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## International Perspectives on Gender, Sexual, and Affectional Diversity

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### **Learning Objectives**

1. To understand how colonialism has impacted the laws about and treatment of sexual, affectional, intersex, and gender-expansive (SAIGE) individuals internationally.
  2. To understand how postcolonial theory informs international SAIGE advocacy.
  3. To understand and apply adaptations in counseling theories to foster the affirmation of diverse gender, sexual, and affectional identities.
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## Introduction

In recent years, we have witnessed and celebrated the elimination of many antigay laws internationally. Unfortunately, this has not translated into an international increase in sensitivity and acceptance of those identifying across the sexual, affectional, intersex, and gender-expansive (SAIGE) spectrum (Miller & Tohme, 2022). To understand the experiences of SAIGE individuals across the world, it is essential that we also consider their international history. We will begin this chapter by examining collectivist values and the ways these values may influence the experiences of SAIGE individuals from collectivist cultures. A critical analysis of the role of colonization in the treatment and experiences of SAIGE individuals of various cultures will follow. We will also present historical perspectives that have and continue to shape the conceptualization, treatment, and acceptance of SAIGE individuals. Additionally, we will provide a brief overview of postcolonial theory and considerations for advocacy with SAIGE individuals. The chapter will conclude by exploring various ways by which counseling practices can be adapted to provide SAIGE affirming services through a culturally responsive lens.

The acronym SAIGE instead of LGBTQ+ is used throughout this chapter. While an important feature of representation, the LGBTQ+ acronym is grounded in Eurocentric and Western(ized) conceptualizations of sexual and gender identity. Communities of SAIGE individuals across the Global South (South American, Africa, Asia, and Indigenous people across the globe) have different beliefs and conceptualizations of SAIGE experiences, many of which were suppressed during the era of European colonization. The SAIGE acronym, coined by the Society for Sexual, Affectional, Intersex, and Gender Expansive Identities (2020), attempts to address representation inclusively in a way that is particularly appropriate to international experiences of sexual and gender diversity. This decision was made to be more inclusive of various identities while intentionally avoiding illustrating or perpetuating hierarchies of privilege and oppression. We also wish to note that when describing trends, mores, and conditions at the national or regional level, there is substantial variation in LGBTQ+ affirming attitudes within the individual, small-group, and local community levels of experience.



## SAIGE European Populations

Today, European countries are typically viewed as being more affirming toward SAIGE identities and rights than other countries; however, it is important to remember that SAIGE rights in European countries have a turbulent history. In the colonial era, and largely due to the view that Christianity was an essential element of European identity, anti-SAIGE oppression of Indigenous people across the globe was the prevalent norm. Within European countries, and with the advent of criminological and psychological paradigms in the late 1800s, SAIGE people were likely to be criminalized, oppressed, and pathologized for their identities and related modes of self-expression. This perspective culminated in SAIGE people being included, along with people of Jewish heritage and beliefs, Romani people, and the disabled, as a group targeted for persecution and elimination by the Nazi regime. Within the countries associated with the former Soviet Bloc (e.g., Russia, Romania, East Germany), persecution and political oppression of SAIGE individuals were also used as tactics of control and domination by totalitarian regimes. Along with struggles for immigrant rights and ciswomen's rights, activist movements for SAIGE rights in Europe have over time fostered tolerance and affirmation across many members of the European Union and other European countries. Many European countries or populations within those countries, however, remain reflexively anti-SAIGE and continue to see persecution of SAIGE people as a core feature of national, religious, and cultural identity.

Portugal was the eighth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage. Portugal led the sexual citizenship rights of SAIGE individuals in Europe ([Santos, 2010](#)). However, despite the early advancement of SAIGE rights, challenges still exist for children. Children experience victimization, challenges with coming out, and a lack of support networks within school environments ([Gato et al., 2020](#)). Belgium, regarded as one of the European countries where SAIGE individuals are most protected, receives many applications from SAIGE individuals seeking asylum from countries that do not offer protections ([Dhoest, 2018](#)). Forced migration is a significant issue that is underdiscussed among SAIGE populations. Western sexual beliefs and norms are forced on individuals, resulting in the oppression



and prosecution of SAIGE individuals ([Dhoest, 2018](#)). Since the year 2000, over 1 million individuals migrated from Muslim-majority countries to Europe, which presents significant challenges for SAIGE migrants. Austria, the Netherlands, Greece, Ireland, and the UK are among the countries in which these migrant populations resettle ([Alessi et al., 2018](#)). Researchers have documented significant differences in the needs of migrant SAIGE individuals. Vulnerability, structural oppression, and traumatic stress are among the challenges identified ([Alessi et al., 2018](#)). There is much focus on countries that contribute most to these refugee populations, such as Syria, but prosecution of SAIGE individuals is an issue in many countries ([Dhoest, 2018](#)). The rise of anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination within Poland has led to migration from Poland to the UK. Activists are behind the organizing, protest, and solidarity among SAIGE groups in Poland. Despite these efforts, many SAIGE individuals are migrating. Many anti-LGBTQ+ Polish individuals attribute the values of diversity, openness, and tolerance exclusively to Western Europe. SAIGE individuals with Polish identities readily identify as European rather than Polish in the UK due to the rise of anti-Polish xenophobia ([Szulc, 2022](#)).

The historical and present-day experiences of SAIGE individuals within European countries are complex. Many countries have progressed in SAIGE rights, whereas many individuals continue to feel hindered socially. SAIGE experiences include a constant fight against discrimination. The intersecting identities of SAIGE individuals subject them to added layers of discrimination and oppression across Europe. Despite these struggles, Europe is still considered more progressive and tolerant than many other regions.

## Collectivism and SAIGE Communities

Collectivism is usually conceptualized as typical of non-Western societies emphasizing interpersonal connectedness ([Ghorbani et al., 2003](#)). In alignment with prioritizing interpersonal relationships, group harmony and fulfilling one's obligations and duties are underscored. Among the



values central to collectivism are compliance, interdependence, nurture, care for others, and the inhibition of indulgence (Kim et al., 1994). This differs from the individualism that is attributed to the West. Individualism is characterized by assertiveness, personal uniqueness, autonomy, and self-fulfillment (Ghorbani et al., 2003).

A hallmark of collectivist communities is the prioritization of communal harmony (Gainsborough, 2010). With this prioritization comes the expectation that individuals conform to societal norms and roles (Freeman-Coppadge & Langroudi, 2021). Research examining narratives of discrimination faced by SAIGE individuals exemplifies that individuals' deviation from a society's gender norms and expectations are met with social punishment via discrimination (Anderson, 2020). Therefore, SAIGE individuals may choose to conceal their SAIGE identity as a protective factor against discrimination and to maintain communal harmony. Conversely, this value of communal harmony may help SAIGE individuals to foster relationships with other SAIGE individuals and to form fictive kin relationships for social support.

Similarly, collectivist communities value preserving familial interests (Bie & Tang, 2016). This often includes putting the individual's aspirations aside when they conflict with what is in the best interest of the family unit, as well as ensuring that one behaves in a manner that reflects well upon their family (Freeman-Coppadge & Langroudi, 2021). To avoid bringing negative judgments or shame upon one's family, a SAIGE individual belonging to a collectivist culture may avoid disclosing their sexual, affectional, or gender identity, seeing this as aligning with the collectivist values of care and nurture (Freeman-Coppadge & Langroudi, 2021). Disclosing one's SAIGE identity may mean risking damaging the connectedness to the individual's family, culture, and religious/spiritual group, thereby interrupting the individual's sources of social support or their sense of self (Lassiter, 2014; Potoczniak et al., 2009). Furthermore, as compliance is a crucial value in collectivist cultures, individuals with SAIGE identities may feel obligated to conceal their sexual-affectional or gender identity and instead adopt and express heteronormative or cisnormative gender or sexual-affectional scripts. Research continues to demonstrate the benefits of familial and



communal support in fostering the wellness of SAIGE individuals ([Abreu & Gonzalez, 2020](#); [Abreu et al., 2019](#)). Collectivist cultures' valuing of family connectedness can also benefit SAIGE individuals. As familial relationships are of high importance in these cultures, family members may be more willing to accept the SAIGE identity of a family member, not wanting to risk losing that familial bond with the individual ([Boe et al., 2018](#); [Freeman-Coppadge & Langroudi, 2021](#); [Potoczniak et al., 2009](#)).

Inhibiting one's hedonistic and sensual desires is another standard value among collectivist cultures ([Ghorbani et al., 2003](#)). In alignment with this core value of collectivist cultures, some SAIGE individuals may not outwardly express or engage in behaviors that they conceptualize as indicative of their SAIGE identity. Research has also shown that individuals belonging to some collectivist cultures, specifically Asian cultures, and subscribing more to those collectivist values demonstrated higher levels of internalized heterosexism, and belonging to such cultures was negatively correlated with disclosure of their SAIGE identity ([Lin et al., 2020](#)).

In the following sections, we explore research findings related to the experiences and cultural attitudes of several cultural groups subscribing to collectivist values. As you read this information, it is important to bear in mind that no cultural group is a monolith. A wide array of values, experiences, and beliefs can exist among the members of any given cultural group. Therefore, one must avoid assuming that all members of a given cultural group or heritage share the same values, beliefs, behaviors, or experiences. In working with all individuals, including SAIGE individuals of various cultures and experiences, counselors must consider a client's intersecting identities when forming case conceptualizations.

## SAIGE Populations in Africa

Due to limitations in research, this discussion cannot cover the entire African continent. Some Africans would argue that SAIGE identities go against traditional African values and that their existence within African society results from colonization ([Badat et al., 2023](#); [Dreier, 2018](#); [Sumbane & Makua, 2023](#)). Within the literature, this belief has been associated with



discrimination, marginalization, oppression, and, in many cases, torture directed at SAIGE individuals across Africa (Mhaka, 2022; Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019; Sumbane & Makua, 2023). However, researchers have uncovered that same-sex relationships among men and women and other SAIGE identities existed in Indigenous precolonial societies. Some traditional spiritual practices allow for transgender (a term not used during precolonial times) identities (Nyeck et al., 2019). It is well documented that varying degrees of tolerance existed across Africa for sexual diversity. However, the criminalization of SAIGE individuals existed after colonization. Researchers have noted the role of religion in criminalizing same-sex relations and anti-SAIGE laws (Dreier, 2022; Nyeck et al., 2019). It is believed that the values and social standards shaped by Christianity led to the lack of acceptance of SAIGE individuals. Pentecostal, Western Christian, and Muslim religions have historically played a role in homophobic campaigns and anti-SAIGE laws (Dreier, 2022). East African churches resisted including SAIGE individuals by disassociating themselves from those churches that have moved toward more inclusion. The Anglican Church of Nigeria followed by the Church of Uganda and the West African Province of the Anglican Church disassociated themselves from the Episcopal church and rejected homosexuality. This has continued throughout the Global South (Dreier, 2022). Monogamy and heterosexuality prevail among most Africans. Three out of five African countries have public expression- and homosexuality-criminalizing laws (Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019). Of the 54 African states recognized by the United Nations, 33 have laws that criminalize same-sex acts. Some African countries use various provisions against unnatural acts, indecency, or debauchery against SAIGE people (Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019). Cote d'Ivoire, Central African Republic, Mali, Burkina Faso, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo have arrested and jailed SAIGE organizers under these laws. Criminalization includes inhuman treatment in many African countries (Pichon & Kourchoudian, 2019). SAIGE individuals were subjected to forensic anal exams, experimentation, shock therapy, and death. Social challenges still exist in areas that have undergone much reform in acknowledging human rights and establishing SAIGE protections (Nyeck et al., 2019).



In Africa, SAIGE individuals are subjected to discrimination and violence (Muller et al., 2021; Mhaka, 2022; Nyeck et al., 2019). As homophobic feelings prevail across Africa, SAIGE individuals experience exclusion from school/work, denial of health care, rape, lynching, and killing (Sumbane & Makua, 2023). In schools, SAIGE students report experiencing verbal harassment, physical attacks, cyberbullying, social isolation, rejection, insecurity, victimization, and theft or damage of personal property (Sumbane & Makua, 2023). Many African people believe that homosexuality is a condition that can be treated or fixed (Badat et al., 2023; Sumbane & Makua, 2023). In North African countries, Muslim leaders have called for more significant sentencing for SAIGE individuals and the death penalty for Muslim gay men. Inhuman treatment has also been noted in Cameroon, Egypt, Kenya, Tunisia, Uganda, and Zambia (Harper et al., 2021; Muller et al., 2021). High levels of violence have been reported in Southern and East African countries among SAIGE individuals (Muller et al., 2021). South Africa is seen as the most progressive African nation in acknowledging the human rights of SAIGE individuals (Pillay, 2018). However, there is a stark difference between lived experiences and legislation (Pillay, 2018). Marriage was legalized, but there are provisions that allow clergy to refuse to marry same-sex couples. It has been reported that only 117 out of 409 offices nationwide will marry same-sex couples, which limits access to marriage licenses and the economic benefits of marriage. South Africa has a history embedded within apartheid, a system of segregation based on race that kept people of different races separate. It also included the regulation of sexuality (Nyeck et al., 2019). The apartheid regime expressly prohibited interracial and homosexual relations (Nyeck et al., 2019). SAIGE individuals were subjected to violence, jail, torture, and experimentation. Though the end of Apartheid led to more inclusion and the decriminalization of SAIGE individuals, many of those attitudes and ideals still exist within South Africa (Nyeck et al., 2019). Legalization has not led to overall acceptance, and many laws do not protect the human rights of transgender Africans. Transgender individuals must be diagnosed with gender identity disorder to change gender legally and access medically supported transition care (Nyeck et al., 2019). In addition, SAIGE individuals in South Africa report higher rates



of unemployment, higher lifetime suicide attempt rates, higher rates of HIV among transgender and homosexual males, and greater subjection to violence, including rape, and many feel personally unsafe (Muller et al., 2021; Nyeck et al., 2019).

Mental health is a challenge among SAIGE individuals across Africa (Badat et al., 2023; Harper et al., 2021). Many live in fear, hide their identities, and feel the need to flee their country due to homophobic beliefs, violence, and economic instability. In addition, extreme experiences of violence have led to depression, suicidal ideation, lack of belonging, and low self-esteem (Badat et al., 2023; Harper et al., 2021; Muller et al., 2021). To cope with their experiences, many have engaged in unhealthy coping strategies such as withdrawal. The oppressive, discriminatory, and, in many cases, torturous experiences of SAIGE individuals in Africa have led to mental health challenges among this population.

## SAIGE Populations in Turkey and Russia

In Turkish society, the experiences of SAIGE individuals are influenced by religion and cultural attitudes. Homosexuality is considered a sin against God by many Muslims in Turkey (Atalay & Doan, 2020). The community of Beyoglu in Turkey was the first to welcome SAIGE and other minority groups. Historians have found evidence that SAIGE individuals existed before and during Ottoman rule (Atalay & Doan, 2020). More public advocacy for SAIGE rights dates to the 1970s in Turkey. Literature on SAIGE communities in Turkey emphasizes discrimination, exclusion, oppression, police brutality, media bias, and gender killings (Atalay & Doan, 2020).

Like Turkey, Russia seemingly was making progress in accepting SAIGE individuals. Homosexuality was decriminalized in 1993, and in 1999 it was declassified as a mental illness. However, in the 2000s, antigay laws began to be passed across Russia (Buyantueva, 2018) that outlawed homosexual propaganda, transgender minors, and acts of public support for SAIGE people. As a result of antigay legislation, reports of homophobic violence increased dramatically, including brutal rapes and murders (Wilkinson, 2013).



## SAIGE Populations in Central and South America

Recent histories of SAIGE experiences, rights, and relative degrees of social acceptance within Central and South American countries reveals themes of repression, marginalization, and civil rights gains and more affirming social mores, especially within younger generations ([Encarnación, 2020](#)). Prior to the 1980s, quasi-fascistic or totalitarian dictatorship supported by Western(ized) interests (e.g., the United States) prevailed as a form of government across much of the region. Strongly patriarchal social mores, including sexism and heterosexism, also prevailed, tied closely to national identities centering the heteropatriarchal family structure and Catholic spiritual identity. Subsequent social activist movements resulted in greater democratization across Central and South American and concomitant developments of civil rights for marginalized groups, including SAIGE people ([Malta et al., 2019](#)). Health and well-being disparities continue to persist, with similar within-group differences in SAIGE health such as the morbidity and multiple minority stress to those faced by transgender and nonbinary Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC) in the United States, Europe, and Asia. Legacies of colonialism, the decimation of Indigenous peoples and lifeways, slavery, and persistent racism and ethnocentrism impact the health of SAIGE populations.

Countries such as Brazil, Chile, and Mexico are examples where substantial SAIGE populations exist and enjoy some degree of civil rights protections, and most countries in South America have antidiscrimination laws supporting SAIGE people ([Encarnación, 2020](#)). Apparent social backlash to the advancement of SAIGE civil rights in the region also mirrors similar reactive movements in Europe and the United States, although scholars note that developments in South America appear to be less intense compared specifically to the United States ([Encarnación, 2020](#)). Despite having greater social acceptance and inclusion than many other countries across the globe, reported rates of violence and murder targeting SAIGE people in Central and South American are some of the highest in the world ([Malta et al., 2019](#)).



## SAIGE Populations in Asia

The various stances toward SAIGE individuals across Asia are influenced by colonial history, religious influence, and cultural values (Au, 2022). Progress has been made in parts of Asia toward more inclusion and protection of SAIGE rights. However, many challenges and varying levels of support for SAIGE rights exist. Before colonization, there was evidence of greater acceptance of identities that differed from heterosexual norms in Asia. Researchers have found evidence of the celebration of SAIGE individuals in Southeast Asia (Tan & Saw, 2023). Rituals in Indonesia and Malaysia assigned specific prominent roles to those identified as transgender. During that time, same-sex individuals lived without fear, but this changed with the laws and religion that came with colonization (Tan & Saw, 2023), which led to intolerance toward SAIGE individuals across Southeast Asia. The criminalization of SAIGE individuals remains in Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore today (Tan & Saw, 2023).

Globally, SAIGE individuals' human rights have been embraced and more attention has been paid to the equality and acceptance of these populations. The United Nations aligned itself with the SAIGE equality call to action. This global call to action has influenced laws in Asia and led to legal gains. Within Asia, there is a strong focus on what some consider to be traditional Asian values, including a focus on the family and heterosexual relationships (Wilkinson et al., 2017). Despite legal and legislative strides, public, religious, and political homophobia exists. Malaysian courts ruled that banning cross-dressing was unconstitutional while at the same time individuals in same-sex relationships were being prosecuted. Similarly, in Singapore, there is a celebration of SAIGE individuals and families annually, but there is still a law in place that criminalizes same-sex relationships (Weiss, 2022). There is still significant opposition and homophobia within Singapore (Wilkinson et al., 2017). In Taiwan, same-sex marriages have been legalized; however, discrimination and a lack of social acceptance persist (Au, 2022). Workplace discrimination and bullying practices in schools remain consistent. Immediately before the legalization of same-sex marriage, a study was conducted to capture community views of



SAIGE individuals and their thoughts on the legalization of same-sex marriage. The study found that respondents overwhelmingly supported a ban on homosexual-related topics in schools and limiting marriage legalization to heterosexual individuals (Au, 2022). Respondents further rejected gender equality education.

Researchers have identified a high prevalence of mental health challenges among SAIGE populations across Asia; however, gaps exist among Southeast Asian SAIGE populations, which are the most understudied. Studies conducted in Thailand, Vietnam, and the Philippines found a prevalence of mental health difficulties. Higher rates of suicidal ideation among SAIGE individuals were identified in the Philippines (Tan & Saw, 2023). In Taiwan, a mental health crisis is ongoing, with challenges identified by researchers such as stress, depression, and anxiety. Across the lifespan, there are differences in mental health vulnerability among Asian SAIGE populations (Tan & Saw, 2023). Bisexual and questioning youth are depressed, whereas lesbian and gay youth are prone to nonsuicidal self-injury and suicidality. Many stressors have led to growing mental health challenges among Asian SAIGE populations.

SAIGE individuals in Asia were more likely to report family rejection, victimization, sexual coercion, physical violence, and sexual violence (Tan & Saw, 2023). One study of Cambodians found that transgender individuals experienced denial and eviction from housing and physical violence. Many SAIGE individuals are unable to live authentically and be affirmed in their identities. Though parts of Asia have made several steps toward inclusion and equity for the SAIGE population, in many areas criminalization and discrimination prevent SAIGE individuals from living authentically.

## SAIGE Populations in the Caribbean

In the Caribbean, few to no formal data are collected on the experiences of SAIGE individuals, and limitations exist in the literature exploring the lived experiences of SAIGE individuals (Jackson et al., 2023). Despite these limitations, many SAIGE individuals within the Caribbean fear violence and victimization. They are collectively oppressed politically, socially,



and economically. They are humiliated and often are subject to disparaging slurs in public, religious targeting by preachers, and mockery in the entertainment industry. Homophobia is prevalent in the Caribbean and has been correlated with religious affiliation and increased attendance of religious services. Religious leaders protested the 2018 judge ruling in Trinidad and Tobago that deemed criminalizing gay sexuality was unconstitutional (Foster, 2021). Similarly, in Bermuda, same-sex marriage was legalized, but then the ruling was repealed due to religious leader protests (Foster, 2021). Similar experiences exist for SAIGE individuals in Barbados. Barbadian SAIGE individuals experience sexual prejudice, which negatively affects their health and well-being (Gromer et al., 2013). Similarly, crime against SAIGE individuals in Jamaica often occurs without investigation, arrest, or prosecution (Allyn, 2012). Within Jamaica, SAIGE individuals face a high risk of verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. Lesbians are often victims of “corrective rape,” in which individuals attempt to cure lesbians of homosexuality through violent rapes. Gay men are the primary targets of much abuse and oppression (Allyn, 2012; Jackson et al., 2023).

Underground communities and cultures have emerged in the Caribbean where SAIGE individuals have created a sense of belonging. Within these underground communities, it is not uncommon to find SAIGE-identified individuals who have heterosexual marriages and families (Allyn, 2012). Within Jamaica, having a SAIGE identity is considered not to be Jamaican, and SAIGE individuals feel this lack of belonging daily. Many challenges exist within the Jamaican community that directly affect gay men (Jackson et al., 2023). Within the prison environment, gay men have been tortured and killed. This treatment ultimately led to gay men being separated from the general population in prisons (Allyn, 2012).

Challenges also exist on islands that have progressed regarding the protection and rights of SAIGE individuals. SAIGE individuals in Trinidad and Tobago can celebrate the decriminalization of gay sexuality. However, protections against violence and acceptance are still lagging (Foster, 2021). In Barbados, researchers have noted widespread prejudice against SAIGE individuals, and there is a general disapproval of SAIGE individuals that is driven by religious beliefs (Gromer et al., 2013). Despite the lack



of approval and inclusion of SAIGE individuals, there seems to be more respect for transgender populations in Barbados. Research has further found that HIV/AIDS prevention has negatively impacted SAIGE individuals, with HIV/AIDS often being attributed to SAIGE populations in Barbados ([Gromer et al., 2013](#)).

## Affirming Counseling Practices

### Applying a Postcolonial Lens

To apply affirming counseling practices effectively, counselors must be able to conceptualize the experiences of SAIGE clients through a lens shaped by postcolonial theory. While based on the term, one might assume that postcolonial theory refers to the era following the end of colonialism – this is not the case ([Seth, 2013](#)). Postcolonial theory acknowledges that colonialism continues to impact communities and cultures and therefore pertains to the historical period that encompasses the beginning of colonialism through to the present day. It seeks to deconstruct sovereignty and emphasize how people of color and other marginalized identity groups have been disenfranchised and oppressed through limited representation, deprivation of power, and exclusion from the production of knowledge ([Bhati, 2023](#)). Through the collection of frameworks that comprise postcolonial theory, relations between Westernized and non-Westernized countries and cultures can be critiqued as to how these relations continue to impact the lived experiences of SAIGE individuals ([McGibbon et al., 2014](#)).

Postcolonial theory allows counselors to examine how colonialism's legacy of oppression continues to shape current hierarchies and power distributions, having geopolitical and individual impacts ([McGibbon et al., 2014](#)). Counselors can critically examine current laws, cultural norms, and values through a postcolonial lens. This allows counselors to conceptualize clients' experiences of oppression in their current culture through a historically informed lens ([Moe et al., 2020](#)). That is, using postcolonial theory, a counselor working with a SAIGE client from a non-Western culture can



examine the ways in which colonialism has contributed to the disenfranchisement of this client. Furthermore, by using postcolonial theory, counselors can ensure that their advocacy efforts to support SAIGE clients do not perpetuate colonialism. Counselors' advocacy efforts should be grounded in critical self-reflection and self- and other-awareness through a postcolonial framework. This may include reflecting on the power and privilege afforded to the counselor because of colonialism and examining whether the advocacy efforts being planned may perpetuate these power imbalances. Furthermore, counselors should reflect on the values guiding their advocacy efforts.

## Counselor Reflectivity

To ensure that the practices employed and conceptualizations developed by the counselor do not perpetuate colonialism and Eurocentrism, counselors must engage in critical self-reflection ([Moe et al., 2020](#)). Points to be reflected upon include but are not limited to the following:

1. What are the cultural biases that exist within Westernized conceptualizations of help-seeking?
2. In what ways are the counselor's conceptualizations of healing rooted in colonialism or Eurocentrism?
3. How are individualistic values reflected in the counselor's conceptualization of success, well-being, and healthy identity development?
4. In what ways might the counselor's conceptualizations neglect systemic and ecological considerations related to the client's lived experiences?
5. How is colonialism shaping the counselor's conceptualization of family roles, dynamics, and other contextual factors?

## Intersectionality

When working with international clients identifying across the SAIGE spectrum, counselors should intentionally apply an intersectionality-oriented framework ([Freeman-Coppadge & Langroudi, 2021](#)). Due to the multiple identities possessed by the individual, the counselor must conceptualize

the client holistically. This requires considering the ways in which the person's various identities, both oppressed and privileged, interact and thereby influence the person's experiences. For example, a person of Nigerian descent who is male-identifying and gay will have different lived experiences, interactions with society, and conceptualizations than a person of Swedish descent who is male-identifying and gay. Furthermore, counselors must reflect on aspects of the client's identity beyond race/ethnicity, country/culture of origin, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual-affective attractions, and educational status to how they intersect to influence the client's experiences. Other aspects of the person's culture and identity should also be considered, including position within the family, birth order, spiritual/religious beliefs, and other identities or cultural considerations that may not be as heavily emphasized in Western cultures.

## Identity Disclosure

As mentioned earlier, individuals from various cultural groups may react in many ways to a loved one's disclosure of their SAIGE identity. Therefore, counselors should avoid assuming how others may respond to these disclosures and therefore should avoid advising clients on whether to share their sexual, affectional, or gender identity with others (Freeman-Coppadge & Langroudi, 2021). Instead, counselors should support clients as they explore the perceived benefits and risks of disclosing their SAIGE identity to others in the context of their culture.

Counselors may also unintentionally disenfranchise clients through the language used to describe a client's sexual or affectional identity. Terms such as "lesbian," "gay," "bisexual," "pansexual," "demisexual," and so forth may unintentionally erase how the client's culture identifies sexual and affectional identity (Moe et al., 2020). Finally, current thinking on the use of the terms "Latino," "Latina," and/or "Latinx" continues to evolve; clients may strongly prefer one mode of use, and counselors should track with their preferences. For example, the terms "Latine" and "Latinae" have emerged as identifiers that both resist patriarchal norms inherent to the term "Latino" while also resisting the imposition of Eurocentric beliefs associated with the origin of the term "Latinx." Therefore, counselors



must use open-ended questions such as “How do you describe your sexual-affectional identity?” to allow the client freedom in their language to self-identify. After the client’s response, the counselor should ask the client to describe what their identities mean to them. This allows clients to explain their identity further while ensuring the counselor refrains from making assumptions and assigning meaning based on Westernized or Eurocentric conceptualizations. Similarly, some cultures recognize more than two gender identities, so the practice described earlier should be used when discussing the client’s gender.

## Conceptualizing Others’ Reactions to SAIGE Identities

The categorization of others’ reactions to or beliefs about an individual’s SAIGE identity as existing along a binary of supportive or harmful is also grounded in Eurocentric and colonial ideologies ([Moe et al., 2020](#)). Instead of conceptualizing others’ behaviors, reactions, and beliefs in this manner, exploring the client’s feelings about others’ reactions is likely to be more beneficial. For example, consider a client who states that their parents do not believe it is appropriate to have certain sexual or affectional attractions. Instead of labeling their parents’ beliefs as harmful or oppressive, consider how exploring the client’s thoughts, feelings, and understandings of this belief system may be more beneficial to the client. Again, the counselor must avoid assuming how these differing beliefs might impact the relationship and instead approach them from within a therapeutic and supportive curiosity framework. In doing so, the counselor is also less likely to unintentionally discount other thoughts, feelings, or beliefs that the client holds regarding their loved ones’ reactions and beliefs.

## Conclusion

Individuals and communities of people expressing SAIGE identities exist across the globe. Some feel that Western(ized) modes of sexual-affectional and gender identity expression, such as identifying with an LGBTQ+ label, resonate with their own lived experiences. Others feel that Western(ized)



conceptions of SAIGE life experiences either are unrelatable or are incongruent with other cultural values. Through colonialism, individuals were forced to assimilate into Westernized and Eurocentric ways of thinking, being, and communicating (Moe et al., 2020). Counselors should be mindful not to employ Eurocentric practices that convey expectations of how the client should progress through their gender or sexual-affectual identity exploration. Similarly, the counselor should avoid conveying expectations that the client finds or cultivates community with individuals of similar sexual-affectual and gender identities, as this expectation may be rooted in Eurocentric conceptualizations of community and social support. Instead, the counselor may consider exploring how and with whom the client feels most supported and understood. For example, expecting a SAIGE client of color to build a community in predominantly White SAIGE spaces may unintentionally convey to the client that these individuals' way of expressing support and their identity is the correct or favorable way of being. Furthermore, how the client defines support, success, and community should not be assumed by the counselor but should be explored openly. Exploring international SAIGE clients' personal histories, acculturation, experiences, and values should guide affirmative counseling with this group. Fostering a sense of cultural exchange and solidarity between SAIGE communities worldwide includes not imposing Western(ized) modes of thinking onto international SAIGE people.

## Summary of Affirming Clinical and Advocacy Practices

1. Consider the historical influences of a SAIGE client's current experiences of oppression through a postcolonial lens.
2. Engage in critical self-reflection regarding the values that guide treatment and advocacy, with particular attention being paid to how these guiding values may perpetuate colonialism and result in power imbalances through an emphasis on individualism, for example.
3. Use an intersectionality-oriented lens when conceptualizing clients to ensure that the interactions between various identities are being taken into consideration.



4. Consider the influences and impacts of identity and cultural aspects that are not emphasized in Westernized cultures, such as birth order, roles within families, spiritual/religious roles, and beliefs, among others.
5. Be mindful of the myriad ways in which loved ones may react to a client's disclosure of their SAIGE identity. Allow the client to make decisions surrounding disclosure based on their personal values and their conceptualization of the risks versus benefits of disclosing.
6. Use open-ended questions when inquiring about a client's sexual-affectional and gender identity to allow them to use language native to their culture.
7. Consider how labeling others' reactions/beliefs as either "harmful" or "supportive" may negatively impact clients' relationships and discount the client's conceptualization of these differences.

### REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can postcolonial theory inform your adaptations of counseling practices to better affirm clients with diverse gender, sexual, and affectional identities?
2. What are the ways in which you can involve family members or significant others in your work with SAIGE clients from collectivist cultures?
3. In what ways are your current conceptualizations of family, support, gender, and sexual-affectional identity shaped by colonialism and individualism?

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