ college students. This contemporary theoretical approach can assist LGBTQ college students to explore how contrary societal messages affect their internal images and ways to move toward reconnection with others. RCT provides LGBTQ college students an avenue to reclaim power and to redefine how they see themselves within relationships.

As with all counseling theoretical orientations, RCT has limitations. Because of its emphasis on building relational competence, RCT may be particularly challenging when working with individuals who have limited capacity for empathy (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Jordan, 2010). Furthermore, those clients who regard counselors as experts in the counseling relationship may struggle with the egalitarian approach of RCT (Duffey & Somody, 2011; Jordan, 2010). In addition, counselors may lack adequate RCT training as preservice counselors. Hence, those interested in learning more about this approach may require supervision that is RCT focused (Duffey & Somody, 2011), which can be a financial burden. It may also be challenging to locate a supervisor with adequate RCT training and experience. Despite these limitations, empirical research demonstrates RCT as a promising approach to address a variety of issues with diverse clients (Lenz, 2016). However, more research is necessary to understand the ways in which RCT can be useful when working with LGBTQ college students. In the meantime, it behooves college counselors to remain current about LGBTQ issues in order to provide culturally responsive services, to form and maintain collaborative networks, and to promote the development of growth-fostering relationships in the lives of LGBTQ college students.

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