Abstract

Counselors and counselors-in-training are expected to provide affirmative and competent counseling services to lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) clients. Counseling self-efficacy, a construct based on the tenets of social cognitive theory, is a useful framework to assess counselors’ perceptions regarding their competencies in providing such services. To date, little is known about factors that may either enhance or inhibit counselors’ LGB counseling self-efficacy beliefs.

In the present investigation, structural equation modeling (SEM) was employed to test two conceptually derived models consisting of predictors of counselor trainees’ LGB counseling self-efficacy beliefs. For the first model, trainees’ LGB focused personal, clinical, and training experiences, sexual identity exploration and commitment, attitudes towards LGB persons, and levels of lesbian and gay (LG) threat were examined in order to determine their levels of influence on counselor trainees’ LGB counseling self-efficacy. The second model was a mimic model that tested whether counselor trainees’ sexual orientation identities moderated the other variables’ influences on LGB counseling self-efficacy. The second model also examined differences in self-efficacy beliefs between heterosexual and non-heterosexual participants.

These models were tested on 406 counselors-in-training who were recruited via the Internet. Using Structural Equation Modeling analyses it was found that LGB attitudes and LG threat both significantly and partially mediated the relationship between counselor trainees’ experiences and LGB counseling self-efficacy such that, for trainees’ with positive attitudes and lower LG threat, more experiences predicted higher LGB
counseling self-efficacy. Sexual identity exploration and commitment, however, did not predict LGB counseling self-efficacy.

The mimic model indicated that counselor trainees’ sexual orientation identities were a significant predictor of LGB counseling self-efficacy. It was also discovered that trainees’ experiences and LG threat remained significant predictors of self-efficacy while LGB attitudes did not. Finally, it was found that non-heterosexual trainees endorsed higher efficacy as compared to heterosexual trainees. A post-hoc analysis was conducted to determine whether sexual identity exploration and sexual identity commitment differentially impacted LGB counseling self-efficacy. Results suggested that sexual identity exploration fully mediated the relationship between counselor trainees’ experiences and self-efficacy. Yet, sexual identity commitment did not significantly impact self-efficacy.

The findings from this investigation reveal the importance of counselor training and clinical experience on LGB counseling self-efficacy, as well as the importance of exploring barriers on LGB counseling self-efficacy. This study’s strengths, limitations, contribution to research, training, and practice are discussed, as are suggestions for future research.