Research Utilizing the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale

As of 2014

**Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale Citation (Bidell, 2005)**

Abstract: This study examined the psychometric properties of the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS), an instrument that measures the attitudes, skills, and knowledge of counselors who work with lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals. Internal consistency of the SOCCS was .90, and 1-week test–retest reliability was .84. Criterion, concurrent, and divergent validity tests established the SOCCS as a psychometrically sound instrument.

**Peer-Reviewed Research Published by Markus P. Bidell**


Abstract: Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) affirmative and multicultural counselor training and competency is essential for ethical clinical practice. This study examined how multicultural courses related to students’ (N = 286) LGB and multicultural competencies. Self-reported multicultural and LGB competencies varied significantly depending on the number and types of diversity education reported. Multicultural courses significantly predicted students’ multicultural, but not LGB counselor competency. Political conservatism was the strongest predictor for both multicultural and sexual orientation competencies.


Abstract: LGB orientations can evoke strong reactions often based on personal beliefs that seemingly conflict with professional standards calling for LGB affirmative counseling. This study examined the relationship between religious conservatism and LGB affirmative counselor competence. Controlling for education level, political conservatism, and LGB interpersonal contact, results indicate that as religious conservatism increased, LGB competency significantly decreased. The strongest predictor of LGB affirmative counselor competency was religious fundamentalism, while multicultural coursework was not a significant predictor.


Abstract: The position held by the American Counseling Association, reflecting acceptance, affirmation, and nondiscrimination of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals, has created conflicts for some trainees who hold conservative religious beliefs about sexual orientation. This article explores the counseling profession’s evolution regarding LGB-affirmative counseling and examines the potential conflict this evolution can create for counselor educators who are training students with conservative religious viewpoints about sexual orientation. Recommendations for counselor educators to manage this dilemma are offered.


Abstract: Three recently developed lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) counselor assessments are addressing long-standing mental health disparities and advancing LGB affirmative research, training, and practice. However, no
A comprehensive review of LGB instrumentation has been conducted. Addressing this need, the authors review the: (a) LGB-affirmative Counseling Self-Efficacy Inventory (LGB-CS1) (Dillon & Worthington, 2003), (b) Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS) (Bidell, 2005), and (c) LGB Working Alliance Self-Efficacy Scale (LGB-WACES) (Burkard, Pruitt, Medler, & Stark-Booth, 2009). Each assessment is reviewed in terms of development, psychometric properties, limitations, and use in research. Implications and recommendations regarding LGB affirmative counselor competency are discussed.


Abstract: Background: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) individuals experience serious mental health disparities and treatment inequities. Counsellor education has been identified as both a contributing factor to these problems as well as an ameliorating mechanism to address these inequalities. Aim: The purpose of the current study was to evaluate the impact of an LGBT-affirmative counselling course. Method: A total of 23 students enrolled in a graduate LGBT counselling course were administered the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS, Bidell, 2005) and the Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Affirmative Counseling Self-Efficacy Inventory (LGB-CS1, Dillon & Worthington, 2003) pre- and post-course. In addition, a comparison group of 23 matched counselling students was obtained from an existing data source in order to make further assessments of the course’s effectiveness. Those in the comparison group were not enrolled in the LGBT course, but were administered the SOCCS at analogous time intervals. Results: After completing the LGBT course, enrolled students demonstrated significant improvements regarding their sexual orientation counsellor competency and self-efficacy. In addition, these students showed significant gains in SOCCS scores versus those in the comparison group. Implications: Results from this study show the positive effect a full-credit LGBT psychotherapy course can have on graduate counseling students’ sexual orientation counsellor competency and self-efficacy. The findings also indicate that such a course can significantly impact counselling skills, a facet of LGBT cultural competency found to be the most attenuated. Findings are discussed in conjunction with LGBT-affirmative counsellor training and clinical practice.


Abstract: Professional school counselors have an opportunity to directly address the educational, emotional, and social problems facing lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth. The purpose of this study was to examine the multicultural and sexual orientation counselor competencies of school counseling students through a cross-specialization comparison with community agency students. Results indicate that school counseling students had significantly lower self-reported multicultural and sexual orientation counselor competency scores. The findings and their implications are discussed.

Peer-Reviewed Published SOCCS Research by Other Scholars:

Abstract: Researchers have identified factors that contribute to counseling competence and multicultural competence, yet there continues to remain a gap in bisexual counseling competence. Negative attitudes faced by bisexual individuals have significant implications for their psychological well-being and identity development. It is important for clinicians to explore their ability to empathize with this population and their attitudes toward bisexual clients. This study sought to determine whether clinician empathy and attitudes toward bisexuality were significant predictors of perceived and actual competence with bisexual clients. The study surveyed 101 clinicians. Multivariate multiple regression analyses revealed that only attitudes toward bisexuality were significant predictors of perceived and actual bisexual counseling competency. Implications and limitations of the study are discussed.

School counselors need to advocate and act as an ally for all students. Safe Space, a training designed to facilitate competency for working with and serving LGBTQ youth (i.e., LGBTQ competency), has received increased attention in the field of school counseling. However, limited empirical support exists for training interventions such as Safe Space, with only one study to date examining its effectiveness for graduate psychology students (see Finkel, Storaasli, Bandele, & Schaefer, 2003). This study used a randomized pretest-posttest control group design to evaluate and examine the impact of Safe Space training on competency levels of a sample of school counselors/school counselor trainees and to explore the relationship between LGBTQ competency and awareness of sexism and heterosexism.


Abstract: This study established the validity and factor structure of the Affirmative Training Inventory (ATI; T. S. Carlson, C. R. McGeorge & M. Rock, unpublished) as a measure of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) affirmative clinical training. Additionally, this study examined the latent associations among the subscales of the ATI and the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (Bidell, 2005) utilizing a sample of 248 master’s and doctoral couple and family therapy students. The findings from this study provide empirical support for the relationship between specific classroom-related content associated with LGB affirmative therapy and students’ perceptions of their own ability to work competently with LGB clients. This study also found a positive association between the degree to which couple and family therapy programs adopt a LGB-affirmative stance and students’ beliefs, knowledge, and skills associated with competent therapy with LGB clients.


Abstract: Counselors from school and community practice, counseling students, and counselor educators (N = 468) participated in this study of competence to serve lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients. Participants reported LGB affirmative attitudes but lower knowledge and skills. School counselors reported significantly lower LGB competence than counselors in other settings. Implications include the importance of graduate and post-graduate training to improve LGB knowledge and skills and hope that LGB affirmative attitudes suggest receptivity toward such growth.


Abstract: The current study sought to test the effectiveness of a workshop for post-graduate clinical psychology students to develop their ability to work with lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) clients in an appropriate manner. Seven female participants completed the workshop and all assessments. The study incorporated a pretest-post-test design, with assessments taking place before the workshop and one month after. Assessment was conducted primarily through a number of questionnaires assessing attitude, behavioural intention, cultural competence and knowledge in relation to LGB people. Short answer responses to a scenario depicting an interaction between a heterosexual clinical psychologist and a gay male client were also analysed. Significant changes were found in behavioural intention (p = .017), cultural competence (p = .001) and knowledge (p < .001). Qualitative analysis of scenario responses identified a number of instances where learning of workshop material was apparent, although this was not reflected in a quantitative analysis. The workshop produced some promising results, but may require modification in future applications to improve its impact.

Abstract: Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) clients use counseling services at higher rates than their heterosexual counterparts, yet current training for counselors may be inadequate. In this online study, 234 graduate counselor education and counseling psychology students completed the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (Bidell, 2005) and provided information about their training in working with LGB clients. Participants viewed themselves as more competent on the Awareness and Knowledge subscales than on the Skills subscale. Increased level of training (doctoral vs. master’s), number of LGB clients seen in practica, and attendance at LGB-focused workshops and conferences were associated with increased competence. Implications for programmatic development are discussed.

Grove, J. (2009). How competent are trainee and newly qualified counsellors to work with lesbian, gay, and bisexual clients and what do they perceive as their most effective learning experiences? Counselling & Psychotherapy Research, 9, 78-85. doi: 10.1080/14733140802490622

Abstract: Aim: Professional therapy organisations promote the importance of working with difference, yet subtle negative biases towards lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) clients continue. Issues of competence in this area have only recently been addressed. This research aims to study the effectiveness of training to support therapists working with LGB clients in Britain. Method: Students (past and present) of an integrative counselling diploma course completed questionnaires including: background details, a Sexual Orientation Counselor Competence scale (Bidell, 2005), and two qualitative questions about previous learning relating to LGB issues. Quantitative analysis utilising a one way ANOVA test was used to compare the levels of competence at different times in training, and grounded theory to analyse the qualitative responses. Results: Results show that students have a high level of awareness, although a lower level measured in year two of the programme. The qualitative results indicate the learning value of personal experiences. Further themes describe the ways in which students learnt about LGB issues. Discussion: The reduction in scores for awareness may indicate that training facilitates a deeper understanding of self. Key themes indicate the importance of challenging old internal working models of sexual orientation. Implications for practice: The results will enable competences and effective learning experiences to be mapped in the curriculum.


Abstract: This study measured couple and family therapists’ levels of homophobia and examined whether levels of homophobia would predict their self-reported competency in treating lesbian and gay (LG) clients. The sample consisted of 741 clinical members of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. Participants completed the Modern Homophobia Scale and the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale which measured self-reported competency in the areas of knowledge and skills related to treating LG clients. The findings of this study suggest that, on average, these clinical members report low levels of homophobia and participants’ levels of homophobia predict self-reported clinical competency.


The majority of the literature on conversion therapy has focused on clients’ experiences and rationales for seeking such therapy. This study sought to explore differences in the beliefs and clinical competence of therapists who practice and believe in the ethics of conversion therapy and those who do not. The sample for this study included 762 family therapists who were members of the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy. Data were collected using electronic surveys that assessed participants’ negative beliefs about and perceived clinical competence with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) individuals. Results indicate that those who believe in the ethics of and/or practice conversion therapy report statistically higher levels of negative beliefs about LGB individuals and lower levels of clinical competence working with LGB clients. Implications for clinical practice and organizational policy are discussed.

This study established the validity and factor structure of the Affirmative Training Inventory (ATI; T. S. Carlson, C. R. McGeorge & M. Rock, unpublished) as a measure of lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) affirmative clinical training. Additionally, this study examined the latent associations among the subscales of the ATI and the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (Bidell, 2005) utilizing a sample of 248 master’s and doctoral couple and family therapy students. The findings from this study provide empirical support for the relationship between specific classroom-related content associated with LGB affirmative therapy and students’ perceptions of their own ability to work competently with LGB clients. This study also found a positive association between the degree to which couple and family therapy programs adopt a LGB-affirmative stance and students’ beliefs, knowledge, and skills associated with competent therapy with LGB clients.


Abstract: Attention to diversity is required in Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education-accredited programs, yet not much research exists regarding the effectiveness of graduate training on therapists’ multicultural counseling competencies. In this study, 12 students enrolled in a masters-level diversity class were given pre- and post-tests of their multicultural counseling competencies. Results showed that students significantly increased their multicultural awareness, knowledge, and skills after completing the diversity class. The discussion includes implications for educators who seek to improve students' multicultural counseling competencies.


Abstract: Although transgender people have increasingly become more visible, there still remains a dearth in the counseling literature regarding counselor preparation with this population. A mixed-method research study was designed to investigate the strengths and gaps in counselor preparedness regarding transgender individuals. In phase 1, counselors-in-training (N = 87) from an urban university in the southeastern United States completed a questionnaire on transgender counseling competence. Phase 2 investigated the educative experiences of diverse counselors-in-training (N = 7) in two separate focus group interviews. The authors converged the results and discuss implications for professional counseling practice and preparation.


Abstract: This study explored the relationship between therapist personality, self-reported lesbian and gay (LG) affirmative therapy competency, and demonstrated LG affirmative therapy competency utilizing an analogue methodology with 212 therapists-in-training. Participants were randomly assigned to review one of four vignettes that varied the sexual orientation and presenting concern of the characters depicted. The experimental design was a 3 (Openness to Experience: Very High/High/Average) × 2 (Gay/Lesbian Vignette) × 2 (Relationship/Adjustment Vignette) factorial with three dependent variables (i.e., case conceptualization ability, LG affirmative therapy competency, LG affirmative therapy self-efficacy), and three covariates (i.e., participant sexual orientation, relationships with LGBT individuals, and number of LGBT clients seen). The relationship between self-reported competency (i.e., self-report measures of competency scores) and demonstrated competency (i.e., case conceptualizations of LG vignettes scores) was also analyzed. Individuals with higher levels of openness to experience exhibited stronger case conceptualization ability; however, contrary to the hypotheses, the four analogue groups did not differ significantly. Case
conceptualization ability correlated with self-reported LG knowledge competency. Implications for research, practice, and training are presented.


Abstract: Grief is prevalent in counseling, but little is known about the current status of counselors' preparation and competencies to provide effective care. This exploratory study surveyed counselors (N= 369) on grief training, personal and professional experiences with grief, and grief counseling competence. Multiple regression analyses found training and experience were statistically significant predictors of competence. The strong relationship between variables suggests these concepts may be understood as synonymous. Implications for training, practice, and research are discussed.


Abstract: This study examined couple and family therapy (CFT) students’, beliefs about sexual orientation, their self-reported competency working with lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) clients, and the level of affirmative training students received in their CFT programs. One hundred and ninety students from accredited CFT programs completed the study. While participants reported feeling only somewhat competent to work with LGB clients and less than half reported receiving any training on affirmative therapy, the majority of the participants did appear to hold positive attitudes toward LGB clients. The results support the literature arguing for CFT programs to include specific training on affirmative therapy practices, as the level of affirmative training was directly related to participants’, self-reported clinical competency working with LGB clients.


Abstract: The current study explored the potential impact of a training program on graduate counseling students’ competency to serve lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) clients. In this pilot study, the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS; Bidell, 2005) was administered to students enrolled in a counselor education program. Results indicated that the training program had a positive impact upon the competency areas of knowledge and skills as measured by the SOCCS. The benefits of incorporating an LGB counselor competency component in training modules to serve the LGB community are discussed. Ways for counselor educators and supervisors to enhance their own LGB competencies and help their student’s ability to meet the needs of LGB clients are also presented.

**Dissertation & Thesis Research Using the SOCCS:**


Thompson, K. A. (2013). *LGB affirmative training and clinical competency: Differences in couple and family therapy students who receive training at religious vs. secular institutions.* (Master’s Thesis). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. (Accession Order No. 1541221)


**Dissertations Using the Pre-published Scale**

(either the SOCCS or SOCS)

