

Multicultural Counseling Competency for the Effectiveness of LGBTQ+ Counseling

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Abstract. Multicultural counseling competencies are very helpful for counselors in helping LGBTQ+ groups because multicultural competencies can achieve an understanding of the client's culturally diverse worldview. In the midst of societal rejection, the LGBTQ+ community has a significant and complex impact on the mental health of its members. Social stigma, discrimination, and lack of acceptance from the general public often result in severe psychological distress for LGBTQ+ individuals. On the other hand, counselors should not judge the clients with whom they work. The research method of this study is qualitative through the use of library research. This article aims to describe the multicultural competencies a counselor should have when working with LGBTQ+ clients. The findings show that the competencies counselors need to have when counseling LGBTQ+ groups are (a) an understanding of LGBTQ+ (b) counselor self-awareness (c) client worldview (d) the counseling relationship (e) counseling and advocacy interventions (f) Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) skills. Multicultural competence means that counselors address not only sexual orientation, but also self-acceptance, relationships, personality, culture, client acceptance, and client identity in order to facilitate the counseling process.

Keywords: Multicultural Counseling; Counseling Competencies; LGBTQ+

INTRODUCTION

Over the past five years, the advancement of rights and the acknowledgment of LGBTQ+ communities on a global scale have exhibited a complex trajectory. On the one hand, there has been notable advancement in certain countries. For instance, the legalization of same-sex marriage was achieved in 29 countries by 2022, an increase from 22 countries in 2017 (Mendos et al., 2022). Additionally, countries such as Switzerland, Chile, and Taiwan have adopted these policies, indicating a progressive shift in inclusive legislation. Conversely, however, some countries still maintain or even tighten discriminatory legislation targeting the LGBTQ+ community. For example, in 2021, Hungary enacted legislation that prohibited the "promotion" of homosexuality to minors, which prompted significant criticism from the European Union and human rights activists (Kovács, 2021).

In Asia, including Indonesia, the development of rights for the LGBTQ+ community is a complex and variable phenomenon, varying between countries. While Japan has witnessed an uptick in the recognition of same-sex relationships at the municipal level, the absence of a national law that explicitly acknowledges same-sex marriage persists. Concurrently, Thailand is progressing with the formulation of draft legislation that would permit same-sex civil partnerships. Nevertheless, numerous other Asian countries, including Indonesia, continue to present considerable obstacles for the LGBTQ+ community. In Indonesia, while homosexuality is not illegal nationwide (except in Aceh Province), there has been an increase in anti-LGBTQ+ rhetoric and attempts to criminalize same-sex relationships through revisions to the Criminal Code in recent years (Human Rights Watch, 2022). This situation reflects the tension between traditional norms, religious interpretations, and the growing human rights movement.

The rejection of the LGBTQ+ community in Indonesia has a profound and intricate impact on the mental health of its members, particularly in the context of the complex social and cultural milieu of the country. Social stigma, discrimination, and a lack of acceptance from the general public frequently result in severe psychological distress for individuals in the LGBTQ+ community. A study conducted by Prayoga et al. (2021) demonstrated that individuals in the LGBTQ+ community in Indonesia exhibit elevated rates of anxiety and depression compared to the general population. Such experiences of rejection are largely attributed to familial, social, and interpersonal factors.

The strong social and cultural rejection of LGBTQ+ identities in Indonesia frequently results in individuals concealing their sexual orientation or gender identity, a phenomenon known as "living in the closet." Hidayati et al. (2020) discovered that this concealment can result in social isolation, loneliness, and diminished self-esteem, all of which elevate the likelihood of developing mental health disorders. Moreover, the dearth of social and familial assistance frequently encountered by LGBTQ+ individuals in Indonesia can precipitate the exacerbation of preexisting mental health concerns and impede access to essential care.

The pressure to conform to the dominant heteronormative norms in Indonesian society can also cause significant internal conflict for LGBTQ+ individuals. The study by Wisnu et al. (2019) revealed that many LGBTQ+ individuals in Indonesia experience internalized homophobia, which is the acceptance and internalization of society's negative attitudes towards homosexuality. This can lead to feelings of shame, guilt, and self-hatred, which in turn can trigger or exacerbate mental health conditions such as depression, anxiety, and even suicidal thoughts or behaviors. The need for inclusive and affirmative mental health services for the LGBTQ+ community is increasing, especially given the high levels of minority stress and mental health risks faced by this population (Hendricks & Testa, 2012). LGBTQ+ individuals still face unique challenges that require culturally sensitive and competent counseling approaches (Meyer, 2003).

The new era marked by globalization, technological advancement, and rapid social change has brought a new dimension to multicultural counselling practice. Counselors are now required to have a deeper understanding not only of LGBTQ+ identities, but also how these identities interact with other aspects of identity such as race, ethnicity, religion, and socioeconomic status (Crenshaw, 1991). This intersectionality is crucial in understanding the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ clients and providing effective interventions (Parent et al., 2013).

The LGBTQ+ phenomenon has received both pro and con responses in society, so it is appropriate that this phenomenon gets good handling from all parties, one of which is the counselor. In providing services to LGBTQ+ clients and LGBTQ+ survivors, the main thing that must be instilled in counselors is to avoid negative perceptions of counselors. (Saidah & Annajih, 2022). Research by Bidell (2013) shows that many counselors feel inadequately prepared to work with LGBTQ+ clients, especially in understanding the nuances of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations. Furthermore, counselors

often face ethical dilemmas in working with LGBTQ+ clients, especially when their personal or cultural values conflict with clients' needs. Yarhouse and McRay (2014) discussed the ethical challenges faced by counselors in working with LGBTQ+ clients, especially in the context of value conflict.

This indicates that when providing counseling services, a counselor must have awareness, knowledge, and skills related to diverse cultural backgrounds. Multicultural counseling competencies, as defined by Sue et al. (1992), include awareness of one's own cultural assumptions, values, and biases; understanding the worldviews of culturally diverse clients; and developing appropriate intervention strategies and techniques. In the context of the LGBTQ+ community, these competencies should be expanded to include an understanding of sexual and gender identity development, the impact of heteronormativity and cisnormativity, and knowledge of specific issues facing subgroups within the LGBTQ+ community (Singh & Dickey, 2016). Counselors must be prepared to address the complexities of identities that may change over time, and understand the social and psychological implications of this fluidity. This is even more important given the increased visibility and acceptance of nonbinary and genderqueer identities in recent years (Richards et al., 2016).

Effectiveness depends not only on counselors' technical competence, but also on their ability to adapt to social dynamics (Craig et al., 2021). In this context, multicultural counseling for the LGBTQ+ community should be understood as a practice that is constantly evolving, responsive to the needs of diverse individuals, and capable of addressing the unique challenges that arise in the digital and global age (Singh et al., 2020). Given these complexities and evolving dynamics, research on multicultural counseling competencies for the LGBTQ+ community in the new era is critical. The purpose of this study is to explore how counselors can develop and maintain the competencies needed to effectively serve the LGBTQ+ community in a changing multicultural context. Thus, this paper will theoretically discuss the multicultural competencies that counselors can develop in counseling LGBTQ+ people in the new era through research findings.

METHODOLOGY

This paper discusses the competence of multicultural counselors in counseling LGBTQ+ groups. This research method is to use qualitative research methods, with data retrieval techniques by means of library research. library research is research that analyzes data in the form of text from a written event to obtain precise facts such as finding origins, true causes, and so on (Hamzah, 2022). Literature review is a study that aims to obtain information and data by using various sources found in the library such as historical records, documents, books and magazines (Sari, 2020).

DISCUSSION

In their 1990 study, Sue and Sue posit that there are three core competencies that multicultural counselors should possess. These are: (1) beliefs and attitudes of culturally effective counselors; (2) knowledge of multiculturally effective counselors; and (3) skills of multiculturally effective counselors. In light of these three points, cross-cultural counselors must possess the following characteristics: (1) counselors must be aware of their own culture and the culture of others, including a comprehension of the various cultural elements that exist between counselors. 2) Counselors must understand that culture can enhance counselors' thoughts, feelings, perspectives, and actions, as well as everything in counselors' lives in relation to the surrounding environment or themselves. 3) Counselors must possess multicultural skills. A multicultural personality is also evidenced by proficient communication skills and the ability to apply counseling approaches in a manner that is responsive to the counselor's context, without imposing the counselor's will.

It is incumbent upon multicultural counselors who work with LGBTQ+ clients to conduct themselves in accordance with the professional ethics established by counseling associations. In the United States, the American Counseling Association (ACA) has established a comprehensive ethical code pertaining to multicultural counseling practices, including the provision of services to clients identifying as LGBTQ+. The ACA Code of Ethics (2014) explicitly states that counselors should respect diversity and should not discriminate against clients based on sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (Section C.5). Furthermore, the code underscores the significance of multicultural competence and the necessity for counselors to continually enhance their

comprehension of the challenges confronted by diverse communities, including the LGBTQ+ population (Section C.2.a).

The theoretical and philosophical framework that underpins multicultural counseling is an essential element of counseling practice for both counselors and clients. It encompasses the following key areas:

a. Understanding the complexities of diversity and multiculturalism on the counseling relationship

Multicultural counseling acknowledges that individual identities are shaped by a multitude of cultural influences, including race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status. In the context of LGBTQ+ individuals, this entails an understanding of the interrelationships between sexual and gender identities and other aspects of identity. The practice of multicultural counseling cultivates counselors' sensitivity to the diverse manifestations and interpretations of LGBTQ+ identities, shaped by a multitude of cultural influences. Horne et al. (2011) highlight the significance of recognizing how cultural and religious values can shape the process of coming out and self-acceptance among individuals in the LGBTQ+ community. A multicultural approach enables counselors to assist clients in navigating conflicts between their LGBTQ+ identity and cultural or familial expectations in a more balanced and healthy manner. For instance, the experience of a Black gay individual may diverge significantly from that of an Asian lesbian. Hays (2016) underscores the necessity for counselors to adopt an intersectional perspective in order to fully comprehend the experiences of LGBTQ+ clients.

b. Recognizing the negative influence of oppression on mental health and well-being).

The LGBTQ+ community often experiences various forms of oppression, including discrimination, stigma, and violence. The Minority Stress Model developed by Meyer (2003) explains how these experiences of oppression can lead to mental health problems. Counselors must understand the impact of systemic and internalized oppression on the psychological well-being of LGBTQ+ clients. Multicultural counseling provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the complexities of LGBTQ+ identities within a broader cultural context. Pachankis et al. (2014) showed that counseling approaches that consider multicultural aspects are more effective in reducing minority stress and improving the psychological well-being of LGBTQ+ clients. By understanding the intersections between sexual identity, gender, race,

ethnicity, and other cultural factors, counselors can provide interventions that are more targeted and relevant to clients' lived experiences.

c. Understanding individuals in the context of their social environment

Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, as applied in LGBTQ+ counseling by McGeorge and Carlson (2011), emphasizes the importance of understanding clients in the context of their social systems. This includes family, community, institutions, and society at large. Counselors should consider how the social environment of LGBTQ+ clients may support or hinder their development and well-being. Multicultural counseling helps in the development of a stronger therapeutic alliance between counselors and LGBTQ+ clients.

d. Integrating social justice advocacy into the various modalities of counseling (e.g., individual, family, partners, group)

Ratts et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of counselors being social justice advocates. In the LGBTQ+ context, this could mean helping clients overcome discrimination, supporting inclusive policy changes, or educating the community about LGBTQ+ issues. In individual counselling, this may involve empowering clients to overcome internalized homophobia.

In light of these fundamental considerations, Ratts et al. (2016) elucidated the competencies that facilitate counselors' engagement in multicultural practice with LGBTQ+ individuals, encompassing the following:

a. Counselor Self-Awareness

Counselor self-awareness is an important foundation in multicultural counseling competence. It involves a deep understanding of the counselor's personal values, assumptions, and biases, especially with regard to sexual orientation and gender identity. According to Sue and Sue (2013), counsellors need to recognize and acknowledge their own biases towards the LGBTQ+ community. This includes examining assumptions about heteronormativity and cisnormativity that might influence their counseling practice.

Self-awareness also includes understanding how counselors' own cultural backgrounds, life experiences, and social identities may influence their interactions with LGBTQ+ clients. Ratts et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of counsellors to constantly evaluate and challenge their own assumptions, as well as actively seek knowledge and experiences that can broaden their understanding of LGBTQ+ issues.

This may include attending trainings, reading current literature, or engaging in discussions with members of the LGBTQ+ community.

b. Client Worldview,

Understanding the client's worldview is a crucial aspect of multicultural counseling. For LGBTQ+ clients, this involves a deep understanding of their life experiences, the challenges they face, and how their LGBTQ+ identity interacts with other aspects of their identity. Counselors need to understand that LGBTQ+ clients may be at different stages of identity development, which may affect their worldview and how they approach the counseling process.

c. The Counseling Relationship,

An effective counseling relationship with LGBTQ+ clients is based on trust, acceptance, and understanding. Israel et al. (2008) emphasize the importance of creating a safe and affirmative environment in LGBTQ+ counseling. Counselors need to use inclusive language and avoid heteronormative or cisnormative assumptions. For example, using the client's preferred pronouns and avoiding stereotypes about gender roles or sexual orientation. The counseling relationship should also respect client confidentiality and privacy, especially given the risks LGBTQ+ clients may face if their identities are revealed without permission.

d. Counseling and Advocacy Interventions,

Counseling interventions for LGBTQ+ clients should be tailored to their specific needs and consider the broader social context. In the context of group counseling, Singh and Dickey (2016) highlight the importance of creating a safe and affirmative space for LGBTQ+ individuals, where they can share experiences, build mutual support, and develop positive coping strategies. Multicultural counseling helps address the stigma and discrimination often faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. A multicultural approach enables counselors to understand and address the impact of this stigma more effectively, helping clients develop adaptive coping strategies and increase their resilience.

In practice, in counseling LGBTQ+ groups, multicultural counselors must have good knowledge related to LGBTQ+ to work effectively with LGBTQ+ individuals (Bradley et al, 2023) by having good knowledge related to LGBTQ+, counselors understand diverse identities so that they can have a positive attitude towards LGBTQ+ individuals without seeing them as a minority group.

Seungbin et al (2019) explained that the Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) in counseling LGBTQ+ people should also be a competency for multicultural counselors. The Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) is considered a comprehensive and useful framework that informs a multiculturally responsive and appropriate intake interview process. The CFI as a conceptual framework informs counselors of five cultural domains that should be acknowledged during the intake interview of LGBTQ+ clients (American Psychiatric Association, 2013, pp.749- 750).

- a. Cultural identity of the individual, it is important to assess salient aspects of the LGBTQI client's cultural identity and to explore how perceived cultural identity affects their self-concept and interacts with the concerns they raise. In particular, counselors need to pay attention to the intersection of LGBTQI clients' various cultural identities and how the collective experience of these identities may influence their concerns (ALGBTIC, 2013; Goodrich et al., 2017; Moe, Reicherzer, & Dupuy, 2011).
- b. Cultural conceptualizations of distress emphasize the importance of cultural context in influencing how individuals perceive, experience, and communicate their problems (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It is important for counselors to explore the problems experienced by LGBTQ+ clients within a cultural context. Counselors are strongly encouraged to consider what LGBTQ+ clients may be facing in their cultural context when conducting initial interviews. If the client's cultural environment (e.g., family, community, institution, and country) has different values and norms in understanding the root of their mental health problems or issues, LGBTQ+ individuals may experience internal and external conflict in understanding their problems and seeking psychological help (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).
- c. Psychosocial stressors, Bostwick et al (2014) describe how culturally marginalized groups often experience systemic and institutional stressors (e.g., victimization and bullying) as well as interpersonal stigma and prejudice in everyday life, which increases the risk of severe mental health problems (e.g., trauma or post-traumatic disorders). Recent studies report that LGBTQ+ populations experience three major stressors for minorities: (a) adverse events and discrimination, (b) heterosexist and homophobic societal attitudes, and (c) expectations of social rejection (Sutter & Perrin, 2016).
- d. Cultural features of vulnerability and resilience, Counselors in this guideline are encouraged to assess protective factors that add to the resilience of LGBTQ+

individuals. Resilience can refer to a person's ability to recover from adversity despite experiencing significant hardship, threats, trauma, or stressors.

The multicultural knowledge possessed by counselors is an effective tool in practice when providing counseling to LGBTQ+ groups. Counselors who possess effective multicultural skills will be able to provide services without making distinctions based on differences or perceived shortcomings of counselors identifying as LGBTQ+. It is imperative that counselors refrain from forming negative perceptions or opinions that could impede the counseling process with LGBT clients. Counselor misunderstandings may result from counselors' lack of knowledge regarding cultural differences between counselors and counselees, as well as their limited experience. Counselors who possess multicultural competence in dealing with LGBT clients are better able to adapt to the counseling situation and provide effective counseling services (Yasmin, 2023).

In light of the aforementioned explanations, it becomes evident that multicultural competence plays a pivotal role in the counseling process for clients belonging to the LGBTQ+ community. Counselors must possess a comprehensive understanding of the nuances associated with the LGBTQ+ community and cultivate an acute awareness of their own identity. In addition, the counselor must be able to view the client's world, establish a counseling relationship, and identify counseling and advocacy interventions. They must also possess the ability to conduct a Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI), which is a valuable tool in the counseling process.

COUCLUSION

The existence of LGBTQ+ groups is considered a minority group that often experiences rejection in community life, so this group often receives discriminatory behavior in community groups. This discrimination will later become a stressor for LGBTQ+ groups, affecting their psychological condition. Counseling LGBTQ+ people will at least help them to reduce the psychological impact. The findings show that the competencies counselors need to have when counseling LGBTQ+ groups are (a) an understanding of LGBTQ+ (b) counselor self-awareness (c) client worldview (d) the counseling relationship (e) counseling and advocacy interventions (f) Cultural Formulation Interview (CFI) skills. Multicultural competence, especially honed in LGBTQ++ counseling, is very helpful in supporting the success of the counseling process. Multicultural competence leads counselors to address not only sexual orientation, but also

self-acceptance, relationships, personality, culture, client acceptance, and client identity in order for the counseling process to work well.

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