

2017

## Using Films to Increase Cultural Competence in Working With LGBTQ Clients

Melodie H. Frick

*Western Carolina University, mhfrick@email.wcu.edu*


Heather Thompson

*Western Carolina University, ehthompson@email.wcu.edu*

Russ Curtis

*Western Carolina University, curtis@email.wcu.edu*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://repository.wcsu.edu/jcps>

 Part of the [Counselor Education Commons](#), [Higher Education Commons](#), [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#), and the [Other Social and Behavioral Sciences Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Frick, M. H., Thompson, H., & Curtis, R. (2017). Using Films to Increase Cultural Competence in Working With LGBTQ Clients. *The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 9(2). <http://dx.doi.org/10.7729/92.1172>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by WestCollections: digitalcommons@wcsu. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Journal of Counselor Preparation and Supervision by an authorized editor of WestCollections: digitalcommons@wcsu. For more information, please contact [ir@wcsu.edu](mailto:ir@wcsu.edu).

---

# Using Films to Increase Cultural Competence in Working With LGBTQ Clients

## **Abstract**

There is a dearth of research on effective strategies for teaching counselors-in-training how to work more effectively with LGBTQ clients. Experiential learning activities, such as watching films, can increase students' knowledge of their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and culturally diverse clients. This qualitative study explored, in the context of a sexuality and counseling course, how 27 students' awareness, knowledge, and skills were influenced by the use of two films, *For the Bible Tells Me So* and *Normal*, which illuminate the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and their families. Results and implications for counselor educators are provided.

## **Keywords**

experiential teaching, LGBTQ, cultural competence, films, counselor education

Counselor educators are positioned to train students to work effectively and empathically within diverse populations such as the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) communities. To accomplish this, counseling training must be informed by evolving cultural competencies, including issues involving sexual orientation and gender identity (Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling [ALGBTIC], 2009; ALGBTIC LGBQQIA Competencies Taskforce [ALGBTIC], 2013). And, while counselor educators are required to include multicultural material in all courses (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014), students often report feeling inadequately trained to work with LGBTQ clients (Bidell, 2005; 2013; Graham, Carney, & Kluck, 2012; Rock, Carson, & McGeorge, 2010).

Research indicates that students express more confidence in working with issues related to sexuality when they receive specific sexuality training (Miller & Byers, 2008; 2010), and it is recommended that more specific training related to sexual orientation and LGBTQ needs should be added to counseling curriculum (Biaggio, Orchard, Larson, Petrino, & Mahara, 2003; Dillon et al., 2004; Frank & Cannon, 2010; Goodrich & Luke, 2010; Israel & Hackett, 2004; Long & Serovich, 2003; Luke, Goodrich, & Scarborough, 2011). Moreover, it has been suggested that all counseling programs should require at least one graduate level counseling sexuality course, with a focus on LGBTQ issues, because all counselors will work with non-heterosexual clients and the intense personal reflection required to work effectively with LGBTQ clients cannot be adequately piecemealed into other courses (Bidell, 2013; Irving, 2014). Not all counseling programs, however, offer courses specific to sexuality counseling (Kocarek & Pelling, 2003; Mallicoat & Gibson, 2014), and there is a dearth of research on effective strategies for teaching counselors-in-training how to work more effectively with LGBTQ clients (Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Walters & Rehma, 2013).

Experiential teaching methods have been found to be effective in enhancing diversity awareness (Lazloffy & Habekost, 2010) and cultivating clinical skills from theoretical knowledge (Knecht-Sabres, 2010; Yardley, Teunissen, & Dornan, 2012). Therefore, the intent of this qualitative study was to explore, in the context of a sexuality and counseling course, how if at all, students' cultural competence (awareness, knowledge, and skills) was influenced by the experiential teaching method of using films that illuminate the experiences of LGBTQ individuals and their families.

### **Experiential Teaching**

Counselors-in-training must increase their awareness, knowledge, and skills about their personal values and biases, clients' worldviews, and culturally appropriate interventions in order to become culturally competent counselors (Chao, Wei, Good, & Flores, 2011; Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011). To accomplish this, counselor educators can use experiential learning activities to increase students' knowledge of their attitudes and beliefs about themselves and culturally diverse clients (Council for Accreditation and Related Educational Programs [CACREP], 2009). Experiential activities that incorporate student reflection on the connection between one's self and those who are culturally diverse are one of the best ways to impact student learning (Arthur & Achenback, 2002; Collins, Arthur, & Wong-Wylie, 2010; Fawcett, Briggs, Maycock, & Stine, 2010).

Experiential teaching methods move beyond didactic teaching methods by broadening students' learning from readings and lectures to lived experiences (Villalba & Redmond, 2008) in order to create cultural sensitivity (Kim & Lyons, 2003; Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010). Experiential learning methods expand what students learn cognitively and move them into more affective learning, thus increasing their self-awareness of what personal beliefs impact their

professional roles as counselors (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Loya & Cuevas, 2010). Further, experiential learning methods provide students a medium to learn through others' lived experiences (Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010; Perry & Southwell, 2011), develop empathy for diverse clients (McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Villalba & Redmond, 2008; Walters & Rehman, 2013), and bridge the gap between theory and practice (Knecht-Sabres, 2010; Yardley et al., 2012).

The use of films is one form of experiential teaching that has been found effective (Armstrong & Berg, 2007; Johnson, 2011; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000; Pierce & Wooloff, 2012; Stinchfield, 2006; Villalba & Redmond, 2008; Whipple & Tucker, 2012) and used in various counseling courses (e.g., ethics, multicultural counseling, group counseling, and theories). Films provide a means of contact with unfamiliar populations and controversial issues from a safe distance (Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Higgins & Dermer, 2001), allow students to practice observational skills, and are catalysts for class discussions about best counseling practices (Dave & Tandon, 2011; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Coupled with watching films, classroom discussions and reflective journal writing help students process their emotional responses from the experiential activities, and transfer their personal reactions into professional application (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Whipple & Tucker, 2012).

Films also enable students to practice and increase empathy (Gerdes, Segal, Jackson, & Mullins, 2011; Roell, 2010) because they allow students to respond to the character's experience which triggers their imagination and affective associations and increases their cognitive understanding and emotional experiences (Ahn, Jin, & Ritterfeld, 2012; Igartua, 2010). Further, watching films and processing cognitive and affective responses are active learning methods that increase diversity awareness (Loya & Cuevas, 2010; Villalba & Redmond, 2008) and improve

perceptual, conceptual, and executive skills (Higgins & Dermer, 2001; Oh, Kang, & De Gagne, 2012; Warren, Stech, Douglas, & Lambert, 2010). Thus, students are better able to collect and observe data (perceptual skill), understand data in a coherent manner (conceptual skill), and influence clients based on what was observed and understood (executive skill).

### **Film Selection**

The use of films with LGBTQ content and characters has been recommended as a method of teaching about sexual orientation and the needs of the LGBTQ communities (Bidell, 2013; Long & Serovich, 2003). For this study, two films were chosen that depicted potential challenges individuals and families experience (e.g., family and community reactions, religious views, etc.) in the process of coming out or transitioning. At the time of this study, the authors noted that it was difficult to find films that encompassed these experiences for all members of the LGBTQ communities; therefore, the selected films provide examples of what individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, or transgender may experience. *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karlsruhe, 2007) is a 98-minute documentary about the lives of five Christian families whose children are lesbian or gay. This film reveals the lived experiences of each family and offers diverse interpretations of spirituality and sexuality by clergy and leaders from various religious backgrounds. The intention of using this film was to open dialogue about the following: (a) how religion and sexuality play a part in LGBTQ clients' lives, including societal support and oppression; (b) how personal values may play a role when working with clients and their families; and (c) how to work effectively and ethically without imposing these values and beliefs (ACA, 2014).

*For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karlsruhe, 2007), however, does not depict members of the transgender community and students need additional information about contextual factors (e.g.,

psychological, political, historical) that influence transgender identity development (ALGBTIC, 2009; Carroll, Gilroy, & Ryan, 2002; Preston, 2011). Therefore, the second film, *Normal* (Busch, Brokaw, Pilcher, & Anderson, 2003), was selected to provide an example of what a person might experience during transition, including emotional responses, clothing choices, voice modulation, and changes at work, home, and in the community. This 108-minute film is a fictional portrayal about a Midwestern family whose father figure decides to pursue sexual reassignment and the reactions from family members, co-workers, and the church community. This movie also portrays the evolving family dynamics around the father's decision, all of which are important for counselors to be aware of when working with transgender clients and their families.

### **Method**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore how, if at all, watching the movie, *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007), influenced students' perceptions of the LGBTQ communities and what families experience when a child or family member is gay. And how, if at all, watching the movie, *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003), influenced students' perceptions of the transgender community and how families cope with a family member going through transition. The authors adhered to ACA Code of Ethics research guidelines (ACA, 2014) and used the consensual qualitative research (CQR) method to conduct a rigorous analysis of participants' experiences and make judgments about the meaning of the data (Hill et al., 2005). The essential elements of CQR include the use of: (a) open-ended questions to capture participant experiences; (b) judges who analyze the data independently and work together as a team to reach general consensus; (c) an external auditor who evaluates the findings generated by the primary research

team; and (d) data analysis procedures that generate domains, core ideas, and cross case analysis (Hill et al., 2005).

## **Participants**

The recommended strong sample size for CQR is at least 8 - 15 participants (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997; Hill et al., 2005). The participants in this study were a convenience sample of 27 individuals; 24 women and three men. Twenty-four participants identified their ethnicity or race as Caucasian, one identified as African-American, one identified as Hispanic, and one identified as Latin. Their ages ranged from 23 – 56 ( $M = 35$ ). Participants were graduate students from counseling ( $N = 19$ ), social work ( $N = 4$ ), psychology ( $N = 3$ ), and college student personnel ( $N = 1$ ) programs, and all were enrolled in one of two sexuality courses taught by the first author; one course was offered at a university in the Midwest, the other at a university in the Southeast.

## **Research Team**

It is imperative for researchers to discuss their positionality and characteristics that may influence study design, data collection, and analysis (Merriam, 1998). The team responsible for data analysis included the three authors, who are three faculty members in a CACREP-accredited counseling program. The research team discussed their assumptions about the use of films in facilitating professional competence in counseling and their beliefs about qualitative research. All team members use films in their courses and believe based on experience and student feedback that this method of instruction serves to enhance students' understanding of the material taught in classes. All three members also agreed an important reason for facilitating this study is their commitment to integrating student feedback in their evidence-based teaching strategies. Additionally, the authors discussed their assumptions that students may not receive



adequate training for working with LGBTQ clients by having only one cross-cultural course or limited references across counseling curriculum, and their biases that students need additional training to better serve this client population. Discussions about assumptions and biases toward this particular type of teaching tool and student outcomes were ongoing. All team members previously conducted qualitative studies using CQR. Prior to beginning data analysis, members reviewed the Hill et al. articles (1997; 2005) and the general procedures for CQR analysis.

### **Instruments**

Research questions and questionnaires were developed after an extensive review of the literature as recommended by the CQR founders, Hill et al. (1997). Two interviews were conducted prior to the study and questions were revised based on those interviews (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). As is recommended, data was collected twice from each participant (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005).

**Questionnaires.** The research team worked together to generate a series of open-ended questions in a semi-structured questionnaire (see Appendix for pre/post questionnaires) to solicit participant perspectives on two films. Students completed surveys on their thoughts, feelings, and reactions about LGBTQ clients and their families, the provision of counseling to LGBTQ clients and families, and general reactions to the films immediately before and after viewing each film. Participants also received demographic forms attached to the questionnaires. Participants were asked to indicate age, gender, ethnicity/race, and graduate program (e.g., counseling, social work, psychology, or college student personnel). Participants also were asked if they had previously viewed each film.

**Reflection Journals.** In an effort to gather a more in-depth understanding of student perspectives and better ensure credibility of the findings, students were encouraged to fully

elaborate on their perspectives and reactions to the films in a reflective journal. Students submitted their journal reflections at the end of the week in which each film was viewed. A final reflection summary paper with reflective prompts about both films was submitted at the end of the course.

## **Procedure**

After approval from both university institutional review boards, the students were provided with an informed consent form at the beginning of the course explaining the purpose of the study and their rights as participants, emphasizing that their grades would not be influenced by participation (or non-participation) in the study. Pseudonyms were used in place of participants' names to protect their anonymity. Additionally, students were informed that the film material could be considered controversial and that the purpose of showing the films was not to change their personal or religious beliefs, but rather to create dialogue about what their clients may be experiencing and processing in therapy sessions. Further, students were instructed that class discussions were voluntary and a safe place to discuss thoughts and reactions to the films' content, and that additional support would be provided for anyone that needed to process his/her experiences, individually (i.e., meet with the instructor, other faculty, or support services). The films were shown during two class periods where participants were provided questionnaires before and after the films. Class discussions followed each film; a film was watched during the first half of a three-hour class and then students processed their reactions, questions, and how to apply what they watched to counseling situations. Participants also wrote weekly reflections to further process their thoughts and feelings, and then submitted summary papers of these reflections at the end of the course.

## **Data Analysis**

Consensual qualitative research (CQR) methodology was used to derive meaning from the data through a process of individual analysis followed by group consensus (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). At each stage of the data analysis process, the first two authors coded data independently before meeting to reach consensus. The third author served as an auditor who evaluated the data analysis. Although three coders are recommended, two coders are considered acceptable (Hill et al., 2005). Data analysis was done in two phases. *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007) was analyzed first. Domains, core ideas, and cross-case analysis was completed before analyzing data from *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003). The same data analysis procedures were used for each film.

### **Domain Coding and Core Ideas**

Team members worked independently to generate domain codes for each film. As a group, emergent domains were discussed and ultimately consensus was reached. The domain codes served as the conceptual frameworks for housing segments of data (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). Domain codes were continually analyzed to best capture core ideas from the data. Next, the team independently generated concise descriptions of the clustered data within each domain. The team then met and worked toward consensus. Condensed descriptions were then compared to the original narratives to ensure that the data were free of assumptions and interpretations.

### **Cross Case Analysis**

For each film, team members worked independently to identify commonalities among core ideas that could be grouped into similar clusters of meaning. Once team consensus was reached, tallies were generated to determine the frequency. The terms general, typical, and

variant are used to describe the frequency of each category (Hill et al., 2005). A general category refers to all or all but one of the cases, a typical category refers to more than half of the cases, and a variant category includes more than two but less than half of the cases. Categories with less than three cases were not included in the analysis.

### **Quality and Trustworthiness**

The research team addressed credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 2009; Morrow, 2005) to enhance the rigor of this study. In an effort to promote credibility, the following steps were taken: biases and expectations were discussed and noted; an auditor checked and provided feedback on the domains, core ideas, and categories generated and tallied by the first two authors; and participants' reflective journals and summary papers were used to triangulate the findings. Dependability was achieved by maintaining a thorough audit trail of procedures, data collection, and analysis: team members worked independently to read surveys and generate domains, core ideas, and cross-case categories; as a group, members discussed domains, core ideas, and cross-case categories with the intent of developing a consensus; tallies were used to determine the frequency of cross-case occurrences; and how decisions were reached by the team (Merriam, 2009; Morrow, 2005). Additionally, efforts were made to increase transferability by providing demographics of participants, descriptive quotes from the data, and a clear description of procedures undertaken (Hunt, 2011). Further, the research team addressed confirmability by discussing their assumptions and biases, maintaining an audit trail to promote transparency of the process, and having ongoing discussions to ensure emerging themes were directly supported by the data (De Stefano, Atkins, Noble, & Heath, 2012).

## Results

Final consensus among the research team identified three themes for both films: *emotional reactions*, *new awareness*, and *counseling applications* (see Table 1). Following CQR guidelines (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005), a general category represents all or all but one of the cases ( $n = 27$ ); a typical category represents at least half of the cases ( $n = 13$ ); and a variant category represented less than half but more than two of the cases ( $n = 3 - 12$ ). Following, findings are presented separately for each film.

Table 1

*Themes and Frequencies of Participants' Responses*

Themes <i>For the Bible Tells Me So</i>	Frequency
Emotional Reactions	Typical (23)
New Awareness	Typical (15)
Counseling Applications	Typical (18)
Themes <i>Normal</i>	Frequency
Emotional Reactions	Typical (17)
New Awareness	Typical (18)
Counseling Applications	Variant (12)

*Note.*  $N = 27$ . Typical = category applied to at least 13 or more of the cases; variant = category applied to fewer than half of the cases.

### **For the Bible Tells Me So**

**Emotional Reactions.** Of the three domains, the film had the most impact on participants' emotions, with 23 participants reporting having both positive and negative emotional reactions to watching the film. One participant stated "I felt moved. I was amazed to see how opinions can change with knowledge and how supportive some families were," while

another stated “change and progress is happening faster than I expected. [I am] thankful for the language to integrate in future discussions with others.” Conversely, a participant responded “I feel like sobbing. There is so much about my sexuality I have not worked through,” and another participant felt “angry that people can be so judgmental.” Finally, one participant reflected that “my heart was made receptive to new thinking.” With these mixed emotions, participants also reported changes in their perception of the intersection between religion and the LGBTQ communities, and how this new awareness would aid them when working with LGBTQ clients and their families.

**New Awareness.** After watching the film, 15 participants reported having a new awareness of experiences faced by the LGBTQ communities, including how religious beliefs can be used in the form of support or oppression. One participant reported before watching the film that he believed “organized religion contributes to oppression,” and after watching the film stated “I feel less prejudice against Christianity because I realize it is not the religion that is the source of bigotry...I especially appreciated the interviews with the priests, reverends, and the Bishop who beautifully articulated a loving stance...from the holy text.” Another participant reported “[films] like this help develop awareness of issues surrounding homosexuals....I learned a lot from [the film]...personal beliefs should not infringe on others’ rights to be who they are and develop without discrimination.” Further, one participant stated “[I] never thought about gay marriage before [watching the film]. Now I think that God would honor any two people who loved each other and wanted that commitment.” These new perceptions guided participants in new ways to use counseling interventions that would be effective when working with LGBTQ clients and their families.

**Counseling Applications.** Eighteen participants articulated ideas of possible counseling practices after watching the film, such as fostering increased acceptance, using psychoeducation materials, identifying supportive people and systems, acknowledging discrimination, and advocacy. One participant explained “[my] ideas of how to talk with families has completely changed. I realize the need for support and psychoeducation...I look forward to being less fearful of this work.” In addition, one participant suggested wanting to “provide a safe environment and identify internalized messages of homophobia...discuss healthy self-image and assess for safety and suicide.” Further, one participant reported feeling

better equipped to work with families with compassion...understand the role that fear and beliefs play in parents....be aware of groups who are disdainful toward LGBTQ and their effects on clients....address homophobic remarks, correct myths/stereotypes to create a safe space....engage in community....psychoeducation to promote acceptance.

After watching *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007), participants experienced positive and negative emotional reactions, an increased awareness of what lesbian and gay children and their families experience when sorting through societal and cultural interpretations of religious text and the coming out process, which produced ideas for possible counseling interventions when working with LGBTQ clients and their families. Participants also reported emotional reactions, new awareness, and counseling applications after watching the film, *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003).

## **Normal**

**Emotional Reactions.** After watching *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003), 17 participants reported having an emotional reaction and many identified having more feelings of compassion. One participant responded that watching the film “gave me empathy and compassion for transgender individuals that I didn’t have previously.” Another participant said “I have more

compassion now. [Before watching the film] I wanted to judge transgender individuals as perverts or just confused. The [film] really helped communicate that to feel complete a change is necessary.” Additionally, one participant stated she was “moved with emotion...stirred my compassion...bravery to come out to loved ones is beyond my comprehension....Being who you should be is greater than any rejection you might encounter. That is phenomenal.” Further, one participant reported that she “felt deeply moved...the movie changed me; moved me from pity to admiration. I needed to be humbled so that my compassion did not become condescension.” Some participants reported that they needed to take a closer look at their preconceived ideas about transgender individuals, such as a person may want to go through transition at any age, not just in their 20s. One participant explained “I found myself semi-uncomfortable. I had many stereotypes of what transitioning looks like and these were challenged....These emotions were unexpected for me.” In addition to emotional reactions, participants reported having a new awareness of the transgender community.

**New Awareness.** Compared to the other two themes (i.e., emotional reactions and counseling applications), 18 participants reported the film most increased their awareness and knowledge of the transgender community and the transition process. One participant stated prior to watching the film that she was “not sure I have any thoughts [on transgender individuals]” to after watching the film thinking “it’s more than just the clothing they wear. No one would make this decision...if it wasn’t a very big part of who they are.” Similarly, prior to watching the film a participant reported thinking she did not “know much about [transgender individuals] other than feeling like they are in the wrong body and want to use the bathroom of the sex they are...[I] wonder if they are homosexuals too,” to after watching the film thinking that it is “heartbreaking what they go through....my biases have been shattered and I feel hope for those with gender



confusion.” Another participant stated she had an “increase in awareness of the difference between gender identity and sexual orientation,” and another participant explained the film “heightened my awareness of the internal struggle, family process, and community reactions....I need to overcome my own gender stereotypes and preconceived notions.” Some participants noted their new awareness included new empathy for what transgender individuals experience. One participant responded that the “movie challenged me to better empathize with a population I would truly labor to understand,” and another participant explained that by feeling the “pain from each character’s point of view,” that she can “understand a little more what it might feel like...builds empathy and understanding of the range of reactions and emotions a person might have.” This increase in awareness also aided participants in identifying ways of counseling transgender individuals and their families.

**Counseling Applications.** After watching the film, 12 participants identified counseling interventions they can use when counseling transgender individuals and their families, such as fostering acceptance, the need to identify or create clients’ support systems, offering psychoeducation materials about going through transition, and monitoring for suicidal ideation. One participant stated wanting to “prepare individuals and their families by educating [them] on what to expect....Help families who want to stay together identify ways to make it work.” Another participant wanted “to be sure not to position the gender change as the client’s entire story.” In addition, one participant wanted to “understand each person’s perspective in the family...find support systems, and discuss the risks of coming out [as transgender].” These choices of professional counseling interventions, coupled with their increased compassion and awareness of what transgender individuals may experience when going through transition, were gained by watching *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003). Moreover, by watching both films about real-

life experiences and fictional portrayals of the LGBTQ communities, participants expressed having expanded what they learned from class readings to better understanding how to effectively work with LGBTQ clients and their families in counseling sessions.

### **Discussion**

This qualitative study examined if the experiential teaching method of watching topic-specific films in a sexuality and counseling course would influence students' awareness, knowledge, and skills in working with LGBTQ clients and their families. Participants' responses indicate that watching the films *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007) and *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003) in a sexuality course are useful experiential teaching methods that serve to increase students' cultural competencies (ALGBTIC, 2009; Chao et al., 2011; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Long & Serovich, 2003). This study's findings support previous research that revealed that observing films helped counseling students by eliciting reactions about themselves and others (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Koch & Dollaride, 2000; Walters & Rehman, 2013), expanded their cognitive learning into affective learning (Ahn et al., 2012; Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Igartua, 2010), and increased their empathy (Gerdes et al., 2011; Koch & Dollarhide, 2000; Roell, 2010; Villalba & Redmond, 2008) for the LGBTQ communities. Further, processing the films' material through class discussions and reflective journals and papers increased students' diversity awareness and sensitivity (Dave & Tandon, 2011; Laszloffy & Habekost, 2010; Loya & Cuevas, 2010; Villalba & Redmond, 2008), and helped them to process their emotional reactions and new perceptions into new professional application (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Whipple & Tucker, 2012). The findings from this study also corroborate the position that experiential learning methods help students develop new professional behaviors (i.e., executive skills) by improving how students observe and gather information (i.e., perceptual

skills) about themselves and others, and how to make sense of clients' lived experiences with their new awareness and knowledge (i.e., conceptual skills) (Higgins & Dermer, 2002; Oh et al., 2012; Warren et al., 2010).

Based on these findings, it appears that students who had emotional reactions (i.e., increased affective learning) and/or an increased awareness of the experiences of LGBTQ individuals were able to translate these into counseling interventions for LGBTQ clients and their families. More participants had an emotional reaction to watching *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007) than watching *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003). One possibility for this is that it presents value-laden material and intense scenes of both support and hatred for the LGBTQ communities. Additionally, students may respond more to documentaries (e.g., *For the Bible Tells Me So*) than fictional portrayals (e.g., *Normal*) with recognizable, cisgender actors who are not from the LGBTQ communities. Notably, after watching these films class discussions evolved from how to avoid imposing personal views on LGBTQ clients, to how to avoid imposing personal views on those who are not accepting or welcoming of members of the LGBTQ communities, thus promoting ethical counseling practices (ACA, 2014). The authors suggest counselor educators use class discussions to process emotions triggered by images seen in the films and guide students through the process of turning emotions and new awareness into effective counseling interventions when working with clients (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Dave & Tandon, 2011; Higgins & Dermer, 2002; Oh et al., 2012; Warren et al., 2010; Whipple & Tucker, 2012). This guidance models for students how counselors can help clients with the same skills in regulating emotions, synthesizing new information with previously held beliefs, and effective decision making skills aimed toward beneficial counseling outcomes.

More participants reported an increased awareness after watching Busch's et al., (2003) *Normal* than watching *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007). Prior to watching *Normal*, some participants stated they did not know much about the transgender community, which could suggest why there was a larger increase in awareness as compared to responses after watching *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karslake, 2007), where all participants reported knowledge and/or experiences with lesbian and gay individuals. There were fewer counseling applications reported, however, after watching *Normal*. It is possible participants needed more time to synthesize their emotional reactions and new awareness of experiences faced by transgender individuals and their families before identifying possible counseling interventions and best practices (Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010; Villalba & Redmond, 2008). Counselor educators can expand students' awareness into transferable counseling interventions by using class discussions, skills-based training, and other experiential activities such as role-plays, community interviews, and discussion panels that include transgender individuals (Long & Serovich, 2003; Pearson, 2003; Preston, 2011). Additionally, students can have class discussions and assignments to increase their knowledge about local and national support networks (Carroll et al., 2002; Chavez-Korell & Johnson, 2010), community resources, and psychoeducational materials they can provide clients. This may include information on the transition process, coming out to family, friends, co-workers, and the community, and acknowledging the outcome may not be as positive as the ending in *Normal*, and what interventions could be taken to address loss and grief.

### **Implications for Counselor Educators**

It is important for counselor educators to understand that the students comprising their classes can range from ultra conservative to extremely liberal in their values related to marriage,

family, religion, and politics and these values may be deeply entrenched depending upon the environment in which they were raised and educated. And, it is important that students feel safe to share their ideas and life experiences by hearing from counselor educators that all perspectives are valued, ridicule from others is not acceptable in the classroom, and that students have additional support (e.g., speaking with the professor, other faculty, or support services) if they need to process what they experience in class discussions. Thus, whether using the aforementioned material in a class devoted strictly to teaching about LGBTQ issues or incorporating it into an existing class (e.g., cross cultural), the authors have found the following practice helpful in increasing the likelihood that the purpose of showing and processing these films is more easily understood and fully considered. First, ask students to briefly write about situations when they were unfairly judged or ridiculed. Then ask students to write about situations when they unfairly judged or ridiculed others, even if they were quite young at the time. Once students complete these two brief written assignments, ask them to discuss their insights and how this may relate to learning about LGBTQ clients and their issues. The authors have found that this exercise tends to decrease potential defenses and preconceived notions students may harbor about LGBTQ client issues by appealing to the larger argument that judgment in general, at least for professional counselors, is typically not conducive to successful client outcomes.

The authors also have found it useful to make students aware that the class may be filled with students who have a wide range of potentially conflicting beliefs and values related to religion, politics, abortion, right to die, and LGBTQ issues, among many other topics, but a part of the responsibility of being a graduate student is to be able to rationally and intentionally consider issues from multiple perspectives so that tentative decisions can be based on a broad

body of knowledge, not just opinion. And, it should be mentioned that thinking systemically does not necessarily mean they have to sacrifice their values, unless with new evidence they see fit to do so. Moreover, discussions should include how to effectively and ethically work with clients whom students hold negative impressions or beliefs by seeking supervision and additional training to prevent harming the client and counseling relationship (ALGBTIC, 2013). Using these strategies to position or “front-end-load” the purpose of viewing and processing these two films does not guarantee that students will engage in completely peaceful and respectful discussion, but the authors have found that it reduces defenses to the point where productive discussion can be facilitated.

### **Limitations and Directions for Future Research**

Although this study provides insight into how the use of experiential teaching methods may enhance counselor-in-training competency with LGBTQ clients, it is not without limitations. One limitation of this study was the use of a convenience sample that lacked diversity which may have biased the results. Additional limitations that could be addressed in future research include assessing the effectiveness of these films in more than two sexuality courses, comparing films with members of the LGBTQ communities (e.g., bisexual, queer) that were not included in this study, assessing students’ comfort and skill levels in working with LGBTQ clients while practicing in a counseling lab after watching films, and comparing various experiential activities to determine the most effective method (e.g., films, role-plays, group activities, etc.) in increasing students’ cultural competence in working with LGBTQ clients. In addition, field studies need to be conducted to determine if students who view these two films build stronger therapeutic alliance with LGBTQ clients, the key ingredient to successful client outcome, relative to students who are taught with other types of sensitivity training modalities.

## **Conclusion**

At its most fundamental level, the role of the counseling profession is to help clients live more authentic and meaningful lives in accordance with clients' own values and goals.

Counselor educators can play a pivotal role in this process by continually seeking effective teaching methods that expand counselors-in-training awareness of personal biases. The use of two films, specifically *For the Bible Tells Me So* (Karlslake, 2007) and *Normal* (Busch et al., 2003), have proven useful as an experiential teaching method in a sexuality course. The authors hope in presenting these findings is that the impact of using these films increases students' awareness and fosters their growth as effective counselors for members of LGBTQ communities.

## References

- Ahn, D., Jin, S. A., & Ritterfeld, U. (2012). "Sad movies don't always make me cry": The cognitive and affective processes underpinning enjoyment of tragedy. *Journal of Media Psychology: Theories, Methods, and Applications*, 24(1), 9-18. doi: 10.1027/1864-1105/a000058
- ALGBTIC LGBTQIA Competencies Taskforce, Harper, A., Finnerty, P., Martinez, M., Brace, A., Crethar, H. C., Loos, B., Harper, B., Graham, S., Singh, A., Kocet, M., Travis, L., Lambert, S., Burnes, T., Dickey, L. M., & Hammer, T. R. (2013). Association for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender issues in counseling competencies for counseling with lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer, questioning, intersex, and ally individuals. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 7(1), 2-43. doi: 10.1080/15538605.2013.755444
- American Counseling Association (2014). *Code of ethics*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Armstrong, S. A., & Berg, R. C. (2007). Demonstrating group process using 12 angry men. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work*, 30(2), 135-144. doi: 10.1080/01933920590925986
- Arthur, N., & Achenbach, K. (2002). Developing multicultural counseling competencies through experiential learning. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 42(1), 2-14. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2002.tb01299.x
- Association of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling (2009). *Competencies for counseling with transgender clients*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Biaggio, M., Orchard, S., Larson, J., Petrino, K., & Mahara, R. (2003). Guidelines for gay/lesbian/bisexual-affirmative educational practices in graduate psychology programs. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 34(5), 548-554. doi: 10.1037/0735-7028.34.5.548
- Bidell, M. P. (2005). The sexual orientation counselor competency scale: Assessing attitudes, skills, and knowledge of counselors working with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 44(4), 267-279. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2005.tb01755.x
- Bidell, M. P. (2013). Addressing disparities: The impact of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender graduate counselling course. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research: Linking Research With Practice*, 13(4), 300-307. doi: 10.1080/14733145.2012.741139
- Busch, T. J., Brokaw, C., & Pilcher, L. D. (Producers), & Anderson, J. (Director). (2003). *Normal* [Motion picture]. United States: HBO Films.
- Carroll, L., Gilroy, P. J., & Ryan, J. (2002). Counseling transgendered, transsexual, and gender-variant clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 80(2), 131-139. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2002.tb00175.x
- Chao, R. C-L., Wei, M., Good, G. E., & Flores, L. Y. (2011). Race/ethnicity, color-blind racial attitudes, and multicultural counseling competence: The moderating effects of multicultural counseling training. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 58(1), 72-82. doi: 10.1037/a0022091



- Chavez-Korell, S., & Johnson, L. T. (2010). Informing counselor training and competent counseling services through transgender narratives and the transgender community. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 4*(3-4), 202-213. doi: 10.1080/15538605.2010.524845
- Collins, S., Arthur, N., & Wong-Wylie, G. (2010). Enhancing reflective practice in multicultural counseling through cultural auditing. *Journal of Counseling & Development, 88*(3), 340-347. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2010.tb00031.x
- Council for Accreditation and Related Educational Programs (2009). *CACREP accreditation manual*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Dave, S., & Tandon, K. (2011). Cinemedication in psychiatry. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment, 17*(4), 301-308. doi: 10.1192/apt.bp.107.004945
- De Stefano, J., Atkins, S., Noble, R. N., & Heath, N. (2012). Am I competent enough to be doing this?: A qualitative study of trainees' experiences working with clients who self-injure. *Counselling Psychology Quarterly, 25*(3), 289-305. doi: 10.1080/09515070.2012.698981
- Dillon, F. R., Worthington, R. L., Savoy, H. B., Rooney, S. C., Becker-Schutte, A., & Guerra, R. M. (2004). On becoming allies: A qualitative study of lesbian-, gay-, and bisexual-affirmative counselor training. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 43*(3), 162-178. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2004.tb01840.x
- Fawcett, M. L., Briggs, C. A., Maycock, G., & Stine, E. (2010). Multicultural counseling competency development with a Guatemala travel study. *Journal for International Counselor Education, 2*(1), 1-18.
- Frank, D. A., II, & Cannon, E. P. (2010). Queer theory as pedagogy in counselor education: A framework for diversity training. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling, 4*(1), 18-31. doi: 10.1080/15538600903552731
- Gerdes, K. E., Segal, E. A., Jackson, K. F., & Mullins, J. L. (2011). Teaching empathy: A framework rooted in social cognitive neuroscience and social justice. *Journal of Social Work Education, 47*(1), 109-131. doi: 10.5175/JSWE.2011.200900085
- Goodrich, K. M., & Luke, M. (2010). The experiences of school counselors-in-training in group work with LGBTQ adolescents. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 35*(2), 143-159. doi: 10.1080/01933921003705966
- Graham, S. R., Carney, J. S., & Kluck, A. S. (2012). Perceived competency in working with LGB clients: Where are we now? *Counselor Education & Supervision, 51*(1), 2-16. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2012.00001.x
- Higgins, J. A., & Dermer, S. (2001). The use of film in marriage and family counselor education. *Counselor Education & Supervision, 40*(3), 182-192. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2001.tb01251.x
- Hill, C. E., Knox, S., Thompson, S. J., Williams, E. N., Hess, S. A., & Ladany, N. (2005). Consensual qualitative research: An update. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 53*(2), 196-205. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.196
- Hill, C. E., Thompson, B. J., & Williams, E. N. (1997). A guide to conducting consensual qualitative research. *The Counseling Psychologist, 25*, 517-572. doi: 10.1177/0011000097254001
- Hipolito-Delgado, C. P., Cook, J. M., Avrus, E. M., & Bonham, E. J. (2011). Developing counseling students' multicultural competence through the multicultural action project.

- Counselor Education & Supervision*, 50(6), 402-421. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2011.tb01924.x
- Hunt, B. (2011). Publishing qualitative research in counseling journals. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 89(3), 296-300. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2011.tb00092.x
- Igartua, J. (2010). Identification with characters and narrative persuasion through fictional feature films. *Communications*, 35(4), 347-373. doi: 10.1515/COMM.2010.019
- Irving, D. (2014, September). An ally's perspective on LGBTQIA issues and training. *Counseling Today*, 57(3), 26-27.
- Israel, T., & Hackett, G. (2004). Counselor education on lesbian, gay, and bisexual issues: Comparing information and attitude exploration. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 43(3), 179-191. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2004.tb01841.x
- Johnson, V. I. (2011). Adult children of divorce and relationship education: Implications for counselors and counselor educators. *The Family Journal: Counseling and Therapy for Couples and Families*, 19(1), 22-29. doi: 10.1177/1066480710387494
- Karslake, D. (Producer & Director). (2007). *For the Bible tells me so* [Documentary]. United States: First Run Features.
- Kim, B. S. K., & Lyons, H. Z. (2003). Experiential activities and multicultural counseling competence training. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81(4), 400-408. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00266.x
- Knecht-Sabres, L. J. (2010). The use of experiential learning in an occupational therapy program: Can it foster skills for clinical practice? *Occupational Therapy in Health Care*, 24(4), 320-334. doi: 10.3109/07380577.2010.514382
- Kocarek, C. E., & Pelling, N. J. (2003). Beyond knowledge and awareness: Enhancing counselor skills for work with gay, lesbian, and bisexual clients. *Journal of Multicultural Counseling And Development*, 31(2), 99-112. doi: 10.1002/j.2161-1912.2003.tb00536.x
- Koch, G., & Dollarhide, C. T. (2000). Using a popular film in counselor education: *Good Will Hunting* as a teaching tool. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 39(3), 203-210. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2000.tb01232.x
- Laszloffy, T., & Habekost, J. (2010). Using experiential tasks to enhance cultural sensitivity among MFT trainees. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 36(3), 333-346. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2010.00213.x
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Long, J. K., & Serovich, J. M. (2003). Incorporating sexual orientation into mft training programs: Infusion and inclusion. *Journal of Marital & Family Therapy*, 29(1), 59-67. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2003.tb00383.x
- Loya, M. A., & Cuevas, M. (2010). Teaching racism: Using experiential learning to challenge the status quo. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, 30, 288-299. doi: 10.1080/08841233.2010.497130
- Luke, M., Goodrich, K. M., & Scarborough, J. L. (2011). Integration of the K-12 LGBTQI student population in school counselor education curricula: The current state of affairs. *Journal of LGBT Issues in Counseling*, 5(2), 80-101. doi: 10.1080/15538605.2011.574530
- Mallicoat, W. D., & Gibson, D. M. (2014, January). Knowledge share: Sexual healing. *Counseling Today*, 56(7), 52-59.

- McDowell, T., Goessling, K., & Melendez, T. (2012). Transformative learning through international immersion: Building multicultural competence in family therapy and counseling. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 38(2), 365-379. doi: 10.1111/j.1752-0606.2010.00209.x
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miller, S. A., & Byers, E. S. (2008). An exploratory examination of the sexual intervention self-efficacy of clinical psychology graduate students. *Training and Education in Professional Psychology*, 2(3), 135-144. doi: 10.1037/1931-3918.2.3.137
- Miller, S. A., & Byers, E. S. (2010). Psychologists' sexual education and training in graduate school. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 42(2), 93-100. doi: 10.1037/a0018571
- Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 52(2), 250-260. doi: 10.1037/0022-0167.52.2.250
- Oh, J., Kang, J., & De Gagne, J. (2012). Learning concepts of cinenurducation: An integrative review. *Nurse Education Today*, 32(8), 914-919. doi: 10.1016/j.nedt.2012.03.021
- Pearson, Q. M. (2003). Breaking the silence in the counselor education classroom: A training seminar on counseling sexual minority clients. *Journal of Counseling & Development*, 81(3), 292-300. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6678.2003.tb00256.x
- Perry, L. B., & Southwell, L. (2011). Developing intercultural understanding and skills: Models and approaches. *Intercultural Education*, 22(6), 453-466. doi: 10.1080/14675986.2011.644948
- Pierce, G., & Wooloff, C. J. (2012). Using movies to teach identity development to graduate counseling students. *The Journal for Counselor Preparation and Supervision*, 4(1), 50-57.
- Preston, M. (2011). Not another special guest: Transgender inclusivity in a human sexuality course. *Radical Teacher*, 92, 47-54.
- Rock, M., Carlson, T. S., & McGeorge, C. R. (2010). Does affirmative training matter? Assessing CFT students' beliefs about sexual orientation and their level of affirmative training. *Journal of Marital and Family Therapy*, 36(2), 171-184.
- Roell, C. (2010). Intercultural training with films. *English Teaching Forum*, 48(2), 2-15.
- Stinchfield, T. A. (2006). Using popular films to teach systems thinking. *The Family Journal*, 14(2), 123-128. doi: 10.1177/1066480705285559
- Villalba, J. A., & Redmond, R. E. (2008). *Crash*: Using a popular film as an experiential learning activity in a multicultural counseling course. *Counselor Education & Supervision*, 47(4), 264-276. doi: 10.1002/j.1556-6978.2008.tb00056.x
- Walters, A. S., & Rehman, K. (2013). Avenue T: Using film as entrée in teaching about transgender. *Sex Education*, 13(3), 336-348. doi: 10.1080/14681811.2012.743460
- Warren, J., Stech, M., Douglas, K., & Lambert, S. (2010). Enhancing case conceptualization through film: The addiction web. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 5(3), 228-242. doi: 10.1080/15401383.2010.507663
- Whipple, J., & Tucker, C. (2012). Using cinema and literature to explore existentialism. *Journal of Creativity in Mental Health*, 7(1), 95-106. doi: 10.1080/15401383.2012.660129
- Yardley, S., Teunissen, P. W., & Dornan, T. (2012). Experiential learning: Transforming theory into practice. *Medical Teacher*, 34(2), 161-164. doi: 10.3109/0142159X.2012.643264

Appendix  
Questionnaires (Pre/Post)

**Pre** *For the Bible Tells Me So:*

1. What are your thoughts about LGBTQ sexual minorities (i.e., individuals who are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer)?
2. What are your thoughts about providing counseling to LGBTQ individuals?
3. How do you believe religion plays a role in your view of sexual minorities?
4. What do you believe religious families experience when their children are gay?

**Post** *For the Bible Tells Me So:*

1. After viewing the film, what are your immediate reactions?
2. Did the film shift your view about religion and homosexuality; if so, in what direction?
3. How can you use what you learned from the movie when counseling LGBTQ clients and/or their families?

**Pre** *Normal:*

1. What are your thoughts about transgender individuals?
2. What do you believe families experience when a family member transitions into another gender?
3. What are your thoughts about providing counseling to transgender individuals and/or their families?

**Post** *Normal:*

1. After viewing the film, what are your immediate reactions?
2. Did the film shift your view of transgender individuals; if so, in what direction?
3. How can you use what you learned from the movie when counseling transgender clients and/or their families?