

# Competencies for Counseling Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered (GLBT) Clients

As more and more sexual minorities seek counseling services for assistance with their life challenges, all counselors need to be well versed in understanding the unique needs of this diverse population. The Association for Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Issues in Counseling (AGLBIC) developed the competencies that follow in order to promote the development of sound and professional counseling practice.

When integrated into graduate counseling curricula, these competencies will assist counselors-in-training in the examination of their personal biases and values regarding GLBT clients, expand their awareness of the world views of sexual minorities, and lead to the development of appropriate intervention strategies that insure effective service delivery.

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## Human Growth and Development

Competent Counselors will:

- understand that biological, familial, and psychosocial factors influence the course of development of GLB orientations and transgendered identities.
- identify the heterosexist assumptions inherent in current lifespan development theories and account for this bias in assessment procedures and counseling practices.
- consider that, due to the coming out process, GLBT individuals often may experience a lag between their chronological ages and the developmental stages delineated by current theories.
- recognize that identity formation and stigma management are ongoing developmental tasks that span the lives of GLBT persons.
- know that the normative developmental tasks of GLBT adolescents frequently may be complicated or compromised by identity confusion; anxiety and depression; suicidal ideation and behavior; academic failure; substance abuse; physical, sexual, and verbal abuse; homelessness; prostitution; and STD/HIV infection.
- understand that the typical developmental tasks of GLBT seniors often are complicated or compromised by social isolation and invisibility.
- affirm that sexual minority persons have the potential to integrate their GLB orientations and transgendered identities into fully functioning and emotionally healthy lives.

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## Social and Cultural Foundations

Competent counselors will:

- acknowledge that heterosexism is a worldview and value-system that may undermine the healthy functioning of the sexual orientations, gender identities, and behaviors of GLBT persons.
  - understand that heterosexism pervades the social and cultural foundations of many institutions and traditions and may foster negative attitudes toward GLBT persons.
  - recognize how internalized prejudice, including heterosexism, racism, and sexism, may influence the counselor's own attitudes as well as those of their GLBT clients.
  - know that the developmental tasks of GLBT women and people of color include the formation and integration of their gender, racial and sexual identities.
  - familiarize themselves with the cultural traditions, rituals, and rites of passage specific to GLBT populations.
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## **Helping Relationships**

Competent counselors will:

- acknowledge the societal prejudice and discrimination experienced by GLBT persons and assist them in overcoming internalized negative attitudes toward their sexual orientations and gender identities.
- recognize that their own sexual orientations and gender identities are relevant to the helping relationship and influence the counseling process.
- seek consultation or supervision to ensure that their own biases or knowledge deficits about GLBT persons do not negatively influence the helping relationship.
- understand that attempts to alter or change the sexual orientations or gender identities of GLBT clients may be detrimental or even life-threatening, and, further, are not supported by the research and therefore should not be undertaken.

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## **Group Work**

Competent counselors will:

- be sensitive to the dynamics that occur when groups are formed that include only one representative of any minority culture and consider the necessity of including supportive allies for GLBT clients when screening and selecting group members.
- establish group norms and provide interventions that facilitate the safety and inclusion of GLBT group members.
- shape group norms and create a climate that allows for the voluntary self-identification and self-disclosure of GLBT participants.
- intervene actively when either overt or covert disapproval of GLBT members threatens member safety, group cohesion and integrity.

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## **Career and Lifestyle Development**

Competent counselors will:

- counter the occupational stereotypes that restrict the career development and decision-making of GLBT clients
- explore with GLBT clients the degree to which government statutes and union contracts do not protect workers against employment discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.
- help GLBT clients make career choices that facilitate both identity formation and job satisfaction.
- acquaint GLBT clients with sexual minority role models that increase their awareness of viable career options.

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## **Appraisal**

Competent counselors will:

- understand that homosexuality, bisexuality, and gender nonconformity are neither forms of psychopathology nor necessarily evidence of developmental arrest.
- recognize the multiple ways that societal prejudice and discrimination create problems that GLBT clients may seek to address in counseling.
- consider sexual orientation and gender identity among the core characteristics that influence clients' perceptions of themselves and their worlds.
- assess GLBT clients without presuming that sexual orientation or gender identity is directly related to their presenting problems.
- differentiate between the effects of stigma, reactions to stress, and symptoms of psychopathology when assessing and diagnosing the presenting concerns of GLBT clients.
- recognize the potential for the heterosexist bias in the interpretation of psychological tests and measurements.

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## **Research**

Competent counselors will:

- formulate research questions that acknowledge the possible inclusion of GLBT participants yet are not based on stereotypic assumptions regarding these subjects.
- consider the ethical and legal issues involved in research with GLBT participants.
- acknowledge the methodological limitations in regard to research design, confidentiality, sampling, data collection, and measurement involved in research with GLBT participants.
- recognize the potential for heterosexist bias in the interpretation and reporting of research results.

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## **Professional Orientation**

Competent counselors will:

- know the history of the helping professions including significant factors and events that have compromised service delivery to GLBT populations.
- familiarize themselves with the needs and counseling issues of GLBT clients and use nonstigmatizing and affirming mental health, educational, and community resources.
- recognize the importance of educating professionals, students, supervisees, and consumers about GLBT issues and challenge misinformation or bias about minority persons.
- use professional development opportunities to enhance their attitudes, knowledge, and skills specific to counseling GLBT persons and their families.

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<http://www.aglbic.org/resources/competencies.html>