

# “MODEL DEVELOPMENT OF COUNSELING COMPETENCY DEALING WITH GAY AND LESBIAN CLIENT: MALAYSIA PERSPECTIVE”

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## ABSTRACT:

This study has developed a framework model in the practice of gay and lesbian counseling in Malaysia based on the findings of a research related to counseling competencies in managing gay and lesbian clients. The study also use qualitative design involving semi-structured in depth interviews. The purposive sampling is used to interview fifteen counselors which have been identified by researcher to have information regarding the management of counseling session for gay and lesbian clients. Fifteen counselors have been chosen to complete the research based on two selection of sampling criteria in this study that are registered counselors and counselors who have experiences in handling gay and lesbian clients. The findings of the study provided view into the need for the development of gay and lesbian counseling models in providing enlightenment and guidance to counselors on the procedures and processes for managing gay and lesbian cases. The development of this model is also based on the conceptual framework that has been developed by the researcher. Researchers used Iceberg's competency model to look at skills, knowledge and attitudes. In this theory, it has been discussed that knowledge and skills are elements of competency that are easy to develop, while the concepts of self, nature, motive and social role are things hidden within one's personality and are difficult to develop. Therefore, the researcher has chosen a social role that advises the counselor in providing awareness to clients to gain common sense during the session. Elements of counselor competence include knowledge, skills, attitudes, determination and values to enhance counselors' ability to deal with gay and lesbian clients. In summary, this model of gay and lesbian counseling can contribute to professional counseling institution and can assist educators in the field of counseling so that trained counselors are more competent in dealing with gay and lesbian issues.

## Keywords:

Model Counseling, Gay and Lesbian, Competencies, Professional Counseling.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Gay and lesbian counseling in the west has been growing for a long time and it is nothing new. For example, a study by Brittany and Swank (2017); Ginicola, Smith, and Filmore (2017); Jeffrey, Dilani, and Narketta (2019) and Fassinger (1991) proposes to develop counselors' attitudes, knowledge and skills in therapeutic relationships with gay and lesbian community. This statement has also been supported by previous studies by Israel., Ketz, Detrie, Burke, and Shulman (2003) and Daniel, Roysircar, Abeles, and Boyd (2012) who have noted the importance of these attitudes, skills and knowledge in helping to increase the internal motivation of gay and lesbian clients. Israel., Gorcheva, Burnes, and Walther (2008) also noted that previous studies have suggested that the profession in gay and lesbian counseling includes exploring countertransference, helping

clients improve their self-esteem, identifying clients' family issues, helping clients address family and community discrimination issues, understanding client identity issues and client homophobia (Graham et al., 2009).

The most important requirement for dealing with gay and lesbian clients is training and programs related to sexuality issues. According to Stephanie, Freeman and Hoffman (2009), training, programs and courses specific to LGBT are lacking. He said there was a lack of research on the content of training or courses for counseling students on sexual orientation, information and anecdotal reports of graduate training stage often involves the exploration of attitudes and promoting the dissemination of knowledge to the LGBT community (Israel & Hackett, 2004; Phillips, 2001). Another key theme expressed by participants was the lack of exposure on LGBT

issues. Although LGBT issues have been included in the cross-cultural counseling course, this preparation is not sufficient when dealing with gay and lesbian clients Stephanie, Freeman and Hoffman (2009). It is important for counselors and training directors to review their training curriculum to include specific topics for individual LGBT counseling, as it is clear that training programs are responsible for helping coaches develop competencies in working with LGBT clients (Cacrep, 2013). Thus, awareness of developing guidelines and therapies for gay and lesbian community began after the American Psychiatric Association (1980) released gay and lesbian from diagnostic and statistical manuals of mental disorders. The notion that being gay and lesbian are mental illnesses does not exist and that they are heterosexual but have sexual and emotional instincts for both sexes (Biaggio et al., 2003; Finkel et al., 2003). The American Psychological Association (2000b) seeks to eliminate stigma and discrimination against gays and lesbians. The American Psychological Association (1999) has also released a guide on conducting therapeutic counseling suitable for gay, lesbian and bisexual clients. It also has information on sexual orientation. In 2000, the American Psychological Association (American Psychological Association, 2000b) published guidelines for counseling for gay, lesbian, and bisexual clients. Subsequently in 2004, the ACA Governing Council approved a list of counseling competencies developed by the Association For Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issues in Counseling (Algbtic, 2013). Both of these competencies list principles and therapeutic recommendations, in reference to provide effective services for dealing with gay and lesbian clients. As such, the gay and lesbian community needs help from counselors to improve their well-being. Competent counselors should be open-minded and willing to accept the presence of gay and lesbian clients, without prejudice against them. However, there are some counselors who are not open to gay and lesbian clients. This is

because homosexual acts are very contrary to culture and religion and violate the norms of human life. As such, researchers will highlight a number of issues related to issues of competence, bias, counselor discrimination against clients, homophobia and lack of disclosure of information on gay and lesbian issues (Balkin, Schlosser, & Levitt, 2009; Barret & Logan, 2002; Satcher & Leggett, 2007; Jamal et al., 2018). In Malaysian context, the previous studies have been more focused on knowledge from the Islamic view and da'wah to help gay and lesbian clients to achieve better well-being. Jaladin (2016), Jaladin et al (2014), explain that the focus aspects are religious steps and counseling used to overcome the spread of gay and lesbian symptoms in society. It can be seen that gay and lesbian symptoms nowadays require effective alternative treatments to help them get back to the basics. The most important thing is that, gay and lesbian change is slow and not a drastic action that can hinder the success of this change for gays and lesbians to get back to the basics. Based on previous studies, returning back to religious practice is one of the good approaches (Jaladin, 2013). The methods of appreciating their respective religions are according to certain procedures that can help these gays and lesbians from the values they hold. For example, praying, repenting, praying, getting closer to God and appreciating the practice of religious teachings can help improve the heart and faith. Based on comparison of western and Malaysian literature reviews, studies in the west have long led the field of gay and lesbian counseling compared to studies in Malaysia. A review of the literature abroad can be concluded that the competence of counselors in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes is so significant in the conduct of gay and lesbian counseling. Apart from that, competency contributing factors are also emphasized in improving the quality of counseling services. The competencies possessed by counselors can help clients achieve life goals in the therapeutic process. However, the researchers found that the studies in Malaysia context were

general in nature and did not classify the gay and lesbian counseling competencies specifically. Many literary studies revolve around aspects of gay and lesbian behavior from a religious and personality development perspective. The study also lacked exposure related to specific training in terms of counseling needs for gay and lesbian clients. The lack of this study may be due to cultural and religious factors differing to the west causing the need for this study to be ignored. However, studies revolving the issue of gay and lesbian have begun to gain a place among researchers in Malaysia. Primarily, because in recent times this issue has been hotly debated by the Malaysian community. In this regard, to ensure that this process of helping relationships is effective, the competency aspect of the counselor is very important in ensuring that the delivery of counseling services achieves the real goal.

In summary, it is clear that previous studies do not contradict with the research conducted by researchers. However, based on previous studies, it shows some loopholes in terms of the elements contained in the competence. This is because the study conducted by the researcher focuses more

on the mobilization process on the elements of knowledge competence, skills and attitudes in solving problems faced by clients by showing the exploration of counselor experience on strategies and approaches that have been used to help gay and lesbian clients. The exploration of these competencies has been refined in depth using a qualitative approach. This effort can contribute to counseling professionals in developing gay and lesbian counseling in Malaysia.

**2. COMPETENCY MODEL ICEBERG**

The theory of this study is based on the theory of Spencer and Spencer (1993) who used the Iceberg Model. This model assumes that competence is generally associated with intention. One Non-intentional behavior is not considered competence. Competence is, therefore, a process of personal character which includes motives, attributes, self-image and social roles, while knowledge will shape actions known as skills resulting in achievement. There are six characters of competence - knowledge, skills, motives, traits, personalities and social roles that can be described based on the Iceberg Model as presented in Table

**Table 1: Iceberg Model**

Competency Characteristics	Explanation
Knowledge	Knowledge is the element that a person has in a particular field. Knowledge is a complex competency. Knowledge measures ability.
Skill	Skills are the ability to perform certain tasks both physically and mentally. Knowing the need for competence allows human ability to be improved.
Character	Character is a person's attitude to behavior or how a person responds in a certain way. Examples of characters are confidence, perseverance and resilience.
Self-Image	The way one sees himself is the concept of internal identity. For example, seeing himself as a leader or counselor.
Motive	It complements all of the excuses and impulses in human beings that lead to action. Motivation is an action, movement and impulse in an individual that can cause a person to take action
Social Role	Social roles are images that one person promotes to others. It reflects the values of someone who is trustworthy and gives awareness and helps one to know the direction of life.

As such, skills and knowledge can be acquired through courses or training and can be linked to academic qualifications. Developing the personal characteristics of an employee is more challenging and requires special emphasis to achieve the success that is expected through training and development. Knowledge and skills are elements of competence that are easy to develop, visible and evaluated through the outward. While the concepts of self, nature, motive and social role are things that are hidden within one's personality, they are abstract and difficult to develop. Social roles are part of the elements of this study as this element gives the counselor a sense of awareness among clients and counselors to refer clients to counseling services. In order to achieve social roles, the counselor will recognize and possess a personal image, personality and motives in helping clients to gain common sense during counseling sessions. As an example in this study, the role of counselors is to be prepared to deal with gay and lesbian cases and to provide guidance and intervention to clients so that clients can gain insight into their lives. This is the social responsibility of the counselor in providing moral, emotional and psychological support to the client.

### **3. GAY AND LESBIAN COUNSELING COMPETENCY**

The Code of Ethics issued by the American Association of Counselors (American Counseling Association, 2005) and the American School Association Counselors (American Counseling Association, American School Counselor Association, 2010) states that counselors must endeavor and be competent. Competent service to client comes from a variety of backgrounds and do not involve discrimination based on age, culture, disability, race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, marital status or partnership, language preference, or socioeconomic status. The three components of multicultural counseling are knowledge, skills and awareness in empowering gay and lesbian community (Green, McCollum, & Hays, 2008).

Recent studies in the west have shown that academics and counselors are beginning to recognize the importance of understanding gay and lesbian community through conducting counseling. This is evidenced by previous studies that shed light on aspects of exploring gay and lesbian issues awareness of the importance of gay and lesbian counseling (Ginicola et al., 2017; Jeffrey et al., 2019; Singh & Dickey, 2017) and the contribution of multicultural counseling to counseling competencies with gay, lesbian and bisexual clients (Israel. et al., 2003). The mastery of this knowledge is a fundamental requirement in handling of gay and lesbian cases (Brittany & Swank, 2017; Caldwell, 2009; Constantine & Ladany, 2001). Therefore, gay and lesbian counseling should be emphasized to counselors as conducting this counseling session requires full client trust. Counselors should also not have prejudice towards clients. A counselor may be considered unethical when practicing counseling services outside of his or her area of competence as contained in the ACA Code of Ethics (2005) under the professional responsibility section (c.2.a).

The study of Barret and Logan (2002) explains that counselors are able to understand and have in-depth knowledge of gay and lesbian issues. These gay and lesbian issues include knowledge on client sexual orientation, development of gay and lesbian identities, HIV and infectious disease knowledge via same-sex relationships, mental health knowledge and counseling ability to explore clients' life history, including client relationships and past experiences. The importance of exploring these clients' past experiences is to find out if a client has been sexually abused, causing clients to be traumatized and engaging in lesbian and gay behavior.

In addition, the study of Ginicola et al. (2017); Rutter et al (2008); Singh and Dickey (2017) discuss aspects of the importance of emphasizing understanding of gay and lesbian competence that need to be emphasized so that

counselors are more empathic when dealing with gay and lesbian clients. This is because gays and lesbians experience oppression and discrimination due to heterosexism, transphobia, heteronormativity and social injustice on themselves (Ginicola et al., 2017; Hein & Scharer, 2013; James et al., 2016). These groups have greater social pressure than their heterosexual and cisgender peers, such as discrimination, prejudice, denial, stigma, and violence (Ginicola et al., 2017; Israel. et al., 2008; Singh & Dickey, 2017).

The study of Jeffrey et al (2019) shows that gay and lesbian clients have a higher percentage of counseling and psychiatric services than heterosexual clients. The high rates of gay and lesbian clients seeking counseling is due to experiencing sexually transmitted diseases, depression, suicidal tendencies and discrimination from family members and peers. This statement is also in line with the study by Lamantia, Wagner, and Bohecker (2015) and Mink, Lindley, and Weinstein (2014) who explain that gays and lesbians are more likely to be involved in psychological disorders, violence and relationship problems with their surroundings because of their identity. Accordingly, these explanations indicate that counselors need to deepen the understanding in relation to gay and lesbian counseling, focusing on more details in various aspects. The model of counselor competence encompassing aspects of knowledge, attitudes and skills that work for a diverse population has been developed in the field of multicultural counseling (Arredondo et al., 1996). Cultural competency models provide a strong foundation for counseling competence with gay and lesbian clients (Fassinger & Sperber, 1997). While some content may differ due to the unique differences between sexual and ethnic orientations, the knowledge, attitudes and skills needed for effective counseling have many similarities. Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis (1992) emphasized several things in cross-cultural counseling that counselors need to be skilled in in the process of identifying human behavior, values, biases and perceptions of counseling to clients. In

addition, the counselor must understand the client's worldview, how the counselor adapts to clients' diverse cultural backgrounds and how they can be used in counseling and working with clients. Therefore, if this multi-cultural counseling is emphasized to the counselor, it can help to enhance the competence of the counselor while producing a competent and credible counselor to the client's diverse culture.

However, in Malaysian context, past studies have focused on Islamic knowledge and preaching to help gay and lesbian clients achieve better well-being. Hassan and Mohamed (2014) and Yusof (2013) explain that the focus is on religious and counseling measures used to overcome the spread of gay and lesbian symptoms in community. It is evident that today's gay and lesbian symptoms need effective alternative treatments to help them get back to the basics. The most important thing is that gay and lesbian change is a slow process and not an action drastically taken to hinder the success of this change for gay and lesbian people to return to the norms Sipon, Jazimin, and Yusof (2003). Based on previous studies, it is said that turning to religious teaching is a good approach (Jaladin, 2013). Their methods of religious devotion follow specific procedures that can help correct these gays and lesbians from the values they hold. For example, praying, repenting, praying, drawing closer to God and embracing religious teaching practices can help to repair the heart and faith. Hassan and Mohamed (2014) discusses studies on the management of gender disorders from Islamic perspectives by limiting them to the spiritual and the physical. This concept discusses ways of dealing with problems through the approach of implementing counseling skills according to Islamic views.

A competent counselor should master the skills of counseling in conducting sessions with clients, especially with clients who have identity problems in their life. Competent counselors are able to adjust their emotions and higher self-disclosure capabilities by using communication skills, analyzing, interpreting and even making

sense. In addition, competent counselors are able to utilize counseling skills in establishing rapport with clients and also to address issues of gay and lesbian clients (Israel et al., 2003; Israel & Selvidge, 2003). Counseling skills are important to ensure the smoothness of the counseling process. In the process of guiding, these basic counseling skills aim to create a cozy atmosphere and enhance the therapeutic relationship between client and counselor Sison et al (2003). Essential skills are minimal urges, prompts, reflection, conferencing and feedback. These basic counseling skills can help clients develop good relationships with gay and lesbian clients to gain their trust (Salleh, Mahmud, & Amat, 2009).

The counselor's competence in terms of attitude, reflects the emotions and behaviors exhibited by the counselor to the client. Attitudes include awareness that refers to the self-awareness, values, biases, and counseling beliefs of gays and lesbians (Arredondo et al., 1996; Sue et al., 1992). Personal and biased beliefs are often related to one's upbringing and community context in the workplace. Therefore, self-awareness is strongly influenced by one's belief system, which is also the key to developing competence (Brittany & Swank, 2017). Attitude is also a state of being in man that motivates him to engage in social activities with certain feelings. In addition, the study also found that the way in which a positive or negative response to an object or situation depends on one's attitude to accepting others, the ability to change, and awareness of the moral and ethical choices of one's own and others' values. A counselor must have the positive attitude to be a competent counselor (Brittany & Swank, 2017; Kanamori et al., 2017; Jamal et al., 2018).

Counselors' attitudes are often cited and emphasized in previous studies (Israel et al., 2008; Kanamori et al., 2017). This attitude is an important element of competence and is a major pillar of counseling sessions. Especially, homophobic counselors and counselor's heterosexual attitudes have negatively affected

counselors' ability to deal with clients (Balkin et al., 2009; Barret & Logan, 2002; Israel et al., 2003). Meanwhile, attitudes that support gay and lesbian competence validates attitudes toward same-sex relationships and reject the idea that homosexuality is wrong, sinful and must be changed. Counselors need to be open to discussing sexual behavior from clients, which is a staple in gay and lesbian competence. In addition, counselors also need to have the necessary knowledge and skills as they are included in counseling competencies (Israel et al., 2003).

#### **4. Model of Gay and Lesbian Counseling in Malaysia**

This model of gay and lesbian counseling has been developed as a result of previous studies and research findings. Professional institutions have recognized the importance of gay and lesbian counseling to be appropriately recognized by counselors (Israel et al., 2003). The findings of the study provide insight into the need for the development of a model of gay and lesbian counseling in enlightening and guiding counselors in dealing with gay and lesbian cases.

The results of this study can also enhance counselors' competence in line with proper ethical practices in integrating gay and lesbian counseling approaches in counseling sessions. In the context of this competency, the researcher will look at various aspects. Firstly, the researcher looks from the knowledge, skills and counseling attitudes of gay and lesbian clients. To this end, the researcher explored counselors' understanding of gay and lesbian issues in the areas of psychology, theory, mental health issues, behavior, past client experiences, client and family background and lifestyle practices of gay and lesbian clients. For the second aspect, the researcher explored the skills of the counselors. These skills include counselors' knowledge of the theory and approach used by counselors to deal with gay and lesbian clients and how they apply counseling skills to

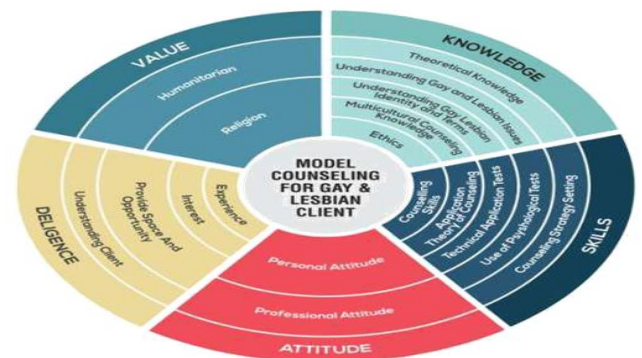
clients. Next, how well the skills and approaches used by counselors can help clients.

However, after data collection and analysis of the study were conducted, the researchers found that there were two other elements of the gay and lesbian counseling competencies that the study participants presented. These two elements are commitment and value. Commitment includes hard work and a high level of interest by counselors in helping gay and lesbian clients without any prejudice and discrimination. The element of seriousness is part of counseling competence. However, past researchers do not address gay and lesbian issues, but only discussed aspects of counseling in general but do not fully discuss gay and lesbian issues. Elements of this value include religious values, sexuality and humanity. This is an added value or a new element in the competence of gay and lesbian counseling.

The development of this model is also based on the conceptual framework that has been developed by the researchers in Chapter II. Researchers used Iceberg's competency model to look at skills, knowledge and attitudes. In this theory, it has been discussed that knowledge and skills are elements of competency that are easy to develop and can be evaluated by the naked eye, while the concepts of self, nature, motive and social role are things that are hidden within one's personality and are difficult to develop. Therefore, the researcher has chosen a social role that advises the counselor in providing awareness to clients to gain common sense during the session. For example, in this study, the role of counselors is to

be prepared to deal with gay and lesbian cases and to provide effective counseling and counseling services to clients. What this counselor does is the social responsibility of providing emotional, emotional and psychological support to clients. Therefore, counselors' competency elements include knowledge, skills, attitudes, determination and values. Figure 5.1 outlines and summarizes the five key components of the competency model of gay and lesbian counseling.

Thus, the developed model of gay and lesbian counseling is based on the construction of themes based on interview data and document analysis that has received expert approval. The model building in Figure 1 is widely accepted and can serve as a framework for the model of gay and lesbian counseling in dealing with cases of gay and lesbian counseling in Malaysia. The researcher also details each element contained in the model of gay and lesbian counseling in Table 2.



**Figure 1:** Model Counselling for Gay and Lesbian Client

**Table 2: Content of Counselling Gay and Lesbian Model**

Main Component	Content	Explanation
Knowledge	Theoretical knowledge theory and psychology	Theoretical knowledge, development of human psychology and clinical psychology should be available to every counselor dealing with this issue. Gay and lesbian issues are not a common issue, they are about one's identity and sexual behavior. Critical understanding of their behavior, their characteristics, their causes, and their emotional and psychological state should be emphasized in their efforts to help them resolve the crisis that has plagued themselves.
	Understanding gay and lesbian	This knowledge of gays and lesbians is discussed in terms of information and background, sexuality issues and mental. Counselors need to diversify their theories to apply in such cases, to help counselors handle sessions better and in accordance with emotional and mental state of the client during counseling session.
		<b>Religious Approaches</b> In addition to using western theories, counselors also used religious approaches in counseling sessions. Sub-themes of religious approach focus on religious practices such as prayer, meditation, fasting and awareness and fostering religious values such as forgiveness and gratitude.
Technical application skills		An approach used to explore the issues faced by gay and lesbian clients. The study found that there were five approaches used by the study participants during the sessions, namely (i) drawing techniques, (ii) play therapy (iii) analogy, (iv) Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and (v) storytelling.

However, as a competent counselor, they must always be ready and open to accept the variety of cases present in their sessions. It is the responsibility of a counselor to accept clients unconditionally and to accept clients as normal human beings. When it comes to gay and lesbian clients, they have to put up with intentions to help clients get rid of the problems they face.

humanitarian		Humanitarian values are the values that counselors exhibit to their clients, where counselors are willing to help these gay and lesbian people. Counselors always provide opportunities for clients to change and a competent counselor cannot show negative attitudes toward gay and lesbian clients. This value is not only the religious value injected into the client, but the value of the helping relationship to be applied by the counselor so that the client feels accepted and loved by the counselor. Therefore, as religion and human values are closely linked in gay and lesbian counseling, the study participants must play an important role in order for the counseling session to proceed smoothly.
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**5. CONCLUSION**

In short, the practice of counseling in handling of gay and lesbian clients has established a guideline for counselors. This article has provided a comprehensive and in-depth overview of the findings. Counselors also gain a wealth of knowledge on gay and lesbian issues. However,

most of the study participants were unable to conduct gay and lesbian counseling on the theory or model used in the west but based only on the knowledge gained during their university studies and their experience in counseling services. This is not surprising as the basic concept of multicultural counseling has been understood and practiced in counseling practice in Malaysia at this time.

In addition, exposure to the gay and lesbian aspects is limited compared to western counseling practitioners. Therefore, trainings and programs need to be implemented in order for counselors to effectively conduct gay and lesbian cases. For example, the addition of a syllabus related to gays and lesbians in university courses. According to the researcher's understanding, the field of counseling only focuses on mental health counseling, career counseling, marriage counseling and drug addiction counseling. Therefore, this study can be suggested to education counselors to develop gay and lesbian counseling. Gender and lesbian counseling needs to be emphasized as this issue is gaining attention from all parties.

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