

EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ ADOLESCENTS AND THEIR PARENTS WITH  
SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation

by

CAROL ANNE LISE VELA

BA, St. Mary's University, 1989  
MS, Texas A&M University-Kingsville, 2000

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR of PHILOSOPHY

in

COUNSELOR EDUCATION

Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi  
Corpus Christi, Texas

December 2015

© Carol Annelise Vela

All Rights Reserved

December 2015

EXPERIENCES OF LGBTQ ADOLSCENTS AND THEIR PARENTS WITH THE  
SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELOR: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

A Dissertation

by

CAROL ANNELISE VELA

This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of  
Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi and is hereby approved.

Marvarene Oliver, EdD  
Chair

Mary Fernandez, PhD  
Co-Chair

Richard Ricard, PhD  
Committee Member

David Leo, PhD  
Graduate Faculty Representative

December 2015

## ABSTRACT

School counselors are professionally and ethically obligated to serve students who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) however, there is limited research and thus limited resources to guide them in approaching the issues. The purpose of the study was to identify the meaning behind the lived experiences of LGBTQ students and parents of LGBTQ students while working with their school counselors. The lived experiences of school counselors working with LGBTQ students and their parents were also studied.

A phenomenological inquiry was conducted to explore the lived experiences of participants. Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with four LGBTQ students, three parents of LGBTQ students, and three school counselors. Additionally, five school counselors participated in a focus group. The researcher used in vivo coding methods to highlight significant units of meaning in the transcripts from interviews and the focus groups.

The researcher scrutinized these statements and developed clusters of meaning into themes: acceptance, experience of coming out, being open with others, being comfortable, education and training, support and challenges, and needing to talk. The study findings showed LGBTQ students needed both familial and school support to thrive in a typical scholastic environment. Parents sought school counselors for mainly academic reasons and did not expect assistance with personal and social issues. Some school counselors recognized LGBTQ issues were developing as early as middle school.

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning students can utilize the school counselor as a resource to help with various issues. Parents of LGBTQ children can utilize the school counselor when looking for support in accepting their child. The school counselors, following the American School Counselor Association's (ASCA) model of competencies, can be

a resource for LGBTQ students by: introducing group support like Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA), facilitating group counseling, helping students come out to family and friends, monitoring student academic success, as well as counsel students on developing healthy relationships. Further research could address the need for LGBTQ resources as well as training for staff in middle schools and possibly in elementary schools.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation first to my parents, Rodolfo and Josephine Vela, especially my mother, who instilled in me the love of learning, the understanding of getting an education, and what that accomplishment can bring to one's life. Even though she is not here physically, there were many times when I was struggling, I could hear her voice telling me, "You can do this."

Second, to my family, (my brothers, sisters-in-law, nieces, and nephews) thank you for the prayers, love, encouragement, and the inspiration to continue my dream. My goal was not only to accomplish this degree, but to also set an example for the family and encourage all of you to go for what life has to offer. For the little Velas, know that anything you set your mind to can be accomplished if you want it bad enough.

Third, to my roommates, friends, and co-workers, for their constant support, listening ears, late night dinners, sounding boards, shoulders to lean on, encouragement, and love that kept me on the path to accomplish my dream, and your dreams for me. I could not have done this without you all.

Finally, to Louie, you are the reason this happened. When I needed a reality check, you were there. For the countless favors, the companionship, and support you have given me over the years, especially during the hardest parts of life. We endured those times . . . and with your help, I also endured this process.

My favorite scripture is Jeremiah 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." I thank God every day for the blessings in my life. Without Him, none of this would have been possible.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Being a school counselor has fulfilled me in so many ways that I wanted to share that passion with others. I have to thank Dr. Della Berlanga who called me and convinced me to apply for the Doctoral program in Counselor Education at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. Her encouragement throughout the years led me to my dream of teaching at the college level. A few years later, I became her volunteer TA in the fall of 2010. I was able to share my experiences with the students who were taking Developmental School Counseling. That experience solidified my dream of becoming a college professor. I now instruct master students on becoming great school counselors with Lamar University.

I want to thank my original dissertation committee: Dr. Kaye Nelson, Dr. Manuel Zamarripa, Dr. Mary Holt, Dr. Patricia Olenick, and Dr. Raul Presas, who listened to my proposal and agreed that I had something worth researching. I also need to thank Parents and Friends of Lesbian and Gays of Corpus Christi and Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi's Gay Straight Alliance, who let me present my study at their meetings, and gave me the feedback I needed to continue my research. I thank the volunteers who took the time to share their stories and experiences with me. Your voices gave life to this study.

A huge thank you to my current dissertation committee chairs, Dr. Marvarene Oliver and Dr. Mary Fernandez, for the countless hours of time, your energy, your attention to detail, and for the constant encouragement which kept me pushing through the process and seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. You both challenged my every thought and expression, and because of that I am a better counselor, writer, and educator. This gratitude extends to my current committee members of Dr. J. Richard Ricard and Dr. David Leo for assisting me through this endeavor and providing valuable feedback through this process.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	v
DEDICATION.....	vii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	viii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	ix
CHAPTER I .....	1
Introduction .....	1
Changing Clinical Definition.....	2
Lack of Training .....	3
Schools Creating Supportive and Safe Environments .....	5
Statement of the Problem .....	6
Purpose of the Study .....	8
Research Questions .....	9
Significance of the Study .....	9
Description and Source of Participants .....	10
Methods and Procedures .....	10
Data Collection and Analysis .....	11
Trustworthiness .....	12
Limitations .....	12
Definition of Terms.....	13
CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	15
Introduction .....	15
Historic Diagnostic Notions about LGBTQ Individuals .....	15
Demographic Density of LGBTQ Population .....	17
Prejudicial Beliefs and Hostile Behaviors Directed at Individuals in LGBTQ Community ....	18
Homophobia .....	18
Aggression and Bullying .....	19
Indirect Bullying.....	21
Intersectionality of Oppressive Factors .....	22
Common Problems of LGBTQ Youth .....	24



Issues in Identity Development of LGBTQ Individuals.....	24
Harmful Dishonesty and Isolation .....	26
Suicidal Ideation .....	27
Role of the Family.....	29
School Climate and Safety Issues of LGBTQ students.....	31
Bullying in schools .....	32
Academic Performance and Truancy .....	33
Homophobia in the Schools.....	33
Legal Issues in Schools.....	35
School Counselor Competence in Working with LGBTQ Students .....	36
Advocating for LGBTQ Youth and Community .....	38
Family Advocates .....	38
Teachers and Staff Advocates .....	40
Counselor Advocates .....	41
Community Advocates .....	42
Training School Staff .....	43
Workshops Addressing Equality .....	44
Positive Role Models .....	46
Summary .....	47
CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY .....	48
Introduction .....	48
Research Questions .....	48
Research Design.....	48
Role of the Researcher .....	49
Lens of the Researcher .....	50
Population and Sample.....	52
Data Collection.....	54
Data Analysis .....	58
Trustworthiness .....	59
Summary .....	60
CHAPTER IV: RESULTS.....	62

Introduction .....	62
Acceptance .....	62
Students' Acceptance of Self.....	62
Parents' Acceptance of their Children.....	64
Counselors' Views on Student Acceptance.....	65
Experience of Coming Out.....	66
Students' Experiences with Coming Out.....	66
Parents' Experiences with their Children Coming Out .....	67
Counselors' Experiences with Students Coming Out.....	68
Being Open.....	70
Students' Views of Being Open .....	70
Parents' Views of Being Open .....	71
Counselors' Views of Being Open .....	72
Being Comfortable .....	73
Students Being Comfortable.....	73
Parents' Views of their Children Being Comfortable .....	74
Counselors' Views of Students Being Comfortable.....	74
Education and Training .....	76
Counselors' Views on Education and Training.....	76
Parents' Views on Education and Training.....	81
Students' Views on Education and Training.....	82
Support and Challenges.....	83
Support.....	84
Students' experiences with support .....	84
Challenges .....	88
Needing to Talk.....	94
Students Needing to Talk .....	94
Counselors Letting their Students Talk .....	95
Parents Needing to Talk .....	96
Additions from Counselors .....	97
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION.....	100

Overview of the Study.....	100
Acceptance .....	101
Experience of Coming Out.....	103
Being Open.....	105
Being Comfortable .....	107
Education and Training .....	108
Support and Challenges.....	110
Needing to Talk .....	112
Additions from Counselors .....	113
Implications and Recommendations .....	114
Limitations of the Study .....	116
Recommendations for Further Research .....	117
Summary .....	117
REFERENCES .....	120
APPENDICES .....	128
APPENDIX A.....	129
APPENDIX B .....	130
APPENDIX C .....	131
APPENDIX D.....	132
APPENDIX E .....	133
APPENDIX F.....	135
APPENDIX G.....	136
APPENDIX H.....	139
APPENDIX I .....	142
APPENDIX J .....	143

## CHAPTER 1

### Introduction

Regardless of ethnicity, culture, or sexual orientation, students in high school deserve to have an environment that is conducive to their learning and development free from micro assaults funded in biased or prejudiced beliefs about their particular lifestyle. Students also deserve to have a comprehensive school guidance/counseling program provided by the school counselor, even if the counselor may or may not have any biases towards students of different sexual orientations. Ethno-cultural groups have found advocates in the schools due to organizations such as the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC), a Mexican American civil rights organization established in 1927 to combat discrimination in schools, housing, the workplace, other parts of society (Valenzuela, 2004), and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). “In 1954, the NAACP legal team, led by Thurgood Marshall, persuaded the Supreme Court to end racial segregation in the nation's public schools, a victory that energized the civil rights movement and transformed America” (Wickham, 2009, p. 11).

Unfortunately, students with issues who identify as LGBTQ have not been supported to the same extent as their counterparts with ethnic issues. “Their [LGBTQ population] identity as a minority group is ignored even though in many schools, as in the broader society, [it] can arguably be said to be the unenviable status of most hated group” (Fontaine, 1998, p. 8). In response to this inequity, the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) informed professional school counselors of their responsibility not to discriminate against any sexual orientation minority students. ASCA’s position on sexual orientation affirms that it is dedicated to the same opportunity and respect for all persons irrespective of sexual orientation (American

School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2010). “However, evidence suggests that most school counseling, psychology, and health professionals lack information, skills, and training to address the health and mental health service needs of GLBQ youth” (Sawyer, Porter, Lehman, Anderson, & Anderson, 2006, p. 40). Due to lack of information available to school professionals and school districts not providing the training necessary to meet the needs of these adolescents, many LGBTQ students continue to go unnoticed with their needs seldom being met.

### **Changing Clinical Definition**

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM)* is used by all medical professionals for diagnosing mental illnesses and for insurance billing. An article posted June 25, 2009, on the Traditional Values Coalition website reported that the American Psychiatric Association (APA) was considering revisions for the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition (DSM-5)* (Traditional Values Coalition, 2009). The Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/ Transgendered/ Questioning (LGBTQ) movement considered whether to advocate for the elimination or redefinition of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) in the *DSM-5*. Gender Identity Disorder is described as strong and persistent cross-gender identification, and requires some degree of discomfort for the diagnosis to be made. After the removal of homosexuality in 1973, GID was introduced in the *DSM-IV*, which was published in 1994. Political action rather than new scientific evidence resulted in the removal of homosexuality (Traditional Values Coalition, 2009). The *DSM-5*, published May 18, 2013, did change the GID disorder to Gender Dysphoria.

In the new edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5)*, released on May 22, the now-defunct diagnosis of gender identity disorder (GID) receives a new name, gender dysphoria, which reflects a new emphasis. Both GID and

gender dysphoria describe a condition in which someone is intensely uncomfortable with their biological gender and strongly identifies with, and wants to be, the opposite gender. (Parry, 2013, para. 2)

### **Lack of Training**

From 1977 to 1993, only three articles on gay and lesbian adolescents were published in *The School Counselor*, the primary professional periodical for school counselors, who have access to most of the population of adolescents. Balkin (2009) reported that counselors' clinical practices with LGBTQ clients can become complicated due to the counselor's religious beliefs. Professional and ethical guidelines require counselors to set aside any preconception such as religious biases that will negatively affect their ability to treat their LGBTQ clients with respect. Counselor preconceived bias along with lack of attention in counselor training programs may keep professional counselors from getting satisfactory preparation for comprehensive and ethical counseling of LGBTQ adolescents (Satcher & Leggett, 2007). Fontaine (1998) reported that only 2% of school counselors attending a Pennsylvania School Counselor Association conference of 101 who returned surveys indicated that "In-service" provided information to them on homosexuality.

Despite legislative action, LGBTQ students face considerable discrimination not only in their communities, but also in their schools. Because of this, school counselors need to be acutely aware and focused on addressing the issues these students face at school. In 2002, George W. Bush signed into legislation the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) of 2001. One major component of the act is that school students and personnel should be free from harassment and abuse. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning youth are targeted more than heterosexual youth when it comes to harassment and violence (Sawyer et al. 2006; Daley,

Solomon, Newman, and Mishna, 2008; Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz 2009; and Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, and Russell, 2011). In addition, they are threatened or injured more by someone with a weapon, found making a suicide plan or attempting suicide more often than their heterosexual counterparts, and considered to be at higher risk of using alcohol and drugs more than their peers. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning students tend to skip school more than their heterosexual peers because of feeling unsafe at school. In response to these issues, Horn, Szalacha, and Drill (2008) have recommended the following:

...the promotion of school safety, such that students and school personnel are free from violent and disruptive acts, including sexual harassment and abuse, and victimization associated with prejudice and intolerance, on school premises, going to and from school, and at school sponsored activities through the creation and maintenance of a school environment that...fosters individual responsibility and respect for the rights of others.  
(p. 792)

Unfortunately, for many LGBTQ students, school is a place where harassment and persecution happen daily. For those students who identify themselves as LGBTQ, Horn et al. (2008) continued:

It is a place where they are subjected to prejudice and intolerance not only from their peers, but also from their teachers, counselors, school administrators, and other adults—the very people whose role it is to ensure that the learning environment is safe and supportive. (p. 792)

School administrators must take responsibility and are accountable for the safety of the educational environment for their students. Those who do not address sexual harassment between students can be sued by students or their parents. Students have sued for harassment that

was not stopped or corrected by the teacher or other school personnel. McFarland and Dupuis (2001) reported the following:

In a landmark decision for educational policy, the U.S. Supreme Court declared that school officials who ignore student-on-student sexual harassment can be held liable for violating the federal civil rights law under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education, 1999*. (McFarland & Dupuis 2001, p. 171)

In addition, school districts and administrators can be sued for revealing a student's sexuality. For instance, a California high school principal was sued for outing a student's sexuality to her parents, which was considered a violation of a student's right to privacy by district court, regardless of the student being openly gay on public school grounds (Lewin, 2005).

### **Schools Creating Supportive and Safe Environments**

In order to overcome barriers within a school system and help raise support for LGBTQ youth, Poland (2010), Cooley (1998) and Bauman and Sachs-Kapp (1998) suggested setting into place strict anti-harassment procedures and providing education for students, staff, and faculty in order to increase mindfulness. Administration that supports student clubs, such as Gay-Straight Alliance (GSA) organizations, will also benefit struggling LGBTQ students. Toomey et al. (2011) reported that GSAs are school-based clubs, led by students, which provide a safe place for LGBTQ students. "In recent decades the number of GSAs in schools has risen dramatically, according to the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN, 2010) there are over 4,000 GSAs registered in the United States" (Toomey et al., 2011, p. 176).

Other than GSAs, school counselors also can help with serving the needs of LGBTQ students. Whitman, Horn, and Boyd (2007) discussed Marinoble's suggestions for a variety of



ways in which school counselors can serve the needs of the LGBTQ youth and help alter the school climate. These recommendations include:

1. Addressing the school policy so that language is inclusive and policy nondiscriminatory
  2. Effecting change in the curriculum so that the histories of LGBTQ individuals are included
  3. Ensuring that language is non-gender specific
  4. Discussing LGBTQ experiences in a positive light
  5. Creating support services for students, teachers, parents, administrators including resource materials
  6. Conferring with parents around sexual and gender identity issues
  7. Providing staff development for faculty and administration so that they, too, can become resources and trainers
  8. Providing educational communities with gender role workshops
  9. Helping educate clergy and police of hate crimes and violence against LGBTQ youth
  10. Disseminating accurate and up-to-date information about healthy sexual behavior
- (p. 147)

#### Statement of the Problem

School counselors are in an advantageous position to address the needs of adolescents who identify as LGBTQ because they have the opportunity to meet with all students in the school. Lack of research to determine how school counselors can help lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning (LGBTQ) students has created a shortage of resources. The problem was school counselors are professionally and ethically obligated to serve students who are

LGBTQ, yet some do not know how to approach the issues. In particular, the voices of LGBTQ students, their parents, and school counselors are missing in the school counseling research literature. In order for school counselors to keep up with the increasing needs of LGBTQ students, more research will need to be available to them.

Media had been considered a resource when school counselors were looking for information concerning LGBTQ population. Whelan (2006) noted that there has been an incorporation of more gay characters in sitcoms within the last 10 years. Fontaine (1998) reported that of the 101 counselors surveyed, 56% reported mass media as a source that provided them with information about homosexuality. In a review of Ron Becker's book titled *Gay TV and Straight America*, Catapano (2007) pointed out that the onset of cable television required the three main networks to change their programming, which was predominately heterosexual. He said:

[Ron Becker]cites statistics supporting his argument claiming that between 1994 and 1997, "40 percent of all prime time network series produced at least one gay themed episode; nineteen network shows debuted with recurring gay characters.'"(3) These changes occurred to a large degree because of the slipping ratings of the three major networks, NBC, ABC, and CBS, due to the rise of cable television. The niche programming of networks like HBO, Showtime, Lifetime, and Bravo provided an opportunity for programming that appealed to significant numbers of viewers who fell outside the mainstream traditional network broadcast audiences. (Catapano, 2007, p. 172)

Television ratings, which were slipping, along with news coverage of LGBTQ civil rights and activism at that same time, encouraged the increase of LGBTQ characters and story lines on television. Catapano (2007) said, "The prevalence of gay-themed programming also occurred at

a time when various issues relating to gay/lesbian civil rights were a regular feature on the nightly news” (p. 173).

The increase of sexual orientation issues in the schools have manifested in my personal experiences as a high school counselor. Individual students have come out during counseling sessions, and parents have called the school and asked me to speak to their child concerning their homosexual behaviors. Teachers have also come to ask how to address homosexual references made in narrative essays and/or symbols related to sexual orientation displayed on work turned in for a grade. Negative attitudes towards homosexuality still exist within the faculty of the schools, even though many counselors and teachers have positive attitudes about working with these students (Satcher & Leggett, 2007). Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning concerns need to be addressed, and school counselors have an obligation to ensure that a comprehensive school counseling program addresses the needs of all students. School personnel need better information and training as well as positive attitudes.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to describe experiences LGBTQ students and their parents had in working with their school counselors as well as the experiences that school counselors had in working with students with LGBTQ sexual orientations and parents of LGBTQ students. This is a phenomenological inquiry about the experiences identified by students who identify as LGBTQ, parents of LGBTQ students, and counselors. An exploration of themes arose from these descriptions. Using individual interviews and email clarification of transcripts, LGBTQ students, parents of LGBTQ students, and school counselors were asked specific questions which guided a conversation focused on self-reported experiences.

As part of the qualitative study, counselors were asked to complete a Demographic Information Sheet (see Appendix D) in order to collect information. Information collected included gender, age, race, political affiliation, frequency of church attendance in a month, and participation in training about gay and lesbian sexual orientations within the past 12 months of the interview. In addition, counselors were asked whether they had worked with people seeking counseling because they were gay, lesbian, or questioning their sexual orientation and whether or not they have a gay or lesbian friend or acquaintance.

### Research Questions

Three research questions informed this study. What are the school counseling experiences of an LGBTQ high school student? What are the experiences of the school counselor while working with students of diverse sexual orientations? What are the experiences of parents of LGBTQ students with the school counselor?

### Significance of the Study

School counselors, teachers, and other school personnel are important when it comes to helping shape the lives of school youth. As the United States continues to incorporate more LGBTQ groups as part of everyday life in the media and now that the Supreme Court passed a law to allow for same-sex marriage across the nation, schools need to address the issues concerning LGBTQ youth. School counselors, teachers, and other school personnel are important when it comes to helping shape the lives of school youth.

There are many ways in which school staff can help, including stopping situations where students are harassing each other, inspiring all students and staff to accept and appreciate the diverse population within a school, and helping to create a safe educational environment in schools. McCabe and Robinson (2008) reported that although a large percentage of

administrators have heard anti-gay slurs in their schools, only one-fifth have been involved in any effort to foster a safer school environment for LGBTQ students. Because of the gap between needs and available resources, more should be done to ensure this population of students feels safe and supported by the schools.

#### Description and Source of Participants

Participants consisted of four student volunteers from the GSA organization on a southwestern college campus, the sons and daughters of parents who attended a Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) organization located in the southwest part of the United States, or college students referred by colleagues. There were also three parent volunteers from the PFLAG organization or from referrals of colleagues and eight high school counselor volunteers who work at schools in the southwest part of Texas.

A prescreening interview determined if participants met criteria for the study. All students self-identified as LGBTQ. Students who were under medication for depression or were seeing a therapist or psychiatrist were not eligible for the study. Each parent identified themselves as a parent of a LGBTQ student. Counselors were selected based on having experience counseling a student of the LGBTQ population. Interviews occurred at convenient locations for both the researcher and interviewee. One interview per participant occurred, lasting from one to two hours each session. A focus group with school counselors took place, which encouraged dialogue and feedback from participants' comments and/or opinions to the questions asked.

#### Methods and Procedures

The researcher contacted the LGBTQ students by first addressing the president of the GSA organization at the university. The researcher asked if she could present her study at their

next meeting and while there, asked for volunteers to contact her. A flyer was distributed at the meeting with the researcher's contact information in order to maintain confidentiality of the participants (see Appendix F). Parent volunteers were contacted by the PFLAG organization. The researcher asked to present information about the study at one of their meetings, and while there, a request for volunteers was made. Contact information of the researcher was distributed by flyer in order to keep confidentiality of those who decided to participate. A request for volunteer school counselor participants was sent by email through a professional counseling association in the southwest part of the US (see Appendix J).

### Data Collection and Analysis

Once the participants were selected, the researcher began each individual interview by reading a short introduction and then asked open-ended questions. The researcher posed additional questions to clarify statements or encourage elaboration. After the initial interview and after sending copies of the transcripts to the interviewees to clarify, verify, and gather any additional information, the second phase of data collection began.

The second phase of the interview process was an open discussion of the subject matter in a focus group format with five school counselors who did not participate in the individual interviews. "Rather than relying on a structured question and answer format, focus groups permit participants to react to one another, providing richer data than might emanate from a single interviewer-subject format" (McCabe & Robinson, 2008, p. 476). This format allowed for a broader response from the school counselors about their experiences with LGBTQ students.

Each interview and the focus group discussion was audio recorded, but the debriefing was not. Recordings of the interviews were transcribed so that participants could clarify their answers in writing and submit any additional comments. Debriefing lasted about 10-25 minutes.

The researcher delivered the audio-recordings to a professional transcriptionist. Once the transcripts were ready, the transcriptionist emailed the finished transcript to the researcher. The researcher read and re-read the transcripts and selected responses in the form of phrases, sentences, and significant ideas in order to identify themes. The data was analyzed using in vivo coding method, which allows the researcher to highlight the participants' own words (Saldana, 2009). Using this process, the researcher coded the responses and inductively derived themes and subthemes.

### Trustworthiness

Three different groups of participants were interviewed in order to understand the experiences of LGBTQ students, parents of LGBTQ youth, and the school counselor working with LGBTQ students. Triangulation of data sources occurred via use of interview data from school counselors, LGBTQ students, and parents. School counselor data also included a focus group with different school counselors. Member checking was done to ensure that individual interviews accurately represented participant voices. Participants who were interviewed were emailed a copy of their interviews to validate or correct the transcription and clarify for understanding and meaning. The researcher used her journal to track observations after the interview process. The transcripts were coded and analyzed bringing forth themes. Because multiple data sources were used in this study, data was deemed trustworthy, balanced, and authentic about the phenomenon under study.

### Limitations

Students were recruited all from the South Central Texas Region, which has a characteristically low frequency of self-identified LGBTQ individuals. This single population pool for students is a limitation of the study. In addition, a diverse ethnic pool of school

counselors was not identified. A broader student population from a wider geographic area may have resulted in different themes. In addition, a more diverse school counselor group may have resulted in different themes. Student participants were not high school age at the time of the interview and thus were recalling experiences, which may have impacted their responses. The counselors interviewed were not asked about their sexual orientation in the demographics portion of the data collection.

### Definition of Terms

The following are terms that will be utilized in this study; they are commonly used terminology in LGBTQ culture.

*LGBTQ*: This acronym refers to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning individuals (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Bisexual*: A person who is attracted to both people of their own gender and another gender (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Coming Out*: A person who acknowledges one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity to other people (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Gay*: A person who is attracted primarily to members of the same sex (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Gender identity*: The sense of being male, female, genderqueer, agender, etc. (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Heterosexual*: A person who is only attracted to members of the opposite sex (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Homophobia*: A range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality or people who are identified or perceived as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) (University of



Michigan, 2015).

*Homosexual:* A clinical term for people who are attracted to members of the same sex (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Lesbian:* A woman who is primarily attracted to other women. (University of Michigan, 2015)

*Questioning:* For some, the process of exploring and discovering one's own sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Sexual orientation:* The type of sexual, romantic, and/or physical attraction someone feels toward others (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Transgender:* people who do not identify with their assigned gender at birth or the binary gender system (University of Michigan, 2015).

*Transsexual:* A person whose gender identity is different from their biological sex, this includes medical treatments to change their biological sex (University of Michigan, 2015).

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Introduction

This chapter reviews literature that supports the explanation of the diverse issues concerning LGTBQ students and the challenges they face in high school, as well as what their parents have endured and what the school counselors have experienced in a school setting. As stated in chapter 1, the purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of three groups: LGBTQ students, the parents of LGBTQ students, and school counselors, as they relate to each other while dealing with the concerns of the LGBTQ population in a high school setting. The review begins with a brief background of changes that have taken place concerning the LGBTQ population, different types of bullying, intrinsic problems of LGBTQ youth, school climate, counselor education, and ways of how different groups advocate for LGBTQ youth and community. Through the process of summarizing and synthesizing the related literature, the researcher shows the link between the needs of the LGBTQ students and their parents in a school setting and what the school counselors could do to help address those needs.

#### **Historic Diagnostic Notions about LGBTQ Individuals**

The *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of the American Psychiatric Association (DSM; APA)*, whose origin dates back to 1840, classified homosexuality as a mental disorder in the APA's DSM-I in the 1950s. "The DSM-I included homosexuality as a form of 'sociopathic personality disturbance.' The DSM-II was revised to change homosexuality from a personality disturbance to a sexual orientation disturbance in 1968" (Woolf & MacCartney, 2014, p. 167). Viewing homosexuality as a mental illness was not controversial at that time because it coincided with traditional social attitudes; however around 1970, LGBTQ activists challenged

the DSM classification. Dr. John E. Freyer, a gay psychiatrist, discussed the lack of investigative evidence to support such a prejudiced diagnosis and how the diagnosis has harmed his clients. This led the Nomenclature Committee of the APA to recommend that homosexuality be eliminated from the DSM-III's list of disorders, in December 1973 (Woolf & MacCartney, 2014). Homosexuality diagnosis continued to be discussed until it was official removed from the DSM-III-R in 1987 (APA, 1987).

The DSM continued to address changes in homosexuality and transgendered diagnoses. "Transgendered individuals were diagnosed as Gender Identity Disorder in the DSM-IV, in 1994, which has now been changed to Gender Dysphoria in the DSM-V in 2013" (Woolf & MacCartney, 2014, p. 167). Even though the APA removed homosexuality out of abnormal psychology in the 1970's, issues concerning the LGBTQ population continue to be debated.

People have become more active in getting government to uphold laws concerning rights for all, regardless of sexual orientation. "Laws and institutional regulations preclude homosexuals' full participation in society—for example marriage, tax exemptions, health benefits for domestic partners, same-sex couples attendance at school proms" (Fontaine, 1998, p. 8). Cooley (1998) also supported Fontaine's reports by stating that homosexuals were still getting jail time for privately practicing sexual acts, as well as being excluded from heterosexual rights such as: medical decisions of one's partner and public and private employment opportunities. When people in society have issues with the LGBTQ population, schools follow the model that is placed in front of them, therefore same-sex dates to proms and traditional events had been denied as well.

## Demographic Density of LGBTQ Population

Within the last 20 years, Ginsberg (1998), McFarland and Dupis (2001), Luke and Goodrich (2012) reported the LGBTQ population in the US ranged from 2%-10%. In the first large-scale government survey measuring Americans' sexual orientation, the Centers for disease Control and Prevention reported that less than 3% of the U.S. population identified themselves as gay, lesbian or bisexual (Somashekhar, 2014). Using the government's 3% finding, one can estimate a national gay/lesbian population of less than 7.5 million people. The student LGBTQ population, according to the *Digest of Educational Statistics* was estimated at 2.6 million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1995). In 2010, the U.S. Census Bureau released new statistics on same-sex married couples and unmarried partner households. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010) showed there were close to 132 thousand same-sex married couples' households and almost 515 thousand same-sex unmarried partner households in the U.S. The 2010 American Community Survey (ACS) estimated there were 152 thousand same-sex married couples and close to 441 thousand same-sex unmarried partners living in the U.S., (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2010). The Williams Institute (2014) estimated that approximately 431 thousand LGBT workers live in Texas. These statistics show that large groups of LGBTQ people are a part of the American population and deserve the same rights as everyone else.

Historically, LGBTQ population has been denied rights for which other Americans are eligible. The most famous among these rights is the right to marry. The *Defense of Marriage Act*, which was recently overturned by the U.S. Supreme Court (Mustanski, Birkett, Greene, Hatzenbuehler, & Newcomb, 2014) denied same-sex couples the privileges available to heterosexual couples. Advocates for the traditional marriage institution (Mutanski et al., 2014) define marriage as a legal union between one man and one woman. Because of this definition,

same-sex couples have been denied rights and privileges that are accessible to heterosexual couples (Mutanski et al., 2014). As recently as May 2015, about 13 states did not allow same-sex marriages. “Other laws and policies that also affect the lives of LGB individuals include hate crimes protections, employment non-discrimination, same-sex adoption, immigration equality, and anti-bullying” (Mutanski et al., 2014, p. 219). Recently, laws such as Indiana’s SB 101, has LGBTQ activists upset.

Marriage Equality USA is deeply disturbed by Indiana’s enactment of SB 101, legislation that enables individuals, businesses, and other organizations to refuse to serve LGBT people and indeed any person simply based on what an individual or business claims is their religious view.” (Marriage Equality USA, 2015, para. 1)

On June 26, 2015, the US Supreme Court, on a 5-4 vote, declared that all 50 states will issues marriage licenses to same sex couples. Sherman (2015) said “The Supreme Court declared Friday that same-sex couples have a right to marry anywhere in the United States, a historic culmination of decades of litigation over gay marriage and gay rights generally” (p. 1). Online dictionaries have now included the definition of marriage as: a) the relationship that exists between a husband and a wife, b) a similar relationship between people of the same sex, c) a ceremony in which two people are married to each other (<http://www.Merriam-Webster.com>, 2015).

## Prejudicial Beliefs and Hostile Behaviors Directed at Individuals in LGBTQ Community

### **Homophobia**

Social issues and a misunderstanding of homosexuality have led to hate crimes against the LGBTQ population. Herek (1986) referred to homophobia as a term meaning the fear and/or

hatred of homosexuality or alleged homosexuality. Herek (1986) described homophobia in terms of the four functions that homophobic attitudes fulfill:

1. Negative attitudes serve an experiential schematic function based on past unfavorable contact with homosexuals.
2. Social-expressive function means an individual may express negative attitudes towards gay and lesbian people to win approval from significant others, especially peers.
3. Value-expressive function- negative attitudes towards gay and lesbian people are expressions of important personal values such as certain religious ideologies.
4. Defensive function- where gay and lesbian people are seen as legitimate targets for attack, so the individual avoids personal anxieties and confusion related to his or her own sexuality. (p. 566)

Mutanski, et al. (2014) reported that there were two related ideas. The first is sexual prejudice, and the second is compulsory heterosexuality. "Sexual prejudice refers to negative societal attitudes toward individuals, who are members of a sexual-minority group, whereas compulsory heterosexuality refers to the pervasive social norm that heterosexuality is laudable, normative, and prescriptive" (Mutanski et. al, 2014, p. 219). Until society becomes more accepting of LGBTQ persons, schools will be more accepting of LGBTQ students. Homophobia has been reduced considerably with more exposure of LGBTQ persons in society due to political marches, activists, and homosexual characters in television sitcoms and movies.

### **Aggression and Bullying**

On a national level, recent suicides of homosexual or thought-to-be homosexual students, subjected to bullying, led Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) and Ad Council to launch a new ad campaign across the U.S. in 2008, called thinkb4youspeak. GLSEN

is the nation's largest homosexual advocacy group focused entirely on reaching public school students as young as kindergarten age. Although bullying affects all people for different reasons, gay youth end up with much more bullying attacks than other youth. Cooley (1998) revealed that a major stressor for LGBTQ youth is verbal and physical abuse from their peers. Gay and lesbian adolescents receive painful remarks and name calling more than any other minority group. Fontaine (1998) agreed with Cooley (1998) that LGBTQ youth reported that name calling was the most predominant abuse, as well as verbal harassment, which was reported more frequently than any fears of physical abuse. Out of fear of being labeled as homosexual and thus subjecting themselves to possible verbal and physical abuse, both heterosexuals and gays avoid acting different from what society calls normal (Fontaine, 1998). Students tend to be victims of crime generally, but LGBT students tend to be victims at a much higher percentage. It was reported that 25% of LGBTQ students are victims of crime, while less than half of that, 10% of the general population of students, are crime victims (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001).

Students who do not play the traditional role of gender and try to express who they feel they are on the inside find themselves at risk of being bullied by homophobic peers.

Homophobia is having an equalizing effect on LGBTQ youth, in that 'any kid who moves outside of acceptable gender norms is setting themselves up for a fall.' Crucially stepping out of gender norms, that is, the expression of femininity by gay/bisexual (male) youth and the expression of masculinity by lesbian/bisexual (female) youth were often described by key informants as "stereotypically gay" behavior. (Daley et al., 2008, p. 15) LGBTQ youth are also more likely to be victimized by antigay prejudices events than adults are (Daley et al., 2008). Youth who are more effeminate and have certain pitched voices or dress in a particular way, tend to be bullied more. "Similarly, all key informants acknowledged the

increased risk of bullying for lesbian youth who are presented as masculine or “butch:” if you’re a masculine dyke and a young woman, the potential for you to be bullied is higher” (Daley et al., 2008, p. 15). Transgender female youth were identified by researchers as being the most at risk for discrimination by their peers, than lesbian, bisexual, and transgender male youth. Even though LGBTQ students get teased twice as much as youth from other differentiated groups, those who are not sure about their sexual orientation tend to get teased the most out of all youth groups. Espelage et al. (2008) reported that youths teased and victimized sexually-questioning students more than heterosexual students and LGBT identified students.

Daley et al. (2008) reported that the effects of bullying cause students to feel less accepted by their peers, which caused social problems. Academic, social, emotional, and physical health can all be affected by acts of bullying. Depression is a huge factor when it comes to bullied children. Children who are bullied are more insecure and withdrawn, and have more internalizing problems, such as anxiety, depression and lower sense of school belonging, compared to their non-bullied peers (Daley et al., 2008; Espelage et al., 2008; Luke & Goodrich, 2012). Once students begin to feel like they are the focus of bullying, more occurrences begin to happen due to anxiousness and feelings of depression and isolation in their own schools.

### **Indirect Bullying**

Verbal and physical assaults are not the only ways that LGBT youth feel bullied. There are many indirect ways to make a person in this population feel ostracized:

Gay youth are the victims of gossip, intentional exclusion, and social isolation. Key informants’ articulation of the indirect bullying of gay youth is particularly important as it suggests that their experiences of bullying are not limited to physical assaults, as are typically reported. (Daley et al., 2008, p. 19)



Even though the behavior is deemed as indirect, the LGBTQ youth feel the effects directly.

In some situations, LGBTQ youth seem to be accepted by some student groups, but in reality they are used for comedic jokes or sexual entertainment. “Key informants described the eroticization of lesbian sexuality by straight males as a preferred form of sexual harassment, as they recall hearing comments like: “You and your girlfriend can make out in front of me.” Here sex between women is “entertainment” for a male audience-a predictable response within a patriarchal society” (Daley et al., 2008, p. 20). Although the LGBTQ youth are included, it is not a form of acceptance. Educators, social workers, social service workers, and parents can find important resources that describe different studies focusing on victimization of LGBTQ youth.

### **Intersectionality of Oppressive Factors**

Many students who identify as LGBTQ end up with an intersectionality of several oppressive factors if they are also an ethnic minority or low socio economic status. Some youth are victimized for sexual orientation and also for ethnicity. Fontaine (1998) reported higher levels of hostility toward LGBTQ youth than toward ethno-cultural minorities, which surfaced from a survey taken by junior and senior high school students in the state of New York. As a result, researchers find it difficult to separate the experiences among LGBTQ youth when it comes to intersections of sexual orientation and other characteristics established by gender, ethnicity, being new to town, low socio economic factors or citizenship status (Daley et al., 2008).

Intersections of ethnicity and gender or of sexuality and nation can be forms of intersecting oppressions. “Intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type and that all oppressions work together in producing injustice” (Daley et al., 2008, p.12). Sometimes students who do identify with having intersectionality factors are not

sure why they are being bullied. When an LGBTQ youth has both oppressive factors of ethnicity and sexual orientation, sometimes their understanding of the motives of the individuals, who bullied them, gets confused.

Whitfield, Walls, Langenderfer-Magruder, and Clark (2014) found further evidence that ethnic minorities are more likely to report discrimination, even among a sample of LGBTQ individuals. Even though harassment of LGBTQ students with intersecting factors is higher because of sexual orientation as opposed to ethnicity, LGBTQ youth who are also minorities because of ethnicity are bullied more than other LGBTQ students:

All key informants articulated concerns that bullying for queer youth of color has a ‘lot stronger repercussions than it does for a lesbian or gay white, middle class person.’ This was seen largely as a result of the intersecting oppressions associated with homophobia and racism, contributing to an increased prevalence of bullying. (Daley et al., 2008, p. 20)

Fontaine (1998) reported that a vast white representation of LGBTQ communities, compared with the main heterosexual images of a racial community, helps the queer youth of color to articulate their struggle. They belong to both communities, yet their affiliation in each remains challenging. Daley et al. (2008) reported that past bullying experiences associated with ethnicity helped LGBTQ youth prepare for any bullying associated with sexual orientation.

An added benefit in addressing intersectionalities on an individual level is that it may more effectively empower youth to develop self-awareness, to create alliances with other youth who have experienced peer victimization, and to draw on their full strengths and resources in dealing with bullying. For example, some Black queer youth may draw strength from past experiences of dealing with racism, which may benefit them in dealing

with bullying they deem as homophobic, as well as helping them to serve as a resource for other queer youth. (Daley et al., 2008, p. 26)

### Common Problems of LGBTQ Youth

Besides getting harassed and bullied, gay youth already have a foundation of intrinsic problems they must cope with. Poor self-esteem, depression, and self-doubt are the three most common problems of homosexual students (Cooley, 1998; Daley et al., 2008; Espelage et al., 2008; Fontaine, 1998). These problems lead to the issues with identity, isolation, and suicide (Cooley, 1998; Savin-Williams, 1994; Valenti and Campbell, 2009). Along with those obstacles is a second cluster of presenting problems, such as fear of revealing sexual orientation to friends and family and fear of rejection by family (Hidalgo, Peterson, and Woodman, 1985). Just the fear of family and friends' reaction to the news that someone identifies as LGBTQ, may cause some LGBTQ people not come out. The need for privacy, maintained by LGBTQ students, requires an incredible amount of psychic energy (Fontaine, 1998).

### Issues in Identity Development of LGBTQ Individuals

Identity formation is the most important developmental task of any adolescent. McAnarney (1985) reported that the ultimate goal of adolescence is the development of a secure identity, a positive sense of self, and the capability to unite with another in a truly intimate relationship, as cited by Espelage et al., (2008). Randowsky and Siegal (1997) reported that all individuals must master particular developmental tasks during their adolescent years in order to lead a useful, mentally sound, and healthy life. They said, "These tasks include: adjusting to the physical and emotional changes of puberty, establishing effective social and working relationships with peers, achieving independence from primary caretakers, preparing for a vocation, and moving toward a sense of values and definable identity" (p. 191).

Researchers concerned with sexual minority identification and development presented their own stages of LGBTQ identity development. In Cass's classic theory and research on homosexual identity formation as cited in Greene and Britton (2012) sexual minority identity progresses through six stages: 1) identity confusion, 2) identity comparison, 3) identity tolerance, 4) identity acceptance, 5) identity pride, and 6) identity synthesis (p. 188).

In 1988, Troiden, developed a four stage model for the attainment of a healthy gay/lesbian identity:

Stage 1: Sensitization- generalized feelings of marginality, perceptions of being different from same sex peers. One learns the social identity of homosexuality.

Stage 2: Identity Confusion- homosexuality is personalized at this stage. Same sex attractions become apparent to the adolescent. One continues to observe the many sources of identity confusion from social condemnation to misinformation regarding homosexuality.

Stage 3: Identity Assumption- homosexual identity is established and shared with others. The youth achieves self-definition as homosexual, associates with other homosexuals, and experiments sexually.

Stage 4: Commitment- the adolescent adopts a new way of life. This is indicated by same-sex love relationships and stigma-management strategies. (p. 112)

These stages develop over a prolonged period of time. Ten years later, Cooley (1998) reported that not all of Troiden's four stages are successfully completed by all homosexual individuals and that connections with peers and acceptance are vital to the identity formation process.

According to Cooley (1998), self-esteem, a sense of identity, and social skills are what general adolescent development includes. Hollander (2000) also did not agree with Troiden's four stages.

He argued that stiff social expectations about sexual identity development may cause more challenges in the experiences of these LGBTQ youths in schools and communities. Even though researchers recognize that there are stages to identity formation including a social aspect that is vital, but there is no consensus on what the stages are or how long it takes to process through them.

### **Harmful Dishonesty and Isolation**

For most LGBTQ adolescents, sexual orientation is not obvious to others. Those who can pass for being heterosexual will generally do so because the rewards for being heterosexual are so great. Researchers find this type of dishonesty harmful, “This deception distorts almost all relationships the adolescent may attempt to develop or maintain and create an increasing sense of isolation” (Feinstein & Looney, 1982, p. 58). Savin-Williams (1994), Cooley (1998), and Valenti and Campbell (2009) viewed LGBTQ adolescents in the typical high school of today as the loneliest and most isolated people.

GSA advisors are well-informed of LGBTQ youth’s high risk for negative experience and results:

These [GSA] advisors were familiar with the specific challenges that LGBT youth face in coming out, such as experiencing isolation and harassment at higher levels than heterosexual youth, through reading research literature, talking to kids, and personal experience of growing up gay in a heterosexual world. (Valenti & Campbell, 2009, p. 235)

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning adolescents may either isolate themselves for fear of rejection or deny their sexual orientation, while their heterosexual peers incessantly

discuss their world of relationships and exploration. Cooley (1998) noted that disguising one's sexual identity builds protective walls and is draining emotionally.

### **Suicidal Ideation**

One of the biggest problems associated with the LGBTQ youth community is suicide. A national study of LGBTQ youth in middle school and high school found that students who identified as LGBTQ were more than twice as likely to have attempted suicide as their heterosexual peers (Russell and Joyner, 2001). Grossman and D'Augelli (2007) reported that from their survey of 55 transgendered students, 25% said they attempted suicide.

Counselors come across LGBTQ students who have attempted suicide or have had suicidal thoughts. "Thirty seven percent of counselors reported that the gay and lesbian youths they had seen had either made suicidal attempts or contemplated suicide" (Fontaine, 1998, p. 14). Over one third of counselors have had situations with students needing help with acceptance of their sexual orientation. Cooley (1998) reported that shame is a big hindrance in one's perception of self as a gay youth. "Shame becomes an issue arising from the individual's perception of his or her attributes as being repulsive... no one can love them because being gay is wrong and sick. Some even feel that it may be better to die" (Cooley, 1998, p. 31). People's perception of self and true acceptance from others could change feelings of shame and create a healthier state of mind.

There are many factors mentioned in the research that can attribute to suicidal thoughts or attempts. Cooley (1998) reported that 30% of gay youth identified as a trigger both external and internal factors causing agonizing confusion regarding their homosexual identity. Cooley (1998) identified a group of risk factors for gay and lesbian adolescent suicide which included: (a)

disclosure of sexual identity at an early age, (b) low self-esteem, (c) running away, (d) substance abuse, (e) prostitution, (f) depression, and (g) gender behavior (p. 31).

Not all researchers reported large percentages of LGBT students wanting to commit suicide. Espelage et al. (2008) said that depression associated with sexual orientation identified as homosexual accounted for only 2% of those who answered his survey; more depression-suicidal feelings and greater use of alcohol-marijuana was reported by questioning students than the heterosexuals or the LGBT groups. Espelage et al. (2008) also reported that LGBT adolescents are not more depressed or suicidal than heterosexuals, but the researchers did report more use of drugs and alcohol. A study by Robinson and Espelage (2011) found “Sexual minority youth who are the targets of homophobic language and who do not have supports in place from their families, peers, or schools are at the greatest risk for acting on their suicidal thoughts” (p. 326).

Sadowski (2013) wrote about a student he interviewed who felt she had no one to confide in. “Lindsey became a chronic cutter. She felt she ‘couldn’t talk to anybody.’ The cutting, she said, had been a way “to show the pain that I was feeling on the inside, on the outside, to make it kind of go away” (Sadowski, 2013, p. 29). The student used cutting as a way to escape the intrinsic feelings of pain. Then, during the student’s 8th grade year, the cutting escalated to a suicide attempt, after which she finally came out as lesbian to her family and friends.

As of recent, Mutanski et al. (2014) reported that societal factors can affect LGBTQ youths mental stability. “LGB youths who reside in counties that have less protective social environments for sexual minorities are more likely to attempt suicide and to use tobacco than are LGB youths who reside in more protective environments” (Mutanski et al., 2014, p. 219). Overall, researchers report that more supportive environments can help with youth’s acceptance

of self. Ryan, Russell, Heubner, Diaz, & Sanchez (2010) indicated that LGBTQ children who had familial support were less likely to attempt suicide. “Participants who had low family acceptance as adolescents were more than three times as likely to report both suicidal ideation and suicide attempts compared with those who reported high levels of family acceptance” (p. 210). Higher levels of acceptance from family and peers can help LGBTQ youth be happier and mentally healthier.

### Role of the Family

Some LGBTQ teens do not have supportive family members when they come out. Some families look for help in understanding the LGBTQ member of the family. Luckily there are resources for those practitioners who help families come to terms with their children who are identifying as LGBTQ. In a resource guide developed for practitioners to help families with LGBTQ children, from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) Ryan (2014) said:

The overall objective in helping families learn to support their LGBTQ children is not to change their values or deeply-held beliefs. Instead, practitioners should aim to meet parents, families and caregivers ‘where they are,’ to build an alliance to support their LGBT children, and to help them understand that family reactions that are experienced as rejection by their LGBT child contribute to serious health concerns and inhibit their child’s development and well-being. (Ryan, 2014, p. 2)

An article published in the *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services* identified the following stages when an LGBTQ person comes out to one or both parents. These stages are: (a) out to self, (b) out to parent(s), (c) relational tension, (d) relational adjustment, and (e) evolving relational identity. The researchers interviewed both the LGBTQ person and their parent in this



study. The researchers said, “Dyad members advance through these phases together, comprising a relational process marked by shared experiences, including some that are specific to either the parent or child” (Tyler, 2015, p. 25). A parent’s experience in this process, whether individual or shared, is just as important as the child’s experience of coming out to their parent (Tyler, 2015).

Borhek (1988) stated that there is significant stress and concern associated with two basic questions: “Should I come out to my parents? And if so, how should I do it?” (p. 125). School personnel are finding themselves having to discuss both positive and negative scenarios to students who are thinking of disclosing their sexual orientation to their families. “School counselors are encouraged to fully explore with their clients, the possible repercussions of coming-out to their family. Some may need to be fully self-sufficient before taking the risk” (Cooley, 1998, p. 33). Young people who do not have some type of support when developing their identity and their fit in this world will find it difficult to get through everyday life. “Youth are attempting to develop their identities without the support of various social systems including: family, peers, and schools” (Espelage et al., 2008, p. 203). Parental rejection of the LGBTQ youth, at first, is the typical outcome. When parents reject their children because they have come-out to them, LGBTQ adolescents behave negatively and very few find themselves leading successful lives. This is why it is so important for the school counselor to discuss with LGBTQ youth different possible outcomes and consequences of coming out to their parents, in order to help foster resources and support in case there is a need.

Espelage et al. (2008), wanted to know how important social support was to the developing LGBTQ adolescent. Their study was done to seek to comprehend parental communication support and positive school climate. They wanted to know to what degree these two types of important social support systems influenced the emotional effects of students who

are questioning their sexuality and those who are LGBT. They also revealed that there is significantly less support from the parents of sexually “questioning” students in comparison to both the heterosexuals and LGBT groups (Espelage et al., 2008). This finding leads this researcher to believe that questioning youth’s issues are not considered as important and may be ignored during the developmental stage of discovering self-identity.

In 2010, Ryan et al. found families who are accepting of their LGBTQ children, considerably reduced negative risks and the adult children experience healthier lives. Additionally, parents who advocate for their abused LGBTQ children and who show support of their children’s gender expression help protect them against depression, substance abuse, suicidal thoughts, and suicide attempts in early adulthood. Young adults who reported high levels of family acceptance scored higher on all three measures of positive adjustment and health: self-esteem, social support, and general health (Ryan et al., 2010).

#### School Climate and Safety Issues of LGBTQ students

Schools have many issues to address concerning academics, test scores, attendance, drop-outs, gang activity, and school shootings. Along with those issues, schools are making sure that all the different types of personalities that encompass a public school are represented safely and each group’s issues are addressed with equal importance. Given the high at risk status of LGBTQ students, there is a significant need of support from schools, especially from school counselors. However, most often schools provide little support of LGBT students. Teachers more frequently present LGBTQ issues in a negative manner when discussed or avoid the topic of homosexuality in their classrooms altogether, even though one-third of the students in that classroom could be affected in some way by these issues (Fontaine, 1998). Mutanski et al. (2014) reported that a school climate must allow all students to feel valued, respected, and accepted regardless of their

sexual orientation in order for youths to be free of sexual-orientation health disparities. This section will discuss the issues the LGBTQ youth experience in schools, such as bullying, how that relates to academic performance, homophobia in school staff, and what teachers, counselors and administrators have experienced as school laws have changed over time.

### **Bullying in schools**

Many of the attacks on LGBTQ youth are happening in school causing an unsafe situation for most students in this group. Gay-bashing (name calling) and physical attacks are two of the forms of violence used against the LGBTQ population in schools. Poor school performance, truancy, and dropping out of school are the common results for the victims after they have endured this type of bullying (Cooley, 1998). School performance and disciplinary issues of LGBT youth have been studied to determine if bullying is a direct factor in student success.

In Fontaine's (1998) study, counselors also reported knowing of verbal and physical harassment of gay youth at their schools. Twenty six percent of elementary school counselors reported awareness of almost 20 incidents concerning harassment: name calling, teasing, ridicule, and exclusion by fellow students were the forms of harassment at the elementary school level. Other accounts were more severe forms, such as physical intimidation, pushing, hitting and shoving, (Fontaine, 1998).

Even though direct bullying, such as physical and verbal abuse (e.g. hitting, shoving, name calling, etc.), is more readily addressed by school officials, indirect bullying (e.g. exclusion, spreading rumors, etc.) of LGBTQ youth may be disregarded or go unnoticed. School administrators do not take indirect bullying as serious as direct bullying since it doesn't seem as

important to address in a school setting, (Daley et. al, 2008). New forms of direct and/or indirect bullying are developing in the schools including cyber bullying (Bidell, 2012).

### **Academic Performance and Truancy**

Eighty percent of LGBTQ adolescents in schools reported decreasing academic performance and other school-related problems (Fontaine, 1998). Problems related to school success are rampant in the LGBT youth community. Truancy and dropping out of school are two factors that lead researchers to use as evidence that LGBTQ youth are a problematic population (Cooley, 1998). Bauman and Sachs-Kapp (1998) stated teens are targets for peer pressure, which cause a prejudiced and often unreceptive position towards their LGBTQ classmates. A peer's suspicion of students who could be homosexual may be sufficient for exclusion. This is why coming out at school is sometimes difficult, for fear of not being accepted by their peers. Non-acceptance leads to low self-esteem which fosters attitudes of not caring if they are successful or not in school.

### **Homophobia in the Schools**

About twenty five years ago, it was reported that school counselors knew that schools would not do anything to help the LGBTQ student community (Price and Telljohann, 1991). The researcher also found that schools were not doing enough to help LGBTQ students adjust to their environment. This information came from a little over 40% of the counselors in their study. Evidence collected 17 years ago suggested that alarmingly high levels of homophobic attitudes and feelings were coming from teachers, counselors, and administrators (Fontaine, 1998). Out of this group of adults on the school campus, it was reasonable to think that counselors would have been the safest people for students to go to when feeling threatened, but Cooley (1998) did not agree. Cooley (1998) believed that counselors also needed to become aware of their own

homophobia, otherwise they would be doing a disservice to this group. Researchers reported that two-thirds of both secondary and elementary counselor groups surveyed expressed negative attitudes about LGBTQ issues (Cooley, 1998; Fontaine, 1998).

In the southern states, homosexual issues are met with more adversity than in other states. Southern LGBTQ students reported that they lacked confidence in their teachers and counselors. Teachers were the closest to the homophobic behavior taking place in the classroom. If it happened between students, teachers were not always sure how to stop the behavior from happening. Students would not seek out school counselors to discuss their LGBTQ problems and said that teachers avoided the topic of homosexuality in their classes. They thought both counselors and teachers to be unsupportive of their orientation (Fontaine, 1998).

However, in the past 10 years, attitudes have been changing in the schools towards diverse sexual orientation students. Payne and Smith (2010) stated the following:

In fall 2006, the Reduction of Stigma in Schools<sup>®</sup> (RSIS) program began working in the Central New York area to bring increased awareness of the LGBTQ youth experience into area schools. This innovative professional developmental model aims to provide school personnel with information and resources that will empower them to advocate for LGBTQ students... (p.12)

Over half of the counselors in Cooley's (1998) study estimated that only 1- 5% of their student population was homosexual. Only 20% of counselors in Fontaine's (1998) study believed their LGBTQ youth consisted of 6-10% of students' population.

## Legal Issues in Schools

School administrators across the nation have found themselves involved in law suits due to poor decisions concerning the LGBTQ students and their issues in their schools. If administrators do not reply properly to claims of harassment, the liability can be very costly.

In 1999 landmark decision for educational policy, the US Supreme Court declared that school officials who ignore student-on-student sexual harassment can be held liable for violating the federal civil rights law under Title IX of the *Education Amendments of 1972* of *Davis v. Monroe County Board of Education, 1999*. (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001, p. 175)

While school policy did not forbid discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, they forbade actions that create a sexually hostile environment (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001). Some principals, as recently as 2012, opposed GSA clubs from forming; their actions caused negative news coverage, which resulted in favor of the students who gained the right to meet as a GSA club. Outing students to parents is also a violation of privacy in some states where some administrators have found themselves doing without regard to the safety situation of the LGBTQ student. Researchers are urging school districts to change their policies concerning parent notification of students' behavior, especially when it comes to revealing a students' sexual orientation, when they were not given permission to do so. "Privacy is an essential right for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, and school policies need to reflect this" (Ettinghoff, 2014, p. 582). Administrators must now ensure that LGBTQ students are provided a safe educational environment in schools. Ignoring this type of sexual harassment could cost school districts financial retribution. Many professional organizations such as the National Education Association (NEA); American School Health Association

(ASHA); National School Board Association (NSBA); American Psychological Association (APA); American Federation of Teachers (AFT); Gay Lesbian Straight Education Network (GLEN); American Counseling Association (ACA), and American School Counseling Association (ASCA) support local schools when combating prejudice and homophobia, (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001).

Student safety comes first in school settings, but students who are told to not be themselves for fear of more harassment or moved to another class under the guise of being safe sends the message that the administrators believe the behavior of the bully will disintegrate if the target goes away. Many gay and lesbian students report that they were made to feel responsible for their harassment, since they did not conceal their homosexuality. “Rather than punish the perpetrators, gay and lesbian students were often transferred to other classrooms. Administrators using such remedies may be at risk of being deliberately indifferent” (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001, p. 176). Less separation of students and providing more information to all students, as well as school staff, about diversity, tolerance, and acceptance of others would better serve all involved.

#### School Counselor Competence in Working with LGBTQ Students

A majority of school counselors are finding themselves feeling incompetent when having to work with LGBTQ youth and their issues. This could be due to school districts not addressing LGBTQ issues during professional development training or lack of information available concerning working with these students. Only 1 in 10 counselors felt a high level of skill when working with the LGBTQ population, meaning 90% indicated little to no competence whatsoever (Fontaine, 1998). “Counselors need to accurately educate themselves about

homosexuality so that they can dispel inaccurate myths and negative stereotypes. They must also educate clients” (Cooley, 1998, p. 31).

Since very few school districts professional development on LGBTQ issues, counselors have had to use other resources to get information to their students or to know which therapy approach to use with students. The major sources of information are mostly found in professional journals and professional conferences. One-third of information acquired by counselors comes from workshops, professional conferences, and textbooks. Only 2% of the school counselors stated that school in-service was a way of providing information to them on homosexuality (Fontaine, 1998). Some counselors have relied on mass media and gay and lesbian friends as a way to get information on LGBTQ issues.

About 20 years ago, Anderson (1994) outlined a five step approach to counselor education: (a) professional development; (b) support staff and services; (c) sexuality in the health curriculum; (d) library services; and (e) general curricula changes (p. 153). Professional development is covered with state and local conferences and workshops. Training for support staff is handled by each campus’ counseling department, presented to school staff at the beginning and throughout the school year. According to Anderson (1994) health classes were getting phased out in some states, so diverse sexuality may no longer be addressed in class. Most school districts have fire walls for security purposes on certain topics researched on the library’s search engine, therefore students are not able to access LGBTQ information due to key words utilized.

Counselors who are more tolerant in spite of personal biases can begin the process to reduce isolation. Cooley (1998) recommended that reduction of isolation can be done by



stopping homophobic behaviors before self-defeating behaviors are embedded and allowing LGBTQ adolescents to explore all these confusing feelings in the safety of a counselor's office.

Almost 90 % of counselors felt that training in LGBTQ youth issues and counseling skills was essential to help the LGBTQ population, while 11% responded they had no such interest (Fontaine, 1998). Researchers Luke and Goodrich (2012) proposed LGBTQ Responsive School Counseling Supervision (RSCS) as a way to assist school counselors and supervisors in meeting the distinct needs of LGBTQ students and those who are interested in this population, across a school counseling program. As mentioned above, LGBTQ RSCS was developed to shed light on the supervisory opportunities across a comprehensive school counseling program and to increase the knowledge, skills, and awareness of school counselors, those training to work with LGBTQ students and other stakeholders (Luke & Goodrich, 2012).

#### Advocating for LGBTQ Youth and Community

Having an advocate definitely helps LGBTQ youth feel like there are people who understand their plight and concerns for safety and school success. Familial support is essential to help LGBTQ youth feel accepted in society. Teachers and staff along with counselors are in a unique situation, as student advocates, to take a variety of approaches toward promoting diversity (Cooley, 1998). Training staff, student leaders and facilitators, and assisting and supporting their efforts, can be powerful ways to make an impact in this important area.

#### **Family Advocates**

With accurate information and education regarding research about homosexuality, families can benefit greatly. Martin and Hetrick (1988) reported that parents need to understand research that shows family history has nothing to do with the development of one's sexual orientation and their child is still the child they loved before. Parents will also have to come to

the realization the child they claim to know is not really who he says he is. The child they thought they knew is now gone, and a new child is in their lives. Cooley (1998) reported, "...counselors can provide support and validation to family members dealing with normal feelings of grief over losing the image of their child's heterosexuality" (p. 33).

Investigators have examined both familial and school social support in the context of how it affects youth who have experienced adverse events. It is believed that mothers are more lenient and accepting of the sexual orientation their children claim: "With respect to familial support, adolescents exposed to stress who perceived greater maternal social support reported fewer internalizing and externalizing behaviors" (Espelage et al., 2008, p. 204). If familial support is evident in the lives of the LGBTQ youth, there is a significant difference in the psychological outcome or mental health issues. D'Augelli (2003) reported:

Youths both of whose parents were rejecting were significantly more likely to demonstrate mental health problems than when parents were accepting or when one parent was accepting. Living with rejecting parents was associated with considerable distress. In such situations, there is little support available at home, and youths cannot share concerns with their families as their identity develops. (p. 451)

Living in a supportive environment of acceptance is essential during the identity development of any youth.

Researchers Gonzalez, Rostosky, Odom and Riggle (2013) reported parents in their study found personal growth and a greater understanding of their child and the LGBTQ community when they were able to focus on positive aspects of being a parent of an LGBTQ child. Parents became aware of discrimination and gained greater empathy and compassion for their child, the

LGBTQ community, and others who are marginalized (Gonzalez et. al., 2013). For many parents, this process led to changes in their views about gender and sexuality.

### **Teachers and Staff Advocates**

Some individuals do not believe that school personnel have the knowledge to help LGBTQ youth deal with their concerns. About 15 years ago, school staff showed little interest with the concerns of LGBTQ students, many individuals in public schools remained unaware of the number of gay students in schools (McFarland & Dupuis, 2001). Recently, more teachers and staff have supported students in various ways, such as with GSAs.

Valenti and Campbell (2009) reported the first high school gay support group was established in 1984. Education, reducing verbal and physical abuse, preventing suicide, and disseminating accurate AIDS information were just some of the ways the needs of LGBTQ students were addressed. The goals of the support group included improving self-esteem and caring for students suffering the effects stigmatization and discrimination due to sexual orientation.

From LGBTQ support groups student- led GSAs began to emerge and gave LGBTQ students a safe place to express themselves. Sadowski (2013) wrote that for one of his lesbian students in high school, things started to change when it came to finding support:

Lindsey had access to resources that enabled her to feel comfortable expressing herself in positive ways. She joined her school's gay-straight alliance (GSA); belonged to a community-based group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) youth; and had supportive relationships with several key teachers who served as a sounding board for issues she faced in school and at home. (Sadowski, 2013, p. 29)

In addition to this, some teachers support by encouraging students to write about LGBT issues for class assignments. Sometimes other personnel can be helpful to students, other than teachers. “Perhaps most important was Janice Lane, the school nurse and advisor of the gay–straight alliance, whom I could trust with anything that was on my mind” (Sadowski, 2013, p. 29).

Sadowski (2013) reported that two widely cited child development mentalists, psychiatrist Michael Rutter and psychologist Norman Garmezy noted that having a caring relationships with teachers and/or staff, can keep children and adolescents, regardless of sexual orientation, from exhibiting risky behaviors.

### **Counselor Advocates**

According to Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, *cognitive dissonance* means psychological conflict resulting from incongruous beliefs and attitudes held simultaneously. Many LGBTQ students suffer from having beliefs that go against their parents’ belief system. This is an expected part of LGBTQ adolescent development, and counselors need to understand dissonance and how to help their student with it. They should be willing to engage in a discussion about it and support them by helping them clarify their feelings about sexual orientation (Coleman & Remafedi, 1989). Researchers agree that school counselors need to be a part of the movement to assure a safe haven and a feeling of belonging for LGBTQ students: “Social Workers [Counselors] need to come forward again in advocating for the dignity and human rights of gay and lesbian people, including adolescents” (Morrow, 1993, p. 658).

Some LGBTQ students view school counselors as someone with whom they can share their problems. Social, emotional, and cognitive isolation are the most common problems faced by LGBTQ youth, therefore counselors need to help address these issues (Fontaine, 1998). On the other hand, Cooley (1998) reported that teachers said that their schools were not endorsing

tolerance and acceptance of LGBTQ youth, yet in the same study administrators said their schools were providing a useful non-homophobic education and doing well with it. Fontaine (1998) found it important to the physical and psychological well-being of LGBTQ students that school counselors take an active role in advocating for policies and services for them.

Students from the LGBTQ community come in for counseling for a variety of reasons. Whether it is trying to find self-acceptance or trying to find ways to be accepted by family members and friends, the counselor is there to help students achieve levels of: self-understanding and acceptance, without judgment. Cooley (1998) reported that the first phase in helping LGBTQ youth is maintaining confidentiality, as well as being non-judgmental professionals. By showing support and helping students reach levels of understanding of themselves, as well as helping others reach levels of understanding of the LGBTQ student, the counselor advocates for the LGBTQ youth population.

### **Community Advocates**

Identifying community resources for LGBTQ youth is a way counselors would be effective in finding help for their students. Families often experience isolation and discomfort when it comes to trying to understand and accept their LGBTQ children. PFLAG and organizations that show support of family members of LGBTQ people can be vital in reducing those uncomfortable feelings. Families suffering with more dysfunction will find family counseling or mental health services useful (Cooley, 1998).

Daley et al. (2008) stated that it was the responsibility of city social services and school staff to help LGBTQ students with resources and counseling in order for them to understand their challenges. This in turn will help these students feel like they matter and negative and harmful behavior will not be tolerated. Social workers, social service workers, educators, and

queer youth advocates can help by identifying multiple oppressions and whether queer youth can take full advantage of existing policy, services, and interventions (Daley et al., 2008).

### Training School Staff

School staff should be prepared to help the LGBTQ students with variety of issues, and know where to send the students for further help. If school districts do not offer training concerning the LGBTQ population, there is a chance that anti-gay attitudes and biases will remain within the school staff. School counselors might not be the first person the student will go to discuss private matters, but they eventually get involved in offering resources and a safe zone.

In the school setting, it behooves the counselor not only to work individually and or in groups with these students to provide them with support and acceptance during this difficult period, but also to work proactive and systemically to promote a school climate that is safe and nurturing for all students, including gays, lesbians, and bisexuals (Bauman and Sachs-Kapp, 1998, p. 42).

Because of their ethical commitment to fairness and individuality, school counselors can be useful in providing training. According to Bauman and Sachs-Kapp (1998), school counselors should be the ones to present staff development and student training about the treatment and expectations of school personnel toward the LGBTQ students. Offering a school-wide program on LGBTQ issues is a statement in itself about the expectations of the school, and school counselors should be in the forefront of promoting such efforts (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998). Counselors can provide training or arrange for the execution of Cooley's (1998) approach. The three key points to this approach include:

1. In order to provide the needed support, all school staff members must be educated regarding homosexuality; they must know the facts and be supportive. Since so

much in the world is uncertain for today's youth, their educational experience should be safe and nonthreatening.

2. Students need **homosexual** and heterosexual sex education. Homosexuality should be included in every discussion of sexuality including dating and relationships, parenting, sexually transmitted diseases, and services available.
3. Administrative discrimination in the hiring of **gay** and **lesbian** staff members must end. These teachers and **counselors** should be hired and valued as positive **role** models for both heterosexual and **homosexual** students. (Cooley, 1998, p. 32)

These points of addressing staff training and education, education for students on sexuality and diversity, and the hiring of LGBTQ roles models, if executed, can change the environment of a school system and allow the people in this system to foster support for LGBTQ students.

Social workers, social service workers, educators, and LGBTQ youth advocates would benefit from effective interventions, which may include sensitivity training. This training could further develop understanding of organized systems of power based on sexual orientation, gender, ethnicity, and citizenship (Daley et. al, 2008). Education courses for teachers and training for staff would teach the importance of LGBTQ issues in educational settings as well as help teachers create appropriate dialogue around these issues (Mutanski et al., 2014).

#### Workshops Addressing Equality

Bauman and Sachs-Kapp (1998) suggested that schools need to create school-wide workshops on important topics such as racism, gender equality, and religious discrimination. Workshops that focus on sexual orientation were considered to be the most effective and provocative of the topics. In the study, when student leaders were given an opportunity to select

a topic for a workshop, they chose sexual orientation because their observations of interactions around the school convinced them that the workshop was needed (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998). Among various articles, one was about a school that held a diversity workshop and trained students as leaders. The first training was 20 hours and caused too many absences during school time which became an issue. The second training was a six weeks class, where students earned a social studies credit. Students worked on team building and other experiential activities which led to an opportunity for self-exploration and for preparing for the workshop. Self-awareness was encouraged through structured activities. Sharing of personal stories and experiences often occurred as these exercises were processed (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998).

The workshop included guest presenters who were invited to speak in classes. Counselors' role modeling and teaching of effective facilitation skills were useful. "They [counselors] were careful to model the following: setting ground rules, showing respect, giving clear instructions, inviting participation, and dealing with disruption" (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998, p.44). By doing this, the counselors could show the students how to facilitate the session and discussion portions of the workshop.

Students were encouraged to facilitate exercises within their training group in order to gain practice and feedback in a supportive atmosphere. The counselors ensured that difficult scenarios would arise by creating them either themselves or with the use of confederates. Facilitators' hoped for at least one member of the audience to be enlightened as a result of the workshop and that would justify all their hard work and dedication (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998).

Hate Hurts was the theme of the workshop. Students were able to acknowledge that LGBTQ people are only one example of a group who gets targeted because of discrimination.



They also recognized that everybody involved in the workshop had been a victim of some sort of discrimination, and that it was a very painful experience. This understanding allowed them to create an empathetic attitude for others whom they may formerly have been afraid of or had some prejudice against (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998).

During the workshop, the principal gave a welcoming address, guest speakers were introduced from three different panels: gay, lesbian, bisexual; family members of a LGBT; and psychologists or experts in human behavior. Students were in groups of 30-35 for the presentation and then split into small discussion groups with 10 people, a student facilitator, and one or two staff members. Students were able to process their experiences and talk about their feelings. Everyone shared and key points were written on chart paper and hung around the school. The final event was the target/non-target exercise which involved stepping to the other side of the room if participants were LGBT or if they knew someone who was. The workshop was assessed by using pre and post workshop surveys, which were later scored (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998).

The schools who took the time to do the school-wide workshop found great results. Feedback from students indicated that these workshops were extremely powerful and effective in increasing the tolerance of LGBTQ students in the community. The counselors were responsible for recruiting and training the students leading the workshop. It was imperative that students who volunteered to be facilitators had high interest, good communication skills, and confidence (Bauman & Sachs-Kapp, 1998).

#### Positive Role Models

Dempsey (1994) reported that Gay and lesbian youth are aware of homosexual stereotypes such as “Homosexuals cannot form loving relationships ... they are sexually

promiscuous ... they are unhappy, and they prey on and seduce children” (p. 161). Because of the lack of role-models for this population of adolescents, many gay students avoid the issue of identifying as gay completely:

Many LGBTQ youth successfully blend with their straight peers and families. They may date and become sexually involved; some girls even become pregnant in an effort to deny their sexual orientation to themselves and others. Some may become involved in academics, sports, or extracurricular activities while others may withdraw from typical teenage social experiences and activities all together. (Cooley, 1998, p. 33)

Cooley (1998) and Schoen (2011) both indicated that positive adult role models could benefit LGBTQ students. Faculty members, counselors, or administrators, who are gay or lesbian, can fill this need. It is definitely a realistic approach to the different LGBT lifestyles. Gay and lesbian school counselors can share with all adolescents their lived experiences and insight into the struggles of defining who they are and how they function in the world (Schoen, 2011).

### Summary

This researcher reported areas of concern and difficulties for the LGBTQ adolescent population. Parental involvement and acceptance are necessary to the positive development of these students. The role the school counselor takes in addressing these concerns in a school setting is also important to the well-being and acceptance of the LGBTQ student population. If all groups, students, parents and school staff, work together in support of these students and their needs, less suicide attempts, reduced drug use, and fewer reports of poor school performance would occur. The goal of all involved should be student success; whether it is overcoming intrinsic problems, changing oppressive factors in communities, gaining educational success and/or finding self-fulfillment.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

#### Introduction

This chapter provides information about the research that was used to explore the LGBTQ students' experiences with the school counselor, the school counselors' experiences with providing services to students with different sexual orientations, and the parents' of LGBTQ students experiences with the school counselor. This chapter discusses in detail the research questions, the design rationale, the research design, the role of the researcher, sample selection process, descriptions of study participants, data collection methods, data analysis procedures, and trustworthiness that were used in the investigation.

#### Research Questions

The primary questions the field researcher addressed were: What are the school counseling experiences of an LGBTQ high school student? What are the experiences of parents of LGBTQ students with the school counselor? What are the experiences of the school counselor while working with students of diverse sexual orientations?

#### Research Design

Researchers have three different methods of research: qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods. Qualitative research allows the researcher to discover and understand more intricate experiences of life (Williams, 2007). Williams (2007) said, "While the quantitative method provides an objective measure of reality, the qualitative method allows the researcher to explore and better understand the complexity of a phenomenon" (p.70). According to Patton (2002), qualitative findings grow out of three kinds of collections of data: interviews, observations, and content analysis. One way to find answers about the experiences of others is through their

testimonies or life experiences. Moustakas (1994) and Patton (2002) both indicated that phenomenological analysis seeks to understand the significance, which is what is at the core of the lived experience of a phenomenon, and how it came to be, for either a group of people or an individual. Because this study aimed to understand the lived experiences school counselors working with LGBTQ students and their parents and the experiences LGBTQ students and parents of LGBTQ students working with high school counselors in a school environment, a phenomenological study was most appropriate.

Phenomenology is the study of the nature or meaning of everyday experiences (van Manen, 1990). Semi-structured interviews with school counselors, LGBTQ students, and parents of LGBTQ students, along with a focus group with additional school counselors provided data that allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of LGBTQ students, parents of LGBTQ students, and school counselors who work with LGBTQ students. By looking at many different perspectives of a similar situation, a researcher can understand and interpret what the nature and meaning of everyday experiences are like.

#### Role of the Researcher

Qualitative investigation offers opportunities for a researcher to learn about the experiences of others. The experiences the researcher brings to the research impacts the choice of what is studied and, as a result, what is discovered. Qualitative analysis is dependent on the style and analytic skill of the researcher. In my role as an analyzer of data, I examined the data from individual interviews and a focus group to arrive at themes. In addition, when the researcher is an insider who shares the experience of the phenomenon under study, the impact of the researcher on the study topic, analysis, and finding can be even greater (Patton, 2002). Thus, consideration of my relationship to the topic of LGBTQ high school students, parents of LGBTQ students, and

school counselors' role in working with issues impacting LGBTQ students and their parents is imperative.

### Lens of the Researcher

Some of my friends, throughout my life, have identified as lesbian or gay. While in college from 1985 to 1990, some of my close high school friends decided to come out. In the 1980s, television programs supporting lesbian and gay character story lines, such as *Ellen* and *Will and Grace*, were not in existence. My best friend came out to me during our senior year in college. For the last 25 years, witnessing his struggle with familial issues, career choices, and romantic relationships has not been easy, though witnessing his struggles was undoubtedly less difficult than living them.

In my professional career as a high school counselor, I have known many students who were lesbian, gay, or transgendered. Some students had gender identity disorders, and some had fluid sexual orientations, formerly termed bi-sexual. A particular counseling experience in my office with a gay male youth and his mother was the immediate catalyst for this study. The student's coming out, which came before the session with the parent, resulted in significant repercussions for the student. During the conference with the student and parent, I told the mother that I had some experience with gay issues. The mother was upset and told me that she did not care how many articles I presented about being born that way or it being a genetic disposition, she had articles saying that it was a lifestyle choice. I continued to work with the parent, and I assured her that I was just trying to be supportive of her, as well as her son. I also did not have any articles to show her, and the experience I mentioned included the personal observation of the life of my best friend. After a brief discussion among the three of us, the parent left the office upset and feeling blindsided. I felt like I had no control over that session

and also knew that the school district did not provide any training to the school counselors concerning working with students who are part of the LGBTQ population.

That experience left me with the knowledge that the role of school counselors in addressing the issues faced by LGBTQ students and their parents was one that needed to be explored. My understanding led to the development of this topic. Once the research topic was approved, I began gathering information. The more information I collected, the more I was able to present to audiences of school counselors. I provided workshops for colleagues in my school district and to the local PFLAG. Because I was conducting this research, I was considered the expert on the subject in the school district and worked with issues concerning LGBTQ students.

Having a close connection to the topic under study presents a variety of benefits and risks. Having knowledge of the struggles and difficulties an LGBTQ person goes through, I was able to establish rapport with the participants, and that made the interview process comfortable and relaxed. I was able to share some of my experiences, which enabled the participants to share theirs as well. Although discussion of LGBTQ issues can be difficult and upsetting, knowing that they were sharing their perspectives with someone who knew about the types of concerns they had may have enhanced the ability of participant to disclose their experiences.

By allowing the participants to know about my association with the LGBTQ population, my experience as an insider permitted me a depth of awareness in guiding the interviews and in analyzing the data that could not have existed with outsider status. According to Moustakas (1994), listening deeply and attentively as well as immersing oneself in the world of the other is essential to developing the relationship necessary to understand the other person's perceptions. My personal experience with and knowledge about the LGBTQ population provided insight about the questions that needed to be explored as well allowed me to develop an empathic

rapport with participants. My own experiences allowed me to self-disclose as appropriate in a way that was relevant to the topic.

Besides the benefits of being an insider with enhanced rapport, there was also the risk of having a pre-formed opinion about participants' experiences. My personal experiences could impact the questions asked as well as how they were asked. Bias and established opinions could also impact the analysis of data, even to the degree that what is ultimately represented are not the voices and experiences of participants. Distorting the perspectives of the participants during analysis and representation is possible if the researcher does not check herself. Patton (2002) noted the importance of empathic neutrality, "a middle ground between becoming too involved, which can cloud judgment, and remaining too distant, which can reduce understanding" (p. 50).

### Population and Sample

Phenomenological inquiry requires selection of information-rich cases that allow for in-depth study of the question under consideration. Participants are considered experts about their experiences. Accordingly, their voices provide the critical data necessary to understand their experiences. The sample size is often small and is selected purposefully. The number of participants is based on saturation of data rather than an identified size (Patton, 2002). There were individuals from three different populations interviewed for this study. The first group was comprised of school counselors from different areas of Texas. An email inviting the school counselors with experience in working with LGBTQ students was sent out to school counselor members of a local counselor organization. Three school counselors participated in individual interviews. One middle school counselor was from the Rio Grande Valley area, one was a high school counselor from a rural area of South Texas, and another high school counselor was from the Central Texas area. These interviews lasted anywhere from 1 hour to 3 hours, depending on

the responses from the participant. Two of the interviews took place in the counselor's home town, while one took place over the phone.

In addition, five school counselors participated in a focus group. School counselors who participated in the focus group were from local high schools. Local high school counselors were also solicited via email (see Appendix J) which was sent to all school counselors in the local counselor organization. The focus group lasted approximately two hours. The three counselors who participated in the individual interviews are Mexican American females. Of the counselors who participated in the focus group, four are Mexican American and one is Anglo American, also all female.

The students interviewed were high school graduates ranging in age from 18 to 20 years old. Flyers (see Appendix F) inviting participation in the study were displayed at a local university. The flyer encouraged LGBTQ students to participate in a study. In addition, referrals were requested from teachers and friends of the researcher. Participants interviewed were two gay male students, one Mexican American and one Anglo American; one Mexican American lesbian; and one Mexican American gay male student who had dressed as a woman for drag shows. Interviews lasted anywhere from 1.5 to 3 hours and were conducted at a neutral place both the researcher and participants agreed to.

The parents interviewed were parents whose children identified themselves as LGBTQ students while in high school. This was the only criterion needed for the parent participants. Flyers (see Appendix F) inviting participation in the study were distributed after the dissertation topic was presented at a PFLAG meeting; this was the same flyer displayed at the university, as an invitation to both parents and students to participate. In addition, contact information was left with the president of the PFLAG organization. Of the participants interviewed, one was a



Mexican American school counselor in a neighboring school district referred by her son, who was a participant in this study; the second was a Mexican American store owner referred by a colleague, whose son was one of her students; and the third was a Anglo American college professor in Florida who was referred by a local college professor. Interviews lasted from 1 to 3 hours. Two parents were interviewed in person, one at her place of business and the other at a neutral location. The parent from Florida was interviewed via telephone from a private location in the researcher's home.

Each participant was given a consent form (see Appendix G) to read and sign before they participated in the study. Those who lived outside of the South Texas area were emailed the consent forms. Participants were made aware that at any time during the study they could retract their consent to participate. After consent forms were reviewed and participants given the opportunity to ask questions, I began the interview. I explained that their information would remain anonymous even though they were being recorded. Participants were told that they would be given pseudonyms to be used in reporting of the results and in any possible publication and were told only the transcriptionist, researcher, and committee chairs would have access to the transcripts. Once the interviews were completed, the recordings were taken to the transcriptionist. Once transcription was complete, the transcripts were returned via email. Email was used to send each participant a copy of the transcript for review for any additions the participant wanted to add and for the purpose of member checking. Facebook messaging, telephone, and/or text messaging were used as a method of contact for follow up.

#### Data Collection

The primary method of gathering this data for this study was the one-to-one interview, using a semi-structured interview process. Interviews give both breadth and depth, allowing a

wide range of participants to share information about their views, while concurrently permitting the interviewer the opportunity to discover individual experiences and understandings in greater detail (Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) described a quality interview as one in which the interviewer and interviewee work together in their respective roles to foster an understanding of the data created. In this study, individual school counselors, LGBTQ students, and parents of LGBTQ students were interviewed. These interviews were completed in the field using a recording application on the researcher's password protected cell phone as the recording device. All of the interviews were pre-arranged by calling the participant to discuss the time and place of the interview face-to-face meeting or interview phone call.

In addition to individual interviews, a focus group of counselors met to discuss the experiences associated with working with the LGBTQ population. In-depth interviews afforded the occasion to hear considerable detail about each student's experience as an LGBTQ youth, each parent's experience of being a parent of an LGBTQ youth, and each school counselor's experience of working with both LGBTQ students and their parents. The privacy of the interview format was especially desirable for subject matter that was sensitive or emotionally charged in nature, particularly for parents and students.

All interviews were conducted at places agreeable to participants or via telephone. Locations were picked that were familiar and comfortable to both interviewer and interviewee. All of the student participants were interviewed and recorded in person, as were two parents. Only the parent from Florida and the counselor from San Antonio were interviewed via a telephone speaker and recorded from the researcher's home. One of the school counselor face-to-face interviews was held in the school cafeteria at a time when school was not in session. The other took place in the home of the school counselor participant. In all of the face-to-face

interviews, the recording device was positioned in the center of the table between me and the interviewee. Individual interviews were conducted using a semi-structured interview guide (see Appendices B, D, and E). The students were asked preliminary questions to determine whether they qualified to participate in the study (see Appendix A). The counselors were given a list of demographic questions (see Appendix C). In addition to individual interviews, a focus group of counselors met to discuss experiences associated with working with the LGBTQ population. The focus group was recorded using a video-recorder, but only the voices were recorded.

All participants appeared comfortable and relaxed while participating in interviews and the focus group. Prior to the start of individual interviews, participants were thanked for participating and consent forms were reviewed, including a reminder that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also asked if they had any questions prior to beginning the interview. For those interviews conducted over the phone, a copy of the questions was emailed to the participant in order to be clearer on the questions in case there was difficulty in hearing the questions over the phone. The participants were also emailed the consent forms, which were scanned and emailed back.

The nature of the interview format was discussed, including the explanation for the need to audio record the interview with assurances that the researcher would retain control of the digital recordings and be the only person besides the transcriptionist to hear the interview recording. Names were not used in the recordings, and the transcriptionist only had generic indicators to use on transcriptions (e.g., Counselor 1, Student 1, and Parent 1).

After all preliminary questions were answered, the recording of the interview began. Participants were told the researcher was in search of information to help the relationship between the school counselor and the LGBTQ student and parent of LGBTQ students.

Participants were asked to answer the questions as freely and comfortably as possible and were informed that at the end they could add anything that was not asked of them.

All interviews were conducted in an open-ended, semi-structured fashion, with the researcher striving to be a conversational guide prompting additional information from the students, parents, and counselors when needed with inquiries, reflections, and explanations. In this way, while all interviews shared a general format with the specified questions asked, participants were invited to share additional information making each interview a unique experience.

A similar process was followed in the focus group with school counselors. Focus groups allow a small group of individuals to discuss a specific topic (Krueger, 1997; Patton, 2002). The purpose of the study, consent forms (see Appendix H), and an opportunity for questions were all addressed at the beginning of the group. The focus group, however, did not utilize an interview guide; the topic was introduced and a free-flowing discussion of the topic ensued. Participants shared their ideas and responded to those of the others involved in the group. Group members appeared comfortable and relaxed. Once the focus group was complete, the researcher delivered the recording to the transcriptionist, who identified the participants by their voices and separated the information on the page. As I listened to the recording and read the transcript, I was able to identify each counselor and assigned them a number (i.e., Counselor 4, 5, 6, 7, 8).

My interview technique relied heavily on open-ended probes, reflections, and clarifications in both the face-to-face interviews and the focus group. Appropriate self-disclosure was also utilized occasionally, with simultaneous invitation to respondents to clarify whether their experiences were similar or different. At the conclusion of each interview and the focus group, the participants were told that if there was anything they thought of and wanted to share

with the interviewer at a later date, they were welcome to contact the interviewer and report the information. None of the participants provided any additional information.

Post-interview notes were recorded immediately following each interview. These served as memos to capture impressions from the interviews along with any thematic content that was especially prominent. Identifying thematic content of interest served in some ways as a mid-level form of analysis, focusing attention on areas of discussion that could provide additional clarification of themes. In an effort to be truly present to the participant's experience and to enhance the conversational nature of the exchange, I refrained from note-taking during the interviews. Recording impressions afterwards helped access information that could be used to focus subsequent analyses.

Once the interviews were complete, the researcher delivered recordings to the transcriptionist. The recordings were extracted from the researcher's cell phone and downloaded onto a computer program that the transcriptionist used. Once the transcript was ready, the copy was emailed to the researcher for review. A copy of the interview was also sent to the participants for corrections or additions.

### Data Analysis

Once I received the transcripts from the transcriptionist, the process of coding began. I read and re-read the data, reading line by line and marking words and phrases that represented units of meaning. During the first round of coding, I utilized in vivo coding, which uses the participants' own words and phrases, in order to give privilege to participants' voices.

Particularly in studies that seek to understand a particular subculture, in vivo coding can be especially important when seeking to understand experiences of marginalized groups (Saldana, 2013) to identify initial themes. Participants' words were the raw data, and using their own

words for initial coding allowed me to prioritize participants' voices (Charmaz, 2006; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Words and phrases were listed in the margins of the transcripts. Once I completed this process, I developed initial categories based on the frequency that words and phrases appeared in the data. Once initial categories were identified for each group of participants, they were examined across all groups in order to identify where they converged or differed. Initial categories were then re-examined and arranged into overarching categories and subcategories. Axial coding using these categories and subcategories was then conducted, and units of meaning previously identified were linked to the categories. Categories and subcategories were again reexamined and reorganized until final themes were established.

#### Trustworthiness

Three different groups of participants were interviewed in order to understand the experiences of LGBTQ students, parents of LGBTQ youth, and the school counselor working with LGBTQ students. Credibility refers to the degree to which study findings and conclusions are believable to the participants who helped create them; they must be truthful in their reflection of the phenomena observed (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Several strategies, such as systemic data collection, demanding training, multiple data sources, triangulation, and external reviews, are aimed at creating high-quality qualitative data that are credible, trustworthy, authentic, fair to the people studied, and especially balanced about the phenomenon under study (Patton, 2002) For those participants who agreed to be interviewed, triangulation of data was achieved through three data sources: LGBTQ students, school counselors, and parents of LGBTQ students. Each participant was free to share their experiences with the researcher, whether positive or negative and without judgment or bias. Participants who were interviewed were emailed a copy of their interviews to validate or correct the transcription and clarify for understanding and meaning. The

transcripts were coded and analyzed bringing forth themes. Because multiple data sources were used in this study, this triangulation brought forth data deemed trustworthy, balanced, and authentic about the phenomenon under study.

In this study, one vehicle used for establishing trustworthiness was triangulation of data sources: LGBTQ students, parents of LGBTQ students, and school counselors who worked with LGBTQ students. Member checking was conducted with individual interview participants, which allowed participants to ensure their words were recorded accurately. Member checking was achieved by submitting transcripts of interviews to participants via email and asking them to review transcripts and make corrections or additions believed important to clarify participants' meanings. In addition, I maintained a researcher journal to track my observations after each interview, to check any biases, and to record decisions made through the process. This provided an audit trail wherein the process of the research was systematically recorded.

### Summary

The primary questions of this dissertation were: What are the school counseling experiences of an LGBTQ high school student? What are the experiences of the school counselor while working with students of diverse sexual orientations? What are the experiences of parents of LGBTQ students with the school counselor? The method of investigation for this study was qualitative phenomenological inquiry, and the primary method of data gathering was interviews and a focus group. Phenomenological inquiry was the appropriate methodology because the researcher wanted to examine the lived experiences of the participants. This methodology gives a voice to those who have experienced the phenomenon under study.

Participants in this study included eight school counselors, including three who participated in individual interviews and five who participated in a focus group; four students

who participated in individual interviews; and three parents who participated in individual interviews. Data was collected and analyzed and themes developed. The following chapter addresses the themes derived from the analysis of the interview data.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

#### Introduction

This chapter provides findings that emerged from data, which included individual interviews with LGBTQ students, parents of LGBTQ students, and school counselors concerned with LGBTQ issues at school, as well as a focus group made up of school counselors. Analysis of the data resulted in identification of seven themes. These themes include acceptance, coming out, being open, being comfortable, education and training, support and challenges, and needing to talk. Themes were evident across students who identified as LGBTQ, parents of LGBTQ students, and school counselors who worked with LGBTQ students at school.

#### Acceptance

The data revealed that acceptance was a common theme for students as well as for parents and school counselors. This theme has to do with acceptance of self, parents' acceptance of their children and their experiences of their children accepting themselves, and school counselors' perspectives on acceptance. Student participants noted that their sexual orientation didn't define who they were as people, so they didn't feel different from their peers. Parent participants discussed how they saw their children arrive at a place of acceptance of themselves and how they too accepted their children's differences. School counselor participants discussed their experiences with students and parents finding acceptance of themselves or of their children, respectively.

#### **Students' Acceptance of Self**

The student participants all shared their experiences of when they first knew they had a different feeling about their sexual orientation. Even though they recognized their sexual

orientation was different from many of their peers, they accepted that difference and indicated they saw themselves like everyone else. Student 3 reflected that there was never a time when he felt different from anyone else. He said:

I never saw myself as different because for the simple reason that love isn't a gender, love is love, and you can't help what you feel between you and another person, so all through my high school, middle school, and elementary life, I have never felt different from anybody else.

Student 4 shared a similar idea, except he came to accept himself through his exploration of thinking differently than others. He indicated that he didn't see himself as different and added:

My sexual orientation doesn't define me as being different from somebody else or anything like that. I have never seen it. I felt different. My thinking was different, because I didn't think, you know, is this right, or is it wrong? Is it bad for me to be doing this? But now that I have gotten into my older years, I see myself as anybody else. I'm not different. My sexual orientation doesn't define me by any means.

Student 1 expressed a similar idea of thinking differently. He reflected on his experience of being part of the LGBTQ community and his realization that he isn't that different from anyone else, saying:

I think that the gay community, they automatically consider themselves different from other people and, yeah, we think differently, but it could also be the other way around. No, they [heterosexuals] think different from us. You know . . . we are not going to want something different. That's what I realized, you don't consider yourself different.

## **Parents' Acceptance of their Children**

Two parents discussed difficulties with acceptance for either their sons or themselves. Both referred to their sons' ways of discussing sexual orientation with the parents. Each of these sons initially indicated they were bi-sexual. Parent 1 said it was difficult to accept her son was gay, and acknowledged that if he was bi-sexual, there was still an option for children, which she found easier to accept. She said:

. . . at first he would tell me he was bi [bi-sexual], so he liked both because he wasn't sure. And then, out of nowhere, he forgot he told me that. He said 'I'm gay,' and I said, 'I thought you said you were bi?' You know it was hard to accept it, and I cried a couple of times because I guess I was being selfish, but I thought about grandchildren. There is nothing like having your own . . . but who knows.

Parent 2 believed her son was trying to hold on to a more socially acceptable notion by claiming he was bi-sexual instead of gay. She said:

He [my son] would probably say that we almost pushed him out because of the stuff his father and I were speaking openly with him . . . the fact that he, first, . . . had male attraction, and then, when he insisted that he was bi-sexual, that perhaps he wasn't bi-sexual and perhaps he was gay. That he was holding on to the need to have a girlfriend because it was more socially expected."

The same parent, who had done research about LGBTQ children, continued by saying, ". . . it really is just part of sexual identity development. You embrace where you are on the continuum, and you recognize that it's a continuum, so you see both ends of the spectrum."

## **Counselors' Views on Student Acceptance**

The counselor participants had different views about acceptance, and focused attention on students questioning themselves. Counselor 1 said that in her experience, students were not sure about their sexual identity. She said, "I went into the boot camps and detention centers. I did encounter some students that were questioning themselves." Another counselor participant brought up that middle school is a very confusing time for some adolescents who are questioning their sexual identity. Counselor 7 observed that some questioning students dated both genders. She said:

Recently, I have middle school girls who one week, they have a girlfriend and one week, they have a boyfriend, and I don't really know how to address it. I've addressed it as, I guess they are exploring their sexuality, but it is extremely frustrating to me because I'm a huge advocate of the LGBT community, and I don't know if they are playing around or if it's just the in thing.

Two other counselors explained that they believed some students are confused about their sexual orientation and sometimes identify as gay or as straight. Counselor 3 said, "I mean you just never know today who is and who isn't [gay] and so they try and see if they [other people] are interested, or to raise an eyebrow, or whichever the case is." Counselor 2 said, "You have many students that will say 'today I'm gay and tomorrow, I'm not.' They are trying to figure it out." She also noted ". . . there are some that are just the wannabees. There is always going to be wannabees. And it's those that don't fit anywhere, but they are trying to fit somewhere. They have their own situation."

## Experience of Coming Out

Many of the participants discussed coming out, whether it was about their own, their child's, or their students' experience. Students discussed their experiences of either coming out to their parents or school staff, while parent participants discussed their child's experiences. The counselor participants talked about their observations of students coming out at school before they come out at home, as well as experiences of knowing others who have come out around them.

### **Students' Experiences with Coming Out**

Students had varied experiences when it came to coming out. One student said that he noticed his attraction to both sexes in middle school, and talked about when he became aware of his attractions. Student 1 said, “. . . in seventh grade . . . that's when I started noticing I was attracted to the other sex, and I found out that I was also attracted to guys, too.” The same student indicated that coming out to the same-sex parent had not happened yet, even though his entire family already knew he was gay. He said:

I honestly have not come out to my dad, but I'm pretty sure he knows. He's not a dumb guy. Yeah, he knows. It's just, like honestly, I know it's going to be fine. My brother told me, 'You need to come out to dad,' because he's the only one I haven't told. I guess it has to be when I'm ready . . . I don't want to over think it. I just don't know how to say it. Student 2, who identified as a lesbian, found it was more difficult to come out to her mother, and she needed support. She said:

I didn't confide in my counselor, I confided in my CIS [Communities in Schools] case manager and I came out when I was 13. I came out to my mom, but I was just a little kid, and she didn't believe me. When I came out to my mom [in high school] I had to have

my case manager help me out because it was an emotional rollercoaster. I mean my mom took it well, but I don't think she would have taken it that well if my case manager wasn't there.

One of the student participants said that coming out to someone who had been in the same situation as she was made it a positive experience. That is why she came out to an openly gay faculty member at her school. Student 2 said:

I felt comfortable coming out to her [school faculty] because I have known her for many, many years, so I felt comfortable coming out to her because she was in the same boat I was at one point . . . I felt more comfortable coming out to her than coming out to somebody who doesn't know.

Student 3 believed his father already knew he was gay, and he never had to come out to his dad.

He said:

I never really confided in my counselor to help me come out to my parents only because my dad always knew. He even told me himself one day, it was, I guess a year before he passed away, that he would not care if I was bisexual or gay, that he would love me for who I was.

### **Parents' Experiences with their Children Coming Out**

The parent participants had different experiences with their children coming out to them. Parent 2 said she practically pushed her son to come out. She found in her research an approach to support her son coming out earlier than usual, in order to make him feel confident. She said:

I am sure it is difficult, and I know we are an atypical family, so I don't expect that there are a lot of parallels in the literature to us, but I would also like to think that we did it the way that the literature has directed us to. We know that a child who comes out earlier is

happier. We know that a child who has family support is happier, so we gave him that early on.

Parent 3 indicated that her child did not come out until he was past his teenage years. She just thought he was shy. She said, “My son came out to me when he was 21 years old. Said he just didn’t feel himself; didn’t feel like he was comfortable being with women.” The same parent also talked about the support she gave to her son’s friends when they came out to their families, and unfortunately, were kicked out of their homes. She said:

There is so much out there that these kids, some are 18, 19, and they are coming out, and they don’t know where to go and . . . I’ve had them sleep on my sofa for two to three weeks on end because they don’t have a place to go. It’s sad. I feel like we are a society that has so much and we have so much need and we don’t put it out there for them.

### **Counselors’ Experiences with Students Coming Out**

The counselors who participated said that the LGBTQ students, with whom they worked, seemed to find it easier to come out to their friends at school before they told the adults in their homes. Counselor 3 said:

A lot of the homosexual youth I had worked with, who had not come out yet at home, they are all out at school. They’re not out at home, so trying to figure out what to do with that and how to help them to not feel so much shame around who they are is difficult.

What is also difficult, according to Counselor 3, is seeing her students come out without any real socialization that helps one practice moving into the different levels of a relationship. She noted that there are models of heterosexual relationships all around. When a homosexual starts getting into a relationship, there are very few models of that type of relationship. She said:

We get to practice when we are heterosexual, we see practice on TV. We get to practice at everything. There is no practicing when you are homosexual. You come out, you get into a relationship, and that's it. Or, you don't come out and you don't identify.

One counselor participant said that students are coming out when they are younger, and it is more prevalent in middle school than in years past. Counselor 2 indicated that she thinks youth "are just more accepting of it because they are not coming out when they are older: they are coming out when they are younger." Another counselor participant indicated that when a student does not come out, or doesn't seek positive role models to help him/her transition, the relationship they are in can be unhealthy. Counselor 3 said:

If they don't have anyone positive in their lives, and if they can't come out to their families, then they live a life that is hidden. They feel that everything is underground for them and that any friends they may have is all in secret, so it establishes, I think, a twisted experience for them from the beginning, instead of something that could be positive.

Counselor 4 shared a story of a friend she thought waited too long to come out because of fear. She said:

I think it's different for each individual person, you just don't know, because some [LGBTQ people] are very conservative and very scared. I had a friend who didn't come out until he was 44, and he was very afraid of AIDS and very afraid of everything. He waited until his mother passed away before he even decided to do anything about it. He had a brother who was also gay, who lived the lifestyle, yet he was miserable for all those years and pretended for all those years. So, I think it is different for everyone, just depending on their experiences and where they were brought up and how they lived. To



make a blanket statement across the board about it, it's just hard to say they are all like this, because they are not.

### Being Open

This theme has to do both with students being open about their sexual identity and openness of society to those whose sexual identity is other than heterosexual. The participants in the study who had the experiences of knowing a student who is open about sexual identity talked about two types of openness: students who are only open at school with faculty and friends and students who have been completely open at their school and with their families. They also discussed a more open attitude in much of society, but noted openness to LGBTQ people is not the same in all environments. Student participants discussed issues around being open in their families and their communities.

### **Students' Views of Being Open**

A student participant also remarked on the importance of openness of faculty. Student 1 noted that when faculty are open about their own sexuality, or at least known to be accepting of those who are LGBTQ, the student is more comfortable. Student 1 said about his teachers in high school:

They were all just comfortable with it, especially Mrs. G. I was there 24/seven with her.

We would just make jokes and stuff like that, the same thing with Mrs. H. She was just a lot of fun. So there are a lot of teachers that are very open, you kind of have to be.

Student participants also talked about being open within the family. One student participant said that being open with his parents and expecting them to be accepting of the LGBTQ lifestyle automatically was a risk he was willing to take. Student 1 said, "I could talk to my mom. She's a counselor; she has to be open-minded, and also, her best friend is gay. That's

why I don't see why she wouldn't understand." Student 3 believed that his grandmother feared he would encounter abuse or assault if he was gay. He said:

My grandma knows what kind of life gay people have. My uncle is gay and his brothers took him to the back yard to beat the gay out of him. He will never come back to Texas. I think that's what she's really scared of, is that she knows what can happen to LGBT students who are openly gay to the public.

One of the student participants said his mother has siblings who are gay, so this made understanding him easier. Student 4 said, "My parents were, luckily, pretty cool with it. I'm kind of lucky. My mother had a gay brother and a gay sister, so she's cool and my dad is just real open-minded."

Student 1 observed that some students find it difficult to be themselves because of fear of rejection. This student also commented on the openness of straight males and said:

Another thing about the gay community is . . . they are so scared to go up to a straight guy and talk to him and be friends. You know, [straight guys] are a lot more open-minded than we think. That's one thing and I mean, I have so many straight friends, and they are cool with it.

### **Parents' Views of Being Open**

Parents reported different experiences with their children's openness. Parent 1 noted that having a gay son was helpful to her in her work because she is able to be open about her son's sexuality. In talking about a student who came out to her, she indicated, "So when he came to me, I told him I had a gay son. He loved that I was so open about that. He told me that, [knowing] that helped him a lot."

One parent participant noted that it was great that the school counselor was open-minded, but if the school community is also open to this population, then that's even better. Parent 2 said, "We had moved to a new area, and he started ninth grade at a new school, and that was high school. That school counselor we spoke with openly about sexual orientation issues, but it is also a very open school." She then reflected on what her son might have gone through had they stayed in one state instead of another state. Parent 2 said:

We moved to the [location redacted] area from [location redacted], so he would have had a very different experience had we stayed in [location redacted]. I haven't seen any differences here in [city] area school. It simply has just been a matter of fact of which he is [gay] and has not been either an issue in a positive or negative way, it just is.

### **Counselors' Views of Being Open**

One of the counselors attributed increased being open and acceptance of LGBTQ persons in society to seeing more of the LGBTQ population represented in the media. Counselor 1 said, "You see it more . . . it's more out in the open. You see it more on TV." Counselor 2 said, "We live in a society that is a very accepting society now . . . out in the open."

Counselor 7 noted that the experience she had with openness and the LGBTQ population was completely different at two different schools. She said:

At the previous high school where I was, the kids were openly gay, and we talked about it. They would dress how they wanted to without any repercussions it seemed. I thought it was really great of the student body not to bother them or bully them or anything because they just accepted that person for who they were. At another high school, you don't see that prevalence. You don't see them really coming out or really being openly gay, and so it's a big difference there.

Two counselors in the focus group noted the presence of openly gay faculty members on their campuses. Counselor 1 said that it was not true of her previous campus, but indicated that “. . . at the school that I am now, yeah.” Counselor 4 observed that having openly gay faculty members is helpful to students and indicated, “Students feel comfortable going to those faculty [openly gay] first, and then they [faculty members] bring them over to the counselor’s office.”

### Being Comfortable

The theme being comfortable has to do with the level of comfort individuals have about LGBTQ issues and topics as well as with people. Student participants discussed their comfortableness with the topic of sexual orientation with certain faculty members and some straight students. The counselors discussed level of comfort with LGBTQ issues and topics for both LGBTQ and straight students, and included broader communities that may be comfortable (or not) with addressing and accepting LGBTQ students. Only one parent commented on the level of comfort her child had with school personnel.

### **Students Being Comfortable**

Student 1 reported that I (the researcher) was one of the people he felt comfortable with discussing his sexual orientation. Student 1 said:

I had you for that class, T-time. I mean, I knew you knew, and it was like, I was comfortable with you. I mean we didn’t really talk about it too much, but I can like, say something gay and we would just laugh together, something like that. Like, it was very comfortable being in your office.

Sometimes the students’ peers have difficulty being comfortable when they find out for the first time their friends are gay. Student 1 said he realized that if his friends are secure in themselves, there were no issues with their friendships. He said:

The only problem I had . . . like some guys are uncomfortable beings friends with someone who is gay. I have realized that a lot of straight guys are very uncomfortable with it, but there are still a lot of them that don't really care . . . they are comfortable with themselves. I've had negative reactions, but to me, it's like they are going to have to get used to it . . . if they are not used to it, I can't automatically . . . force it. They always come around to it. It's . . . a big shock at first, especially if you are not used to it.

### **Parents' Views of their Children Being Comfortable**

Only one parent discussed comfort. The parent pointed out that the teachers are approached as much, if not more, than school counselors. Parent 1 said, "I know that my son has told me that his teachers knew, but he was very comfortable with them because they knew him, and they treated him no different than any other student." She also said, "I know the principal at the school he attended was [comfortable], I believe she knew him, and he was real comfortable as well."

### **Counselors' Views of Students Being Comfortable**

A counselor also noted that straight students sometimes feel uncomfortable when confronted with LGBTQ students. Counselor 6 said:

You got to look at the other side . . . my daughter is in middle school, and there are a lot of open lesbian girls, and there is a girl who dresses like a boy, cuts her hair like a boy, looks like a boy that's in her PE class. They all change clothes for PE still, and she said, 'Mom, I feel like there is a boy in there looking at me,' and so when you look at it from a parent's point of view . . . I explained to her, 'Well you know, but she is really a girl and don't worry,' and she said, 'Mom, I feel so uncomfortable.' I said, 'Honey, just go in a bathroom stall and change clothes if it makes you feel uncomfortable.'

The same counselor also noted that sometimes straight students have expressed discomfort when they were hit-on by an LGBTQ student. She said, “I have had students who are gay hitting on straight kids, and they [straight kids] come in and say they don’t feel comfortable. Then I have to bring them [the LGBTQ student] in and tell them not to be harassing.”

Other counselors reported that the LGBTQ students who felt comfortable with them had no problem sharing their experiences. Counselor 2 said:

There was one particular time where the parent . . . we spoke on the telephone, and I know this parent . . . I knew this family, and when the young man came in to my office to tell me or to talk about his situation, he was not in my grade or letter, but I guess he felt comfortable in coming to me because he would see me at church.

She continued with comments about her own feelings of comfort in the session and where religion plays a part in this. She said:

We all go out of our comfort zone. All you are asking of me is just to be there for you . . . I’m sure I did have to go out of my comfort zone because my religion does not believe in it, although sometimes I have to differ because you know, you see them at church, they are not turned away, they are people, they are God’s people.

A counselor from the focus group noted that a change from a supportive community to a less supportive community can impact a student’s level of comfort. Counselor 8 talked about the impact she witnessed on one student, and said:

When I was at the middle school, in fact, I can think of a student in particular, she was doing ok because we had a bigger community there, and she had her friends. She was able to come and talk to me and discuss what was going on with her and her relationships. She seemed very comfortable. I moved to the high school and she moved to

the high school, and I've seen a big change in her. I don't think that she feels as comfortable being who she is. I see that she is getting in a lot more trouble. I see her in the office a lot, and this concerns me that she is really trying to find out how different things are when they are in high school.

### Education and Training

The importance of education and training for counselors as well as for all school employees was discussed by counselor, parent, and student participants. Counselors discussed lack of training from school districts, guest speakers that came in while completing course work, and professional conferences they used as resources for information. Parent participants agreed that school staff needed training to work with their LGBTQ students. Students indicated that more training needed to be offered to counselors and staff because although some faculty helped them, still others did not know how to help.

### **Counselors' Views on Education and Training**

Counselor participants indicated that while education and training for school counselors dealing specifically with how to work with LGBTQ students is important, this type of education and training was lacking in their educational programs and their district staff development sessions. Counselor 1 said:

As far as actual training that comes to students that are lesbians or homosexual, LGBTQ, I haven't had any. I don't know if there is actually a course that you take for that. I haven't. Basically, the trainings that I have gotten were the same thing. I know some of the professors we did encounter would touch base on that [homosexuality], but not to the point of actual good group knowledge.

The same counselor remembered that in one of her classes, two gay males shared their experiences with the master's students. She said:

In taking counseling classes, we had two gay guys come in and talk to us . . . I just wish . . . there were local trainings. I guess around here when it comes to homosexuality or dealing with issues, coping strategies and things that we can use in our school settings as school counselors . . . are kind of limited. Even when it comes to sex and pregnancy, we are also limited.

When asked how she received training, Counselor 2 had this to say:

Counseling courses and workshops in the subject matter [LGBTQ]. After receiving the training, at least I had enough information to build on and to handle situations should they have occurred. Of course, I have to add to that when I started teaching and counseling. I wasn't aware if they [LGBTQ] were in school. They weren't as prominent, and we weren't as aware, or as open, because you're talking about the 80s . . . I cannot remember specifics on that.

She also indicated that conferences and workshops were two of the ways she received information on how to help this population. She said:

You know, when we go to conferences, they give us handouts, but those handouts are really references or resources for us, not to be given to the students. They were resources and information that could be used in a classroom when you were doing sensitivity sessions, but other than that, I don't recall. I know that we would have the [specific association] always put together a directory of assistance, different phone numbers that you could possibly have resources, hotlines, things of that nature.



Counselor 3 said she gained experience over time and that professional counseling conferences helped her when she was working with LGBTQ students. She said:

There weren't any courses . . . but early on in my career, I had many students. The LGBTQ community just kind of gravitated towards me when I first became a school counselor, and I try to, when I go to [professional state counseling conference], especially, just to attend as much as I can. That's the only training I've had.

One of the counselors shared one of her experiences while at university, working on her Master's degree in Counseling and Guidance. Counselor 1 said:

For one of my classes, we needed to do like, a study, and I did homosexuality in the Rio Grande Valley. Actually I had several friends that were gay, and they invited me to a club, and I had never been to one. I was like 'oh wow,' and so when we were doing the interviews back stage, you know the tears came out, the emotions came out, and my friend came to the classroom to present about his life and how hard it was. To me it's like because of biases, because of our prejudices, we are making a person suffer, feel inferior.

Counselor 7 noted that she definitely needs new information every so often and compared it to computer software. She said:

I think we definitely don't have enough training with this, but it's just like technology; as soon as you learn a new technology, there's something newer, and you are still behind. I think, just for lack of a better word, that lifestyle is increasing at a very rapid rate. When I was in school, it was not an issue. I think this is definitely something that we need to continually [look into]. I mean there are always going to be bullies. There are always going to be differences, but I think because this is something that is so different. People

have such different value sets for this. We need to have training so that there is a consistency.

Counselors also noted the training they receive is often basic or not helpful. Counselor 6 said, “I think it’s true that the training we get is not adequate for the district, for what it is that we have to deal with.” Counselor 5 said, “Because even like, at [conference] . . . it’s very basic. It never really goes in depth. I want to know techniques. I want to know what they are specifically doing, but it’s very surface.” Counselor 4 said:

It’s difficult to figure out which exact technique is going to work, because I know there is not enough research out there yet, and that’s why this was . . . something I was interested in. I had a parent blow up in my office with the student when I was trying to establish if the student had sanctuary in his own home.

Counselor participants noted they made it a point to get training on their own and that they needed to keep updated. Yet, they also found funding to be an issue with their school district when planning on attending their state conferences. Counselor 7 said:

If people take time to go to more of their professional development, that’s where a lot of training is already happening, but they can’t afford it and so the difference is support in that [from the school district].

Counselor 8, in reference to the same issue, said:

I know, because I pay for everything. We need to get funding to send us to training or funding to bring people in to go get training or let somebody be an expert on every different topic, and we come together.

Counselor 5 suggested:

I wonder if we can have like, our own [professional development]. Let's not shove ten presentations in one hour. I've already voiced my opinion on that . . . I think we did it one year, where we had three people presenting or four. I presented on sexting or something like that, but just on what we are experts in and really share it with other people.

Counselors also noted the importance of school-wide training that includes the whole school community, including students, teachers, administrators, and staff. The counselor participants thought that training the rest of the school about issues of diversity could be a role they needed to take on. Counselor 3 said:

I don't think it's an inappropriate role. I think we have a better bird's-eye view of what [impact] the lack of tolerance or possible picking on has on the student body in general. . . . By the time the administrators get it, typically at that point, it's a discipline issue. I think that [behavior] sometimes colors what those outcomes are going to be. I don't think that it's as simple as training for it. Tolerance is important and so is multi-cultural diversity. I think this is a little bit greater than that. It's training all unto itself.

Counselor 6 voiced a similar point of view, and stated:

I wonder if it starts with us to build tolerance within the school. As counselors, I think we all have very different viewpoints. Just like they teach us empathy and all those things, this is a new topic for some of us. I wonder if that training would help [others learn] how to understand. Just like educating us and then we could go back and educate other people.

Counselor 8 noted that, “. . . education is not going to hurt anything, and we all need to be aware.

We all need to teach tolerance, but we are never going to get everybody to change.”

Counselor 5 commented on the helpfulness of having persons who are LGBTQ participate in training, and said:

We had something similar to that [sensitivity training] . . . I don't remember the name of the course, but I invited my brother. He spoke to them [the class] and [then] my uncle and his boyfriend [spoke]. So after speaking about it, they broke up into groups and everybody would ask them questions. Some of them could have been inappropriate, but we said ask whatever you want, and then they will tell you if they feel like that was inappropriate and why it was inappropriate. It was really good, and we actually wrote an article about it, and one of the gentlemen who is super conservative, Mexican man, said 'I actually feel like they are real people now, like they're human. It must sound ugly what I'm going to say, but now I know that they are humans and I'm not going to see them in a different category.' So, that experience helped him a lot. That would be something that would be probably useful, but to find people that have the courage to do that, that's another thing.

### **Parents' Views on Education and Training**

Parent participants agreed that school counselors, staff, and faculty should have training if they don't know how to work effectively with LGBTQ students, but also indicated they believed that at least some school personnel would know what to do. Parent 1 said:

Just by what my son's told me and so forth, I think many would know how to, or they would seek help to help a gay student. If they don't know how, then they should seek help, find out about training and so forth.

Parent 2 said this when asked if adults in her son's school would know how to help him:

I think the school counselor does, and I think that the teachers that we have encountered, thus far, have been very adequate at handling the academic concerns of a sophomore. He has not had any other concerns or given them the opportunity to showcase whether or not they have any skills to work with him, but they also have not shown any reason that they couldn't.

Parent 3 pointed out the importance of education for students as well as faculty and staff. She said:

I think that if we had also, and I guess the GSA [Gay-Straight Alliance] would do this, or groups like that, where you have medical professionals come talk to the kids about how it's okay to be different. These are some things you may have to look out for. You know safe sex and all that.

Similarly, another parent discussed the importance of diversity training for students so that they would understand what being gay is about. Parent 1 said:

Students need to understand [what being gay means] because that is where the bullying starts, if they are not knowledgeable of the facts. 'Is there a way to become gay or are you born that way?' you know, let them know the facts.

### **Students' Views on Education and Training**

One of the student participants thought that counselors needed training, because they don't always know what to do. Student 2 said:

I honestly don't think my counselor would have known what to do. I think counselors need a little bit more help . . . taking classes to learn how to cope with it or to deal with it, because I know my counselor wouldn't have known what to do. She has been my

brother's and my sister's counselor, and they have already graduated high school. I don't think that she would have known how to help.

When asked if he thought adults in the school system knew how to help him with his concerns, Student 4 said:

Honestly, I don't. I'm not saying as a whole, I'm saying that some do, and some don't. I'm sure some people, some of the administrators, some of the teachers have taken the time to educate themselves, but honestly, it's South Texas; a lot of people stick to their views. I'm not saying that they're against it . . . but I don't think that some teachers, if you came to them, would be able to give you solid advice.

Student 3 said that he would see it helpful if teachers also took counseling classes so they can also help students in their classroom. He said:

I think it would be good if other instructors and teachers could have counseling classes. I mean it would be good for them to have counseling, too, under their belts, because some students don't go to the school counselor or look for help from them. If they [students] have no one else to go to because they [counselors] can't help them, the teacher's won't talk to students because they say 'we don't do counseling. You are going to have to go talk to your counselor about that.' I think it would help a lot more students.

### Support and Challenges

All groups of participants discussed supports and challenges. All three groups discussed the support that was important to the well-being of the students when it came to their relationships with their family, friends, and/or school personnel.

## Support

**Students' experiences with support.** When it came to finding support in the schools, some LGBTQ students thought help during their first few years in high school could have made a difference in their experience. Student 1 said:

I mainly needed help my freshman, sophomore and part of my junior year. It's just because it was kind of scary. You know, it is really scary, and it would be nice to have someone . . . or maybe even have like, a pamphlet out with the whole gay thing, you know. That's kind of like, the door thing. That's like, how you would know that help is available there because we had nothing like that in the offices or anything like that.

Student 1 had already experienced a year of college when he was interviewed, and indicated that what he experienced in college would have been a great support for students in high school. He said:

What we did have in college, which would be really good in high school, is that we did have a gay group, and we had a counselor there and she would counsel us and she would ask us about our day and stuff like that and see if anyone had any issues about our past. It was just a really good feeling, like everyone just said what they really would feel and there were so many tears and everything. I think something like that would be really good for high school because it helped a lot of kids, especially those who are new to it. I think that is kind of needed in high school.

Student 3 indicated he had mixed experiences with support from school counselors. He said:

Struggling through middle school was really hard. I was bullied a few times just for my skin color, which is why I went to a different school. Then when I went to the other school, it was a little bit easier. I mean the counselors there were very helpful, if I had

any problems they were there to hear me and then going to high school, my freshman year in wasn't easy. I felt as if my counselor thought that I made up excuses of being bullied just to get attention, which I think is a big issue with a lot of counselors and LGBT students. They [LGBTQ students] just want attention and so they would make up a story.

Student 2 indicated that she needed help sometimes, and that her CIS case manager was supportive. She said:

Trying to get my words across to people where it really matters was hard for me because I'm just a student, so when it came to her [CIS Social Worker], I always confided in her to help me do things or to help me get my point across . . . because I can't do it on my own.

Student 3 said even though he did not get much help from the school counselor, he found help from a faculty member. He said:

In the gay incidents that I have had of being bullied with other teachers, she [his counselor] never really got between. Other counselors did help; they really did. They gave me their opinions, they gave their advice of what to do and how to handle it . . . but the one person who I said really helped me through a lot was one of the CIS people.

To be completely honest, I don't see my counselor that I had my whole four years, as my counselor just for the simple fact that she never really wanted to help out with me and my situation. She was just like school grades and this, so I always confided in my Communities in School Case Manager. I always saw her as my [personal] counselor, my shoulder to lean on. The person I needed to help me through my whole high school years being an LGBT student.



Student 4 said knowing one could go to the school counselor for a personal issue, and not just for grades and schedule changes, was not well advertised at his school. He said:

It would have been nice to have it [personal counseling services] advertised more. I remember being younger, and if you had a problem, then you could go talk to the counselor, but in high school, it was more like just to sign up for classes, to change your schedule, more just like, school-related. If they would have just said, I probably would not have used them, I'm going to be honest, but it would have helped other people. It was just something that I noticed.

**Counselors' experiences with supporting students.** The counselor participants viewed themselves as being supportive of LGBTQ students. Counselor 1 indicated that helping people understand differences, find coping skills, and help support students, was part of the counselor's job. She said:

The counselor's role is basically to make them understand, okay, this is the way society sees things, it's not necessarily the correct way. Unfortunately, we are living in a society that appearance is everything. Our world is basically coping skills and help for the kids. To help them get through it [life].

One counselor also indicated that the counselor's job is to listen and help students work through issues. Counselor 2 said:

Just allowing the student to come in and to be themselves and to speak and, of course, not to retrieve as much information for my own, but to help them work through it and to help them get to the next step and to even decide whether is this really what they're thinking, feeling and having to live with, and most of the time it is.

Counselor 3 indicated that in her experience of helping her students come out to their family, she gave support to not only her students but the parents as well. She said:

I had two great experiences helping some young men come out to their parents, their moms. They were from single-parent homes. One was a little smoother than the other, but just being able to help them find a voice. Helping them [students] recognize that when their parent appears to not be accepting of their gayness, how they have struggled or finally found some peace after 15 years of coming to terms with the fact of being gay. Now in 15 seconds, they want their parent to totally be accepting of it. Trying to facilitate that process with the moms and talk them through the idea that grief is going to happen. That was actually a really nice opportunity to be able to help.

She also said she had to help a family not punish their daughter for being lesbian. She said:

For one of my students . . . her parents had a tremendous struggle with her being a lesbian and so forth. I never met with them directly, but we did a lot of stuff over the phone, and some of it was simply not trying to help them accept her as much as to not punish and penalize her. They were not at a place of acceptance at all.

**Parents' experiences with support.** The parent participants had not considered utilizing the school counselor for help with their students, especially when it came to LGBTQ issues, but one did indicate that if the school counselors could find speakers to talk to the parent of LGBTQ students about diversity, then she would see that as helpful. She said:

Have some speakers [come in] that can tell them [parents] more or less, how to work with your son or daughter that is gay. The hardest thing to do is to accept it, and then, after that, it's for the family because right now, we are still struggling with, like, my brother-

in-laws that make fun. I don't appreciate that, but every family has faults. I mean nobody is perfect. They tease and just laugh about that, it hurts . . . You know what I'm saying?

## **Challenges**

Students, parents, and school counselors noted challenges for LGBTQ students. Students struggled in some of their relationships with teachers and staff once it was known that they were LGBTQ. Counselors talked about the difficult times they had with students who were bullied and administrators who were unsupportive. One parent addressed the challenges she experienced with her son feeling like he has to overcompensate in all other aspects of his life because he is gay, and another parent shared her concerns for the LGBTQ students as a whole when their vulnerability leads them to something dangerous.

**Students' experiences with challenges.** Some student participants noted challenges with school staff. Student 2 indicated that the relationships she had with her teachers changed after they found out she was gay. She said:

I think the only difficulties I had were my teachers and my elders. They saw me as like, you know, the perfect person in the world before they found out I was gay. Then, when they found out I was gay, it was like, they didn't try to act differently, but they couldn't help it. I guess you can say I just feel like things were different after they found out.

In a similar vein, the same student participant also noted a change, but in relation to the school counselor, once it was revealed she was a lesbian. Student 2 said:

My high school year was kind of different because, I mean, my [CIS social worker] . . . was more like my own personal counselor who went to [high school] with us. So, it was like when I talked to her, everything was the same, but when I talked to my actual [school] counselor . . . once she found out I was a lesbian, it was like everything just kind

of changed. Her attitude towards me, the way she wanted to do things, it was just kind of different. It was just weird.

Student 1 sensed he was treated differently when he interviewed the administrator for the school paper. Student 1 said:

I guess because they are older men, they usually are, and I guess they are, still kind of not used to that, the whole gay thing. Not that I felt discriminated by it, but it is just like, there is a difference. I see how they talk to me and some of the other students. You know they kind of, like, when I go and talk to them, try to get me out of the room, you know, compared to the other ones, like the straight kids.

Another student discussed problems with a specific teacher, but viewed the difference in treatment as being more serious. Student 3 reported:

I had some bullying, especially from a teacher. My senior year in high school had to be the worst experience for me because of one of the teachers I had. Many people saw it as I was making excuses, when in reality, he really did treat me different from the other students he had in his classroom . . . even a CIS teacher noticed that there were differences in how he treated me.

Student 4 shared a story about a time in middle school when the school administrator reacted strongly to what the student saw as harmless. He indicated:

We were in eighth grade and we had our little table [at lunch]. This was when my best friend and I first came out. All of us, it was a bunch of girls that just ate with us. Some were 'bi' and whatever, and we jokingly called ourselves the rainbow table. It wasn't anything serious. It wasn't like we went around with signs and shirts. But some people, who didn't care for gay people . . . complained on us, and I just remember when, eighth

grade keep in mind, all little harmless, got called into the office, and they basically said to stop calling ourselves that, and that we were being compared to a gang, and I was just like ‘blow it away’ because we were little. We were eighth grade, and we were just looking for support.

Student 4 noted that bullying and tolerance are not gay issues but are issues that impact all kinds of students. He said:

I just think that it’s [tolerance] got a long way to go. It’s just not for gay issues, but many kinds of issues. People get bullied all the time. The suicide in [specific school district], as far as I know wasn’t a gay issue, he was just being bullied. I just feel like it [bullying] needs to have more awareness. Teachers need to keep their eyes open in the hall, and do something about it. Be proactive, not just ‘oh great, good afternoon.’ Obviously, if it’s happening it’s not going to stop just because they stop there one time. I feel like there needs to be zero-tolerance. Not just one day of ISS, there needs to be some serious consequences.

Student 4 also noted the importance of bullying and said, “It’s 2012, and people have handled things differently, it’s not like oh ‘boys will be boys,’ you know, people can die from what people do.” Student 4 also commented on bullying of LGBTQ students in school, and said:

. . . just mean people I guess, minor bullying. I really never had it too bad. As far as I was concerned, I always had a really good like, social networking. My best friend since we were five and I are both gay, so, we had each other . . . It was always worse in like, a gym class or something like that with all guys. You know, it gets a little worse I guess. My friend had a basketball thrown at him once, and I was pushed against the pole once.

Student 1 said that he was concerned that sometimes his straight friends would get harassed just because they hang with him. He said:

Well sometimes, honestly, like hanging out, when I realized like, hanging out with guys, because I have a lot of straight guy friends, and people would pick on them for just hanging out with me and be like, “oh he’s gay or something.”

**Counselors’ experiences with student challenges.** Counselors discussed how challenging it is to deal with bullying issues between students on school grounds. Counselor 6 talked about a bullying incident that happened on her campus. She said:

It’s okay to have an opinion, and it’s okay to respectfully express your opinions, you don’t have to get to the point of name-calling, belittling, or in this scenario that we had today, where he [a student] was shoved out the door, hands were already on the other person. In trying to make the victim feel, like yes, we are here for your safety, but you also have to be respectful of the fact that he may not accept what you do, but he chose to express himself in a very violent and wrong way, physical way, and that’s not what we are going to tolerate.

Counselor 2 observed that staff tries to help when students are bullied. She provided an example about a gay student who was bullied throughout high school and said:

When he was a freshman, they [students] gave him a hard time. They would pick on him, they would push him, and they would call him names. How he survived that is beyond any of us. Of course we [staff] were there [for him]. I think most of the teachers were very compassionate and very understanding and tried to protect him.

Counselors noted that LGBTQ students come to school with many familial issues weighing on them, and the dissonance of family dynamics is often discussed in the counselor’s

office. Counselor 2 said that students really don't have too many school issues, but they do bring family issues to school. She said:

They just can't separate their personal life from their school life. Their biggest issue is not school; their biggest issue is dealing with the family, and they bring it to the school. Most of the time, that is what they want to talk about: the hurt that they feel; the disconnect they feel from their family, or the family not knowing. 'How do I tell mom? How do I tell my dad?' It was more so the mom than the dad.

She continued to describe the possible hurt the student feels when family is unsupportive and sometimes abusive. She said:

This perfect little boy and the father had a little knock-down drag-out at the house, don't know if the boy went to the house and they caught them together or what. Then somehow with the scuffle, that had been taking place over a period of time, the young man finally told them, "Well, you took us to San Antonio and this happened" with them right next door.

Another counselor talked about how a parent was verbally abusive to her son, once he had come out to her. Counselor 4 said:

The parent was calling him names, very derogatory. Then she tells him in front of me, "The minute you are 18, you are out of here." Everything they had planned for him as far as trips and things that were going to happen his senior year, are now null and void, just because he is gay.

Counselors also noted that administrators can be a challenge when counselors try to help them understand how LGBTQ students need support. Counselor 3's biggest concern was how the actions of administrators could possibly hurt students. She said:

Where I find my biggest difficulty early on was helping administrators make sense of the whole thing [being gay], helping administrators to not penalize a gay male for expressing his want to be more feminine.

Another counselor felt that it was challenging enough to go through regular adolescence but adding LGBTQ issues on top of that makes it more difficult. Counselor 1 said:

. . . they are going through a lot of changes in adolescence itself. It is very difficult for them to deal with everything around them, their hormones and their thoughts. Well, you know, a lot of times what happens is that a lot of them are to the point that they are having suicidal ideations because of this [being gay]. The cutters or whatever . . . those are some of the things I have seen. Also, they become promiscuous. I guess it just depends how severe it is or how much support they have at home.

One counselor indicated that the relationships the students get into are a huge concern and poses some challenges. Counselor 8 said:

They [students] are very impressionable, and you don't know if there is a victim and an aggressive one, not so much recruiting, but maybe convincing. If there is a little talk about it, "Well, let's try it and see how you feel." Really, are they ready mentally to even experience any sexual experience regardless of boy-girl, boy-boy or girl-girl relationships?

**Parents' experiences with challenges.** The parents noted the challenge of dealing with unsupportive family members and the dangers that await students who are not careful and get into very unhealthy situations. Parent 1 talked about how critical her family members are, so her son ends up feeling like he has to be perfect in every other way to make up for being gay. She said:



Like my sisters, they will make little comments sometimes, but people are always going to tease, and I think the best way to deal with it is go along with it and tease them back on what their imperfections are. Just don't overdo it, but that's what I do. I think even though you have to work harder at being good at everything else because the way society has it, this is like an imperfection, and you have got to be perfect in everything else so that it can balance out.

Parent 3 brought up some points about how LGBTQ situations can lead to dangerous and hurtful outcomes if not careful. She said, "You have to explore sometimes, and not go to the promiscuous route either . . . and then you have people that are in the sex trade [human trafficking], and you don't want that either."

### Needing to Talk

In the current study, needing to talk has to do with needing to tell one's own story and share those experiences so that others can understand. Students discussed not only the school counselor as a person who will listen, but also organizations that address LGBTQ issues. Counselor participants recognized the importance of students being able to come in and talk as needed. Parent participants also discussed needing to tell their story.

### **Students Needing to Talk**

Students need to talk, and sometimes, the school counselor is available to them to do that. Student 1 said that besides talking to counselors, he found Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) to be very impactful and to provide him with a purpose. He said:

I was in PFLAG for a little bit when I was in San Antonio. I would go to meetings and talk to parents, help them . . . it was parents that were pretty much troubled by it. I would go talk to the parents, just to show them that it was alright. It's more than just your son

being gay or your daughter. I really liked it because it was a lot of fun. It was just helping them a lot and then you hear other stories, like being picked on and stuff like that. I was just like, hey, I was always the person that would be like, 'I never got picked on,' you know. I would tell them, and they would kind of open their eyes and they would always want to talk to me after the meetings and stuff like that.

### **Counselors Letting their Students Talk**

The counselor participants indicated their belief that the availability to listen to students gave the students an opportunity to tell their stories and figure things out. Counselor 1 said:

Reflecting back on a particular situation, I just sat there and took it all in and allowed the student to talk. Really, that is pretty much what would happen with any of the students that would come in, but I try very hard that if I had any reaction, that I would not let them see my reaction because it wasn't about me, it was about them. It was important to be neutral and understanding and just let them realize that I was there for them and that this was a safe place, that they could come in here and speak safely without feeling that they were going to be judged.

Similarly, another counselor discussed the importance of being available to listen and help students as they come out. Counselor 2 said:

Our role is to listen and to help them get through that [coming out]. To listen to the student, to give them that little encouragement that they are going to be okay and depending on the family, their upbringing, which I don't know of. He knows his family best and if he has communication which we hope with the family, to go and with confidence talk to them, but if not, I did tend to offer services. If you need me to talk to

your parents, if you want to ask them to come in and you can address the issue and we can try and talk about it.

Counselor 3 noted that some student issues, such as low grades and absences, are indicators that there are other concerns that need attention. She said:

A lot of times you wonder, could they [the student] have made that [being gay] up? As you talk to them or they talk to you, because it is usually [comes up in] more than one visit, that you realize that there is some truth behind all of this, and then you see it in their grades, or in their attendance, or in their actions.

Counselor 2 noted that all students need someone to just listen. She said:

The homosexual [student] might need somebody to listen, help them work through their situation, their feelings, their thoughts, or a situation that might have happened. A heterosexual [student] might just be there because of general information. But until you know, they are the same.

Similarly, Counselor 8 noted that just being available is important. She said:

Sometimes just for them to be able to have a place to go and talk to and feel understood and vent, that's what we are supposed to do, and that can make all the difference for that student is what I feel. That's what I try to be.

### **Parents Needing to Talk**

One of the parent participants shared how talking to someone helped her understand her son. Parent 2 said, "I had a conversation with a friend when he [her son] was about six, and it really came to fruition by the time he was 11 or 12." Another parent felt that more support at school, like a group counseling situation, would have helped her son. Now that her son and his

friends are adults, they go to her house, and she has observed them talking about their issues and finding support. Parent 3 said:

I think if he would have had a support group to go to, like you say there is a group now, the GSA, where they can meet and talk about issues. Because that is really what they are doing now as adults, they are coming to the house. It's a safe house for them. That's how they say 'we don't feel like we are being judged.' They can say anything and do anything.

#### Additions from Counselors

While not rising to the level of a theme across all groups of participants, counselors appeared to have perspectives not discussed by parents or students. First, several counselors noted their awareness of behaviors and mannerisms that caused them to believe a particular student might be gay, before any discussion occurred. Some said that some gay males they knew were obvious in their mannerisms and sometimes others will see that they are gay before the students see it themselves. Counselor 1 said, "I do believe that in a lot of them, you can see it when they are younger . . . those feminine traits . . . and a lot of times you don't." Counselor 2 said:

You can look [at them] and there is a certain characteristic . . . whether it's in their voice, whether it's in their mannerisms, or whether it's in their walk. Like the one from *Legally Blonde* when they are at the water fountain and the guy says 'Don't be tapping your last season's Pradas [shoes] at me.' Then she goes and asks her boyfriend what kind of shoes she is wearing and he says 'black.' So I mean there is some flamboyancy in a person. They know you can see it; you can sense it.

Counselor 3 said, “I had a young man who was very flamboyant, he loved wearing makeup and putting little barrettes in his hair and so forth.”

A common concern for the counselor participants was privacy concerns for all students, especially those in the LGBTQ population who are entitled to keep their lifestyles private. One of the counselor participants from the focus group commented that even though some students are hiding their sexuality from their parents, they have no problem being openly gay at school. She also mentioned FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) laws, which protect the student’s sexual identity as confidential and can cause some issues for the school administrators, especially if the student gets into disciplinary problems and the administrator outs the student to his/her parents without the student’s consent. Counselor 4 said:

If you get civil liberties involved, they [LGBTQ students] can sue the school if you don’t allow representation of the group. Just like what happened to one of the schools in [specific district]. There have been lawsuits that I’ve read about in articles where principals have ‘outed’ students to parents and the student was not open at home even though they were open at school. That is their right, to not tell their family until they are ready to tell them.

The rest of the counselors in the focus group discussed duty to report because of the potential harm to the students if in a sexual relationship at too young an age. Counselor 7 said, “So, it’s always having to decide where the harm is in that, and how do you define harm, and then you do the warning [to the parents].”

Two counselors brought up concerns with sexually transmitted diseases and violent behavior within a relationship. Counselor 5 said, “How do you talk to them about it [sexual relationship], because I know that two ladies are going to have different relationship than two

men, so it's really hard to be like, 'Well, what are you doing, technically what is going on?' because girls have given girls STDs, too." Counselor 8 said:

In relationships, like violence, date violence, I've seen it a lot, too. I just had a young lady who said the ex-girlfriend said 'she told me to punch her,' and so she punched her and, it's like 'what?' That was the way of telling each other that they liked each other. I didn't understand.

One of the counselors compared the acceptance of the LGBTQ population to the times when civil rights movements were the focus of racial dissention in the past. Counselor 7 said:

That's what I was thinking. Just the fact that we have been dealing with racism since the 40s and 50s, and it's come about again, and people have changed. Some people have, but these students, they are part of the initial 'hey look, I'm different, this is who I am, I'm different from what society deems as the norm,' and this is a big change; it's a big movement for our students at this time. Like if we were back in the 50s trying to get rights.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

This chapter provides an overview of the study, a review and discussion of the qualitative findings, and the conclusions drawn from these findings. Discussion addresses the research questions as well as findings of this study in relationship to the extant literature. Finally, implications for practice and recommendations for future research are considered.

#### Overview of the Study

The school counselor's responsibility is to offer guidance in the areas of personal and social, academic, and career exploration to all school students. School counselors must serve LGBTQ students as they would any others, without judgment or bias according to the *ASCA Code of Ethics*. The purpose of the study was to identify the experiences LGBTQ students and parents of LGBTQ students have had in working with their school counselors as well as explore the experiences that school counselors have had in working with students with LGBTQ sexual orientations and parents of LGBTQ students.

There were three different populations interviewed for this study: school counselors, students who identify as LGBTQ, and parents of LGBTQ youth. Individual interviews with three school counselors from different areas of Texas, as well as a focus group with five school counselors from the same city were conducted. The criterion for participation in the study was that the school counselor had experience with LGBTQ students. Counselors who participated in the individual interviews were three Mexican American females, and those who participated in the focus group were four Mexican American and one Anglo American who were also all female.

The students interviewed were high school graduates ranging in age from 18 to 20 years old. The invitation for this group to participate in the study was posted on a flyer and displayed at the local university. Another way students were asked to participate was through referrals from a colleague. Those interviewed were two gay male students, one Mexican American and one Anglo American; one Mexican American lesbian; and one Mexican American gay male student who had also dressed as a woman for drag shows.

The parents who were interviewed were parents whose children identified themselves as LGBTQ students while in high school. That was the only criteria needed for the parent participants. One parent was referred by her son who was also a participant in this study. She is also a Mexican American school counselor in a neighboring school district. Another parent, a Mexican American store owner in town, was referred by a colleague who had the participant's son was one of her students. One parent was an Anglo American college professor in Florida who was referred to me by a local college professor.

Qualitative data consisted of transcripts from individual interviews and a focus group. Each transcript was reviewed and analyzed for units of meaning, which were sorted, compared, and contrasted until the researcher identified seven themes. These included acceptance, coming out, being open, being comfortable, education and training, support and challenges, and needing to talk. In addition to these themes that included responses from all participants, counselors contributed other important information that did not reach the level of themes.

### Acceptance

The theme of acceptance has to do with how these students experienced coming into themselves, accepting who they are, and how they would be in the world. The students, the school counselors, and the parents all described their unique stories of how they themselves, their



students, or their children found acceptance. Some students expressed how different they felt from others when exploring their sexual orientation, but then realized they really were not that different from their peers.

Several participants in this study indicated that middle school was a place where the students first explored sexual orientation. The student participants and the counselors both identified through their individual experiences that middle school was the place where most of the students first found themselves being attracted to same-sex partners. The student participants and the counselors who worked with middle school students both shared experiences about middle school students questioning their sexual identity. Some parent participants encountered their children exploring their sexual identity during middle school as well. There was no evidence in the literature in this study that addressed middle school as a place in the lives of LGBTQ students when questioning one's sexual orientation is explored, so this was a unique finding in this study.

Some students identified as bisexual before identifying as gay when first discussing their sexual orientation with their parents. One student said she dated boys so as to make her mother happy. Two parents said their children may have wanted to hold on to some kind of socially acceptable situation, before they identified fully as gay. This finding supports Fontaine's (1998) contention that LGBT youth have concerns when it comes to revealing their sexual identity because of fear of disclosure to peers and parents and fear of rejection by family.

The counselors found it frustrating when students had been manipulated or hurt by the questioning students; because in the end, the questioning students were not gay after all. The counselors advocated for the LGBTQ student and, then, found out that the other student they

were interested in dating was just curious, and not actually gay. This finding was not found in previous literature and may require further study.

### Experience of Coming Out

The theme of coming out detailed the LGBTQ student participant's experiences of coming out to friends, family, or school staff. Counselors shared their experiences with helping students come out to parents, while parents talked about being there for their children when their children decided to discuss their sexual orientation. The accounts provided by participants support the contentions of Borhek (1988), who stated that there is considerable tension and anxiety associated with two basic questions: "Should I come out to my parents?" and "How should I do it?" Some counselors shared experiences where they believed they were helpful to their students when they needed to find the words to discuss their sexual orientation with their parents. Another counselor shared that she just wanted to get the parents to quit punishing her student because she was lesbian. Hidalgo, Peterson, and Woodman (1985) reported that LGBTQ students had a fear of rejection from families, which leads to loss of individuality, self-neglect, disregard for personal needs and damaging habits of self-care, and while fear of rejection was not itself a theme in this study, the importance of parental or family responses to students coming out was evident.

Contrary to much of the extent literature, two of the four students in the current study found it easier to come out to the opposite-sex parent. The student participants in the current study had different experiences related to who was supportive. One gay male came out to his mother, but not his father; although he suspected his father knew. The student who is lesbian told her mother once in middle school and again in high school in front of her CIS case worker. She never mentioned coming out to her father. Another male student reported a father who was

supportive and a grandmother who had issues. He did not mention coming out to his mother. The last student had a mother who was supportive because the mother had gay siblings.

In addition, some of the student participants said they actually found it easier to come out to friends and teachers first, and then to parents. Finding an LGBTQ staff member in a school is helpful when the student needs to know how they should feel about themselves. Cooley (1998) noted that having a faculty member/counselor/administrator, who is gay or lesbian, could fill a need and can be helpful to the LGBTQ student as a role model. Schoen (2011) also indicated that openly gay faculty and staff, especially counselors, are the most beneficial when helping students. While Bauman and Sachs-Kapp (1998) indicated that schools were not supportive of LGBTQ students and indicated that mere suspicion of homosexuality may be sufficient for ostracism, students in the current study did not voice this concern. This difference may be a result of significant changes that have occurred in the attitudes of students over the past 15 years.

Most of the student participants did not use the school counselor as a resource when coming out. Student participants and the parents of LGBTQ youth participants mostly reported going to the school counselors for academic questions and scheduling concerns. They did not think of going to the school counselor for LGBTQ issues. Since it was not well advertised, some did not know they could.

One parent, who is a school counselor, indicated that her son coming out to her made her a better school counselor when it came to working with LGBTQ students seeking guidance at her school. Another parent believed she pushed her son out because she was well-read on early acceptance of LGBTQ youth and the emotional support early acceptance provides. Tyler (2015) identified several stages of the coming out process, including (a) out to self, (b) out to parent(s), (c) relational tension, (d) relational adjustment, and (e) evolving relational identity. Tyler

indicated that both parents and LGBTQ child advance through these phases together creating a process marked by shared experiences. This information is contrary to what the parents in this study experienced. Another parent offered her couch as a refuge for some who were kicked out of their homes for being LGBTQ. Unfortunately, many are left to their own defenses when they come out and their parents are unsupportive.

One counselor expressed concern that LGBTQ students lacked the practice of public relationships and therefore feel awkward because there are so few models to follow. Another counselor expressed her belief that students who hide their relationships from society end up having unhealthy relationships. Counselor concerns were consistent with those expressed by Feinstein and Looney (1982) who reported “this deception [of being gay, yet acting straight] distorts almost all relationships the adolescent may attempt to develop or maintain and create an increasing sense of isolation” (p. 58). Counselor concerns in the current study are consistent with extant literature, and perhaps go further than previous literature in terms of recognition of the need to be able to practice relationships in public venues where there are role models during the stage of life when heterosexual young people are learning and practicing relationship skills.

### Being Open

The theme of being open has to do with both students being open about their sexual identity and openness of society to those whose sexual identity is other than heterosexual. Counselor and parent participants both expressed their belief that the media has had a strong effect on the school and staff being more accepting of LGBTQ students, as well as on LGBTQ students being more open about their sexuality. Counselors in this study reported a difference in the acceptance level of LGBTQ students from one school to another school, and one of the

parents reported differences as they have travelled from schools in one state to schools in another state.

One of the parent participants believed that her son's openness about his sexuality led her to be open about it with her students at school. Since she is a school counselor, she believes this personal experience will help her students be open with her if they are questioning their sexuality. Another parent made a reference that the school her son attends is very open and noted that had they stayed in their previous (Southern) state, she would have had a different experience. Fontaine's (1998) report that in Southern states, homosexual issues are met with more adversity than in other states gives this parent's claim some merit. However, more current data is needed to understand whether such differences are still found in specifically Southern states.

The student participants all agreed that if there is openly gay faculty in the school, then they don't feel a need to hide their sexuality. This finding is consistent with Sadowski's (2013) and Schoen's (2011) findings that LGBTQ students who have mutual, caring relationships with nonparent adults, such as teachers and counselors, as well as exposure to openly gay faculty and staff may be protected from a host of risks to their well-being.

Sometimes one's occupation provides enough education and experiences to handle certain situations. One student felt he was able to be open with his mother, since she too, was a school counselor. Unfortunately, a different student reported that he had a gay uncle who was physically abused by his family, and the incident kept his grandmother in fear. However, the same student's father knew about his sexuality and was accepting of it. A different student's parent had two siblings who were gay, so he felt he could be open about his sexual orientation. All the student participants had accepting parents. Ryan et al. (2010) found that young adults

who reported high levels of family acceptance created a positive environment that supports self-esteem and general health.

### Being Comfortable

The theme of being comfortable refers to the level of comfort participants expressed about dealing with LGBTQ issues and topics as well as the comfort they felt with particular people. Student participants found support from particular faculty, staff, or other adults on campus as well as with some students. One parent noted that the rapport faculty and some staff have with their children resulted in the fact that selected school personnel were the first to know their child is LGBTQ. Sadowski (2013) noted the importance of supportive relationships with adults on campus and indicated that those relationships can provide a place for LGBTQ students to have a sounding board for issues at school and at home.

The students shared experiences of when they first were questioned about their sexual orientation by their peers. The student participants reported that some straight students are okay with them being LGBTQ, and some are still not. Even though the student participants from this study did not report any recent physical or verbal bullying from their peers, they know some heterosexual peers will not agree with or understand their sexual orientation. The student participants expressed that the straight students will just have to get used to it and that they will eventually come around. The literature indicated that LGBTQ students had more intense bullying than just not being understood. For example, Cooley (1998) revealed the verbal and physical abuse from peers is a major stressor. Sawyer et al. (2006), Kosciw, Greytak, and Diaz (2009), and Toomey et al. (2011) revealed that LGBTQ youth are targeted more than heterosexual youth when it comes to anti-gay harassment and violence. Daley et al. (2008) said the LGBTQ youth suffer twice as much bullying and their heterosexual peers. The participants in this study did not

reveal any violent experiences, but their experiences and treatment from others was significant enough to be noted and made to feel different.

Sometimes the counselor will need to step outside of his/her comfort zone to serve the LGBTQ student. One counselor confessed that even though she was uncomfortable when her peers explored same-sex relationships when she was in college, she believed she was no longer uncomfortable or biased in her current position as a school counselor. Cooley (1998) addressed the importance of counselors being accurately informed and, unbiased counselors in order to decrease isolation by undoing internalized homophobia before patterns of self-defeating behaviors are ingrained. Counselors need to check for their own biases before committing to serving a student.

One counselor also noted that straight students come in to tell her about incidents where LGBTQ students are hitting on them, which makes the heterosexual students feel uncomfortable. This issue is one yet to be adequately addressed in the literature.

### Education and Training

All three groups had something to say about educating those around them on issues concerning the LGBTQ population. Counselors reported a lack of educational resources in their programs concerning LGBTQ students, but they acknowledged that the sessions at their professional state conferences were current on the LGBTQ topic; thus, conferences were their primary resource for helping this population. Unfortunately, school districts are not always able to pay for their counselors to attend professional conferences. Counselors believed that any information on LGBTQ concerns and issues is limited at conferences and during staff development meetings, as is the information on sex and pregnancy. In 1998, Fontaine reported that only 1 in 10 counselors felt competent to serve LGBTQ students. While this number may

have changed in intervening years, school counselors in this study still experienced a lack of up-to-date information regarding helpful interventions and information for working with LGBTQ students. Luke and Goodrich (2012) proposed LGBTQ Responsive School Counseling Supervision (RSCS) as a way to assist school counselors and supervisors in meeting the distinct needs of LGBTQ students and those who are interested in this population, across a school counseling program.

Counselors also discussed the responsibility of the school counselor to provide the school with sensitivity training. Beliefs about their responsibility in this area echo Cooley's (1998) assertion that counselors not only need to educate themselves on the LGBTQ issues concerning their students, but also educate others; he said that accurately informed, unbiased counselors can begin the process to decrease isolation by undoing internalized homophobia before patterns of self-defeating behaviors are ingrained. Both Cooley (1998) and Bauman and Sachs-Kapp (1998) reported that it was the counselors' responsibility to present staff development and student training updates on treatment and expectations of school personnel toward LGBTQ students.

Parent participants indicated that all staff should be trained in LGBTQ issues. The parents thought that adult staff in a school were able to help their children with any issue concerning academics but wished there was more support provided by the community in the schools, so that differences and health issues can be discussed and presented to the students. Similarly, Cooley (1998) indicated that one way counselors can be effective is by identifying community resources. Daley et al. (2008) also reported that it is the responsibility of city social services and school staff to help LGBTQ students with resources and counseling. These recommendations support the need for staff training.



The student participants reported a different idea about training. Even though the counselor seemed to be the most unbiased, some students said they still needed more training because they did not always know what to do. They also reported that teachers needed counseling classes in their programs of study. Student participants' statements support those of McFarland and Dupuis (2001), who reported that many people in public school remain uninformed about the number of gay students in schools and show little interest in the concerns of these students.

### Support and Challenges

The theme of support and challenges is about the supportive experiences that the LGBTQ students had from school counselors or support groups (GSAs) located in their schools. The counselors also believed that parents of LGBTQ students can also seek support and resources from the counselors and the schools. Isolated challenging experiences were also reported by some of the participants.

Counselors believed they were supportive of LGBTQ students and were advocates for change. They all mentioned helping students in several ways, including finding resources for them, listening to their stories, or helping students come out to their parents and being supportive. Two counselors reported having to intervene with parents who were punishing their children because of their sexual orientation. Over 20 years ago, Morrow (1993) said that counselors need to come forward in advocating for the dignity and human rights of gay and lesbian people, including adolescents. Data from counselors in the current study indicated that these counselors believe in the importance of such advocacy and see themselves as providing it to students.

Counselors noted that parents need support as well. Cooley (1998) related parental need for support to parental need to “grieve the loss of the image of their child’s heterosexuality” (p. 33). Parents in the current study expressed more concerns about their children’s safety and well-being. However, parent participants in the current study did not utilize the school counselor as a resource for concerns or information about LGBTQ issues.

Student participants said that freshman year in high school is crucial for getting help or support. By the time they are seniors, they have pretty much found their way. College support groups were addressed, and the student who experienced them believes that a support group in high school would have been beneficial. Valenti and Campbell (2009) reported that the first high school gay support group was founded in 1984 to address the underserved needs of gay and lesbian students. Sadowski (2013) reported that GSAs are now where LGBTQ students can find support in schools. Some students in this study did find the counselors and CIS social workers to be helpful when it came to finding help. Another student said it was not well advertised that counselors were available for personal problems.

The counselors and students alike pointed out the lack of support from the families, staff, and student peers as a challenge. Counselors reported that they hear about the struggles of their students, their disconnection from their family, about the bullying they endured, and about difficulties with some school staff. Counselors also noted that they worked with students with a lot of family issues and needed to address the dichotomous lives the students were living. Coleman and Remafedi (1989) reported that counselors need to understand dissonance as an expected part of gay and lesbian adolescent development.

Counselors in the current study discussed a number of challenges faced by their students as well as ways they intervened. Research indicates that LGBTQ students are at high risk for

suicide, drug use, sexual diseases, cutting, and dangerous behaviors (Daley et al., 2008; Espelage et al. (2008), Fontaine, 1998; Luke and Goodrich, 2012) and counselors in this study noted their awareness of a variety of factors that are challenging for their students.

Student participants reported incidences where school staff was not supportive. Being treated differently by faculty and staff, or being prevented by administrators and staff from engaging in support-seeking behaviors, were both noted. Mustanski et al. (2014) reported that in order for youths to be free of sexual-orientation health disparities, school climate must allow all students to feel valued, respected, and accepted regardless of their sexual orientation. While attitudes and actions of school staff may have changed significantly since Fontaine's (1998) work, both students and counselors indicated that, in their experiences, some school staff continue to engage in inappropriate behaviors and have problematic attitudes with regards to LGBTQ students.

The students also shared their experiences with bullying by peers and how they wished faculty had been more aware of it and done something about it. This was supported by Cooley (1998) who reported that teachers are the closest to the homophobic behavior taking place in the classroom and see what the students are going through. It is a teacher's obligation to keep all students safe in their classrooms. Students also reported concern for their straight friends who would get teased for hanging out with them because they were LGBTQ students. There was no evidence in the literature review that addressed bullying of friends of gay students who were heterosexual.

### Needing to Talk

All three groups of participants shared experiences of how talking has greatly helped the parents accept the situation they were in, helped the students figure out a way to be honest with

everyone, and helped the school counselors be better advocates for the LGBTQ students. All three groups of participants found talking about their experiences helpful.

One student found going to PFLAG helpful not only to himself but also to the parents who attended who heard his story. The counselors also reported instances where the students came into their offices and were allowed to just talk and tell their stories without judgment from the counselor. Counselors acknowledged that the parents of LGBTQ students could really use a place to talk about their LGBTQ children. One parent talked to a friend about her son when he was six, after she suspected he was gay. Other parents thought the school could be more supportive by having group sessions for their students. While it seems evident that being able to talk or tell one's story would be important for LGBTQ students and their parents, literature regarding this area is lacking. Espelage et al. (2008) said "Youth are attempting to develop their identities without the support of various social systems including family, peers, and schools" (p.203).

#### Additions from Counselors

Counselors noted a number of concerns that were not shared by students and parents. One concern was about privacy for the students about their sexual orientation. Counselors in the current study were aware of the privacy rights of youth regarding their sexual orientation and referred to lawsuits that could be brought if administrators or other school personnel reveal students' sexual orientation to parents. Some students are openly gay at school but not at home. Ettinghoff (2014) addressed the issues concerning the need for school districts change their policies about disclosure of sexual orientation to a parent. "Privacy is an essential right for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth, and school policies need to reflect this" (Ettinghoff, 2014, p. 582). He added, "Schools should modify their parental

notification policies, disciplinary procedures, and employee training to ensure that LGBTQ students are not outed in ways that may be detrimental to their well-being and lives” (Ettinghoff, 2014, p. 582).

### Implications and Recommendations

School counselors can be a resource and can be an advocate for the LGBTQ students and their parents. The *Ethical Standards for School Counselors*, developed by the ASCA, state in its preamble the rights that all students have such as respect, information and support, educational choices, privacy, and to feel safe in school environments (ASCA, 2010).

Each person has the right . . . have access to a comprehensive school counseling program that advocates for and affirms all students from diverse populations including:  
ethnic/racial identity, age, economic status, abilities/disabilities, language, immigration status, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity/expression, family type,  
religious/spiritual identity and appearance. (ASCA, 2010, p. 1)

Advocating for LGBTQ students and offering group counseling as support are just two of the ways school counselors can address the personal and social issues in a comprehensive counseling program. In addition, school counselors may have a critical role to play in encouraging faculty and staff who are part of the LGBTQ community to participate as safe and supportive school personnel who are available to students.

The school counselor could serve as a resource for parents and could help parents understand their LGBTQ child and the issues concerning them that are outside of academic guidance. Help with personal and social issues is not well-advertised and counselors should make this information visible and available. Information about what the counseling office in a school can offer students and parents could be brought to the attention of the community by

individual campuses or as a whole by the school districts. School counselors could also provide information about PFLAG and similar organization where parents can find people to talk to and acquire resources for their children. Information concerning meeting times and contact people for helpful organizations should be part of school counselor resource information. School counselors can also assist in identifying community agencies or programs that will support both the LGBTQ student and their parents when it comes to specific needs of the student, especially concerning therapy, family counseling, drug and alcohol abuse programs.

Counselors can facilitate and guide a group counseling session on campus. By having the students participate in group counseling, the counselor can be beneficial by introducing the students to each other, fostering the discussions that ensue during the meetings, and developing positive support of each other. The support on campus will allow LGBTQ students to have more positive experiences, leading to better choices, better grades, success of graduating high school, and a direction of higher education or work force.

Counselors who recognize their own lack of education and/or training can request funding from their districts so that they are able to deliver a comprehensive counseling program for all students. Directors and Coordinators of Guidance and Counseling, who are responsible for the staff development of counselors within their districts, can do a needs-assessment to determine what training is important for the counselors in their districts. School counselors knowledgeable about the issues facing LGBTQ students and ways schools can address the issue are in a position to provide training for other school personnel about issues impacting LGBTQ students as well as ways the school can address these issues. School counselors may need to actively advocate for provisions of such training. In turn, more school counselors would have the skills and competencies needed to serve this population of students and their parents.

Counselor educators who teach in school counseling programs would be wise to provide students with information about issues facing LGBTQ students as well as with assistance in knowing how to work with these students and their parents. Counselor educators can provide materials and resources to help school counseling master's students be competent and better equipped to work with LGBTQ students. A better understanding of sexual orientation, from both a medical standpoint as well as from an emotional one, can help all involved promote respect and acceptance of diverse populations. Counselor educators should also promote the need for on-going training for both school counselors and other faculty and staff in school settings.

#### Limitations of the Study

There are several important limitations that must be kept in mind when considering the results of this study. Students were questioned about the experiences they had with the school counselor, but the students were all of college age between 18-20 years old. Thus, the experiences in high school happened a year or two before they were interviewed. Accuracy of those memories could have been impacted or influenced by time. In addition, only Anglo American and Mexican American LGBTQ students were interviewed; therefore, intersecting oppressive factors may not have been addressed as they would have if the population had been more diverse.

Another limitation was that parent participants were unable to address experience with the school counselor regarding issues concerning their child's sexual identity because none had consulted with school counselors about this topic. While parent participants consulted with school counselors regarding academic concerns, personal concerns were not discussed. Another limitation is that, while counselor participants were from a large geographic region in South Texas, all were female and all but one was Mexican American. A more diverse population of

counselors, in terms of ethnicity and gender as well as inclusion of counselors from outside South Texas, might provide different perspectives and experiences.

### Recommendations for Further Research

There are a number of foci for future research about the experiences of LGBTQ adolescents and their parents. Additional research about LGBTQ students and their parents' interactions with the school counselor, that addresses limitations of the current research, would strengthen knowledge in this important area. In addition, assessing such things as the stability of emotional support from family and schools, professional development provided or supported by school districts concerning LGBTQ issues to school counselors, administrators and staff, and the legal concerns and consequences of direct or indirect bullying of LGBTQ students in a school setting would be important additions to the literature.

This study provided new information about the experiences of LGBTQ students and the parents with the secondary school counselor and pointed to several areas of research that need further study. Some of the questions that emerged for further study are Do students in middle school need to have LGBTQ resources and support available to them? What are the experiences of male counselors when working with LGBTQ students? What are the experiences of African American counselors working with LGBTQ students? What are the experiences of African American, LGBTQ students in working with the school counselor? What are the experiences of transgendered students, specifically in a school setting?

### Summary

Two primary issues emerged from the review of the literature on LGBTQ students, parents of LGBTQ students, and the school counselor. The first that is apparent is the lack of information about the relationships that these three groups, LGBTQ students, parents, and the



school counselors have concerning working together to foster and present a program that will instill a positive school climate for all students. The second issue was the fact that there was a clear gap of information on LGBTQ issues, as it was from 1985 to 2007, and then more information came to the forefront from 2008 on. There was information on statistics, census, and quantitative survey reports but very little on qualitative studies and relationships between LGBTQ students and school personnel.

The overall intent of the study was to see what the experiences all three groups, students, parents, and counselors had with each other concerning LGBTQ issues and concerns. Students in this study discussed being first aware of their sexual orientation during middle school; therefore there is a definite need for counselors to attain more help and resources in middle schools when it comes to students coping with their sexuality. By the time they reach the upper grades in high school, they have it figured out. They also need to know the school counselor is there to help them through any issue, academic or personal. Group counseling and active GSA clubs would benefit the LGBTQ students in finding positive support.

The parents need to know that the school counselor is there to help them as well as their students with personal, social and emotional issues. It is all part of the ASCA model of competencies that counselors offer to serve their students. Parents could benefit if they seek out PFLAG organizations or meetings, which foster discussions about helping their LGBTQ child. This in turn can help in the acceptance process of their children.

The lack of training and information available to school counselors, as well as all staff, was discussed by school counseling respondents, who indicated it was only available through professional conferences and not through in-service training at district level. For counselors in this study, funding to attend conferences for the purpose of professional development was not

available; thus, school counselors had to pay for any training they received themselves. In addition, counselors should be advocates for diverse populations. One way school counselors can do this is by receiving training and then bringing it back to provide workshops to school staff so that they are better prepared to help all students, regardless of sexual orientation, feel safe and respected.

I am a certified school counselor with 23 years of experience working with high school aged students of all diverse backgrounds and sexual orientations. Over the years, the LGBTQ students found their way into my office and have felt very comfortable discussing their issues with me. I have conducted an extensive review of studies that discuss LGBTQ student issues and the school counselor but can find no reports that discuss the parents of LGBTQ students and the relationship with the school counselor component. Based on my training, experience, and review of the relevant literature, I believe that research on the experiences of LGBTQ adolescents and their parents with the school counselor warrants serious consideration.

## REFERENCES

- Aldeman, M., & Woods, K. (2006). Identification without intervention: Transforming the anti-LGBTQ school climate. *Journal of Poverty, 10*(20), 6-26.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2000). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (4th ed., text rev.). Washington, DC: Author.
- American Psychiatric Association. (2013). Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (5th ed.). Washington, DC: Author.
- American School Counselor Association [ASCA]. (2010). *ASCA code of ethics and standards of practice*. Alexandria, VA: Author.
- Anderson, J. (1994). School climate for gay and lesbian students and staff members. *Phi Delta Kappan, 4*, 151-154.
- Balkin, R. (2009). Religious identity and cultural diversity: Exploring the relationships between religious identity, sexism, homophobia, and multicultural competence. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 87*, 420.
- Bauman, S., & Sachs-Kapp, P. (1998). A school takes a stand: Promotion of sexual orientation workshops by counselors. *Professional School Counseling, 1*, 42-45.
- Bidell, M. P. (2012). Examining school counseling students' multicultural and sexual orientation competencies through a cross-specialization comparison. *Journal of Counseling and Development, 90*, 200-207.
- Borhek, M. (1988). Helping gay and lesbian adolescents and their families. *Journal of Adolescent Health Care, 9*, 123-128.
- Catapano, P. (2007). Ron Becker's: Gay TV and straight America. *Journal of Popular Culture, 172-174*.

- Charmaz, K. (2006). *Constructing grounded theory: A practical guide through qualitative analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- cognitive dissonance. (2015) In *Merriam-Webster.com*.
- Retrieved August 24, 2015 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/cognitive%20dissonance>
- Coleman, E., & Remafedi, G. (1989). Gay lesbian and bi-sexual adolescents: A critical challenge to counselors. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 68, 36-40.
- Cooley, J. J. (1998). Gay and lesbian adolescents: Presenting problems and the counselor's role. *Professional School Counseling*, 1(3), 30-35.
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). *The basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- D'Augelli, A. R. (2003). Mental health problems among lesbian, gay, and bisexual youths, ages 14 to 21. *Clinical Child Psychiatry and Psychiatry*, 7, 439-462.
- Daley, A., Solomon, S., Newman, P. A., & Mishna, F. (2008). Traversing the margins: Intersectionalities in the bullying of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth. *Journal of Gay and Social Services*, 19(3), 9-29.
- Dempsey, C. (1994). Health and social issues of gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual adolescents. *Families in Society: The Journal of Contemporary Human Services*, 75(3), 160-167.
- Espelage, D. L., Aragon, S. R., Birkett, M., & Koenig, B. (2008). Homophobic teasing, psychological outcomes, and sexual orientation among high school students: What influence do parents and schools have?. *School Psychology Review*, 37(2), 202-216.
- Ettinghoff, E. (2014) Outed at school: Student privacy rights and preventing unwanted disclosures of sexual orientation. *Loyola of Los Angeles Law Review*, 47, 579-617.

- Feinstein, S., & Looney, J. (Eds.). (1982). *Adolescent psychiatry: Volume X*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Fontaine, J. H. (1998). Evidencing a need: School counselors' experiences with gay and lesbian students. *Professional School Counseling, 1*(3), 8.
- Ginsberg, R. W. (1998). Silenced voices inside our schools. *Initiatives, 58*, 1-15.
- Gonzalez, K.A., Rostosky, S. S., Odom, R. D. & Riggle, E. D. B. (2013). The positive aspects of being the parent of an LGBTQ child. *Family Process, 52* (2), 325-337.
- Greene, D.C. & Britton, P.J. (2012). Stage of sexual minority identity formation: The impact of shame, internalized homophobia, ambivalence over emotional expression, and personal mastery. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Mental Health, 16*, 188-214.
- Grossman A. H. & D'Augelli, A. R. (2007) Transgender youth and life-threatening behaviors. *Suicide & Life-threatening Behavior, 37*, 527-537.
- Herek, G. M. (1986). On heterosexual masculinity: Some psychical consequences of the social construction of gender and sexuality. *American Behavioral Scientist, 29*, 563-577.
- Hidalgo, H., Peterson, T., & Woodman, J. (Eds.). (1985). *Lesbian and gay issues: A resource manual for social workers*. New York: National Association of Social Workers, Inc.
- Hollander, G. (2000). Questioning youths: Challenges to working with youths forming identities. *School Psychology Review, 29*, 173-179.
- Horn, S., Szalacha, L. & Drill, K. (2008) Schooling, sexuality, and rights: An investigation of heterosexual students' social cognition regarding sexual orientation and the rights of gay and lesbian peers in school. *Journal of Social Issues, 64*(4), 791-813.

- Kosciw, J. G., Greytak, E. A., & Diaz, E. M. (2009). Who, what, where, when, and why: Demographic and ecological factors contributing to hostile school climate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth. *J Youth Adolescence*, 38, 976-988.
- Lewin, T. (2005, December 2). Openly gay student's lawsuit over privacy will proceed. *New York Times*, p. 21
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Luke, M., & Goodrich, K. M. (2012). LGBTQ responsive school counseling supervision. *The Clinical Supervisor*, 31(1), 81-102.
- marriage. (2015) In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved November 9, 2015 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/marriage>
- Marriage Equality USA. (2015, March 26). Marriage Equality USA outraged by Indiana governor signing discriminatory statute into law. Retrieved from [http://www.marriageequality.org/meusa\\_outraged\\_indiana\\_rfra](http://www.marriageequality.org/meusa_outraged_indiana_rfra).
- Martin, A., & Hetrick, E. (1988). The stigmatization of the gay and lesbian adolescent. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 15, 163-183.
- McCabe, P., & Robinson, F. (2008). Committing to social justice: The behavioral intention of school psychology and education trainees to advocate for lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered youth. *School Psychology Review*, 37, 469-486.
- McFarland, W. P., & Dupuis, M. (2001). The legal duty to protect gay and lesbian students from violence in school. *Professional School Counseling*, 4(3), 171-179.
- Morrow, D. (1993). Social work with gay and lesbian adolescents. *Social Work*, 38(6), 655-660.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

- Mustanski, B., Birkett, M., Greene, G. J., Hatzenbuehler, M. L., & Newcomb, M. E. (2014). Envisioning an America without sexual orientation inequities in adolescent health. *American Journal of Public Health, February, 104*(2), 218-225.
- Parry, W. (2013, June 4). Gender dysphoria: DSM-5 reflects shift in perspective on gender identity. Retrieved from [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/04/gender-dysphoria-dsm-5\\_n\\_3385287.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/06/04/gender-dysphoria-dsm-5_n_3385287.html)
- Payne, E. & Smith, M. (2010). Reduction of stigma in schools: An evaluation of the first three years. *Issues in Teacher Education, 11*-36.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Poland, S. (2010). LGBT students need support at school: Homophobia in districts is widespread-and can have tragic results. *District Administration, 44*.
- Price, J. H., & Telljohann, S. K. (1991). School counselor's perceptions of adolescent homosexuals. *Journal of School Health, 61*, 433-438.
- Radowsky, M. & Segal, L. J. (1997). The gay adolescent: Stressors, adaptations, and psychosocial interventions. *Clinical Psychology Review, 17*, 191-216.
- Robinson J.P., & Espelage, D. L. (2011). Inequities in educational and psychological outcomes between LGBTQ and straight students in middle and high school. *Educational Researcher, 40*(7), 315-330.
- Russell, S.T., & Joyner, K. (2001). Adolescent sexual orientation and suicide risk: Evidence from a national study. *American Journal of Public Health, 91*, 1276–1281.
- Ryan, C. (2014). A practitioner's resource guide: Helping families to support their LGBT children, *Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, 2*-15.

- Ryan, C., Russell, S.T., Huebner, D., Diaz, R., & Sanchez, J. (2010). Family acceptance in adolescence and the health of LGBT young adults. *Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing*, 23(4), 205-213.
- Sadowski, M. (2013). There's always that one teacher. *Educational Leadership*, 28-32.
- Saldana, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Saldana, J. (2013). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
- Satcher, J., & Leggett, M. (2007). Homonegativity among professional school counselors: An exploratory study. *Professional School Counseling*, 11(1), 10-16.
- Savin-Williams, R. (1994) Verbal and physical abuse as stressors in the lives of lesbian, gay male, and bi-sexual youths: Associations with school problems, running away, substance abuse, prostitution, and suicide. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 62(2), 261-269.
- Sawyer, R. J., Porter, J. D., Lehman, T. C, Anderson, C., & Anderson, K. M. (2006). Education and training needs of school staff relevant to preventing risk behaviors and promoting health behaviors among gay, lesbian, bisexual and questioning youth. *Journal of HIV/AIDS Prevention in Children & Youth*, 7(1), 37-53.
- Schoen, M. K. (2011). Gay & lesbian school counselors: Making a difference. *ASCA School Counselor*, 48(5), p. 11-15.
- Somashekhar, S. (2014) Health survey gives government its first large-scale data on gay, bisexual population, *Washington Post*, Retrieved on October 18, 2015 from



- [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/health-survey-gives-government-its-first-large-scale-data-on-gay-bisexual-population/2014/07/14/2db9f4b0-092f-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/health-survey-gives-government-its-first-large-scale-data-on-gay-bisexual-population/2014/07/14/2db9f4b0-092f-11e4-bbf1-cc51275e7f8f_story.html)
- Toomey, R.B., Ryan, C., Diaz, R.M., Russell, S. T. (2011). High school gay-straight alliances (GSAs) and young adult well-being: An examination of GSA presence, participation, and perceived effectiveness. *Applied Developmental Science, 15*(4), 175-185.
- Traditional Values Coalition. (2009). The so-called ‘hate crimes’ bill S. 909, the Matthew Shepard hate crimes prevention act: VIII. A little historical perspective is needed Retrieved from <http://www.traditionalvalues.org/>
- Troiden, R. (1988). Homosexual identity development. *Journal of Adolescent Health Care, 9*, 105-113.
- Tyler, T. R. (2015). Our story: The parent and LGBTQ child relational process. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services, 27*, 17-45.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census. (1995). *Digest of educational statistics, statistical abstracts of the United States* (115<sup>th</sup> ed.). Washington, DC: US Department of Commerce.
- U.S. Bureau of the Census (2010). Census bureau releases estimates of same-sex married couples. Retrieved from [http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010\\_census/cb11-cn181.html](http://www.census.gov/newsroom/releases/archives/2010_census/cb11-cn181.html)
- University of Michigan. (2015, May 16). International +LGBT at the University of Michigan. Retrieved from <http://internationalspectrum.umich.edu/life/definitions>
- Valenti, M., & Campbell, R. (2009). Working with youth on LGBT issues: Why gay–straight alliance advisors become involved. *Journal of Community Psychology, 37*(2), 228–248.

- Valenzuela, A. (2004). *The greenwood encyclopedia of American regional cultures: The southwest*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2004. *Credo Reference*. 18 Mar. 2010. Web. 29 Nov. 2010.
- <http://0www.credoreference.com.portal.tamucc.edu/entry/abcarcsw/language>.
- van Manen, M. (1990) *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy*. Albany, NY: SUNNY Press.
- Whelan, D. (2006). Out and ignored. *School Library Journal*, 52(1), 46-50.
- Whitfield, D. L., Walls, N. E., Langenderfer-Magruder, L., & Clark, B. (2014). Queer is the new black? Not so much: Racial disparities in anti-LGBTQ discrimination. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Social Services*, 26(4), 426-440.
- Whitman, J., Horn, S., & Boyd, C. (2007). Activism in the schools: Providing LGBTQ affirmative training to school counselors. *Journal of Gay & Lesbian Psychotherapy*, 1, 143-154.
- Wickham, D. (2009, February 17). 100 years into historic mission, NAACP mustn't lose its way, *USA Today*, p.11a.
- Williams, C. (2007). Research methods. *Journal of Business & Economic Research*, 5(3), 65.
- Williams Institute. (2014). LGBT stats: Texas. Retrieved from <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/census-snapshots/texas/>
- Woolf, L.M., & MacCartney, D. (2014). Sexual orientation and gender minorities. In C.V. Johnson & H. L. Friedman, (Eds.), *The Praeger Handbook of Social Justice and Psychology* (pp.155-176). Santa Barbara CA: ABC-CLIO.

## APPENDICES

Preliminary Questions for LGBTQ Students	Appendix A
Questions Asked of LGBTQ Students	Appendix B
Questions Asked of School Counselors	Appendix C
Demographic Information Sheet for Counselors	Appendix D
Questions Asked of Parents of LGBTQ Students	Appendix E
Flyer for University Student Center	Appendix F
Consent Forms for Individual Interviews	Appendix G
Consent Form for Focus Group	Appendix H
Letter from Texas A&M University Corpus Christi IRB	Appendix I
Email Inviting Counselors to Join Focus Group	Appendix J

## APPENDIX A

### Preliminary Questions for LGBTQ Students

- (1) Do you consider yourself a student who has a different sexual orientation other than heterosexual?
- (2) Are you under doctor's care for depression or under any kind of medication to treat anxiety or depression?
- (3) Are you currently seeing a community counselor or Psychiatrist for any reason?
- (4) Have you ever worked with your school counselor for any reason?

## APPENDIX B

### Questions Asked of LGBTQ Students

- (1) When did you first realize that you were different when it came to your sexual orientation?
- (2) In the time that you have worked with a school counselor, what was your experience in coming out to him or her?
- (3) Explain the similarities and the differences that you found in the counseling after the counselor knew that you were part of the LGBTQ group.
- (4) What difficulties have you had in school as a student who identifies as LGBTQ?
- (5) What was the school counselor's role in assisting you with these difficulties? Did you ever talk about feeling ostracized or uncomfortable, or did your friends ever feel ostracized or uncomfortable with a counselor?
- (6) Tell me about an experience when you have talked to the school counselor about coming out to your parents or getting counseled with your parents. What was it like having your parent be involved in this type of counseling?
- (7) Have you ever been part of a social justice group advocating for your rights as an LGBTQ student?
- (8) What has been your experience with the teachers in your classes as an LGBTQ student? Have any of your teachers talked to you about it?
- (9) What has been your experience with the administrators in your school as an LGBTQ student?
- (10) Do you think that adults in the school system know how to help you with your concerns?
- (11) What type of counseling services do you think would have been helpful to you that you did not receive during your four years in high school?

## APPENDIX C

### Questions Asked of School Counselors

- (1) What courses, professional training, or events in your life have given you the feelings of competency when working with the LGBTQ students?
- (2) In the times that you have been approached by a student who is examining his or her belief system and sexual orientation, what was it that you experienced while the counseling was taking place?
- (3) What counseling approaches have you used with the LGBTQ students, and how did you utilize them in your session?
- (4) Explain the similarities and the differences you find in counseling a heterosexual student and a homosexual student or bisexual or transgender student.
- (5) What difficulties have you observed LGBTQ students encountering within the school environment? What is the school counselor's role in assisting with these difficulties?
- (6) When you have counseled an LGBTQ student, did you ever have the experience of counseling their parents as well, and what was it like counseling the parent of an LGBTQ student?
- (7) Did you ever advocate for an LGBTQ student in any capacity, whether it was in school or the community in which you live?
- (8) Did you ever have to go outside of your comfort zone or belief system in order to have a successful counseling experience with an LGBTQ student, and what was that experience?
- (9) What has changed about you since you started working with LGBTQ students?
- (10) Is there anything you would like to add that was not asked of you?

## APPENDIX D

### Demographic Information Sheet for Counselors

1. Gender                      M                      F
2. Age  
Under 30    31-35    36-40    41-45    46-50    51-55    56-60    Over 60
3. Race  
White   Hispanic   Mexican-American   Asian   African-American   Pacific Islander
4. Having a gay or lesbian family member or friend  
Family member is gay   Friend or associate is gay   Both gay friend & family member
5. Political Affiliation  
Republican                      Middle of the Road                      Democrat                      Independent
6. Frequency of church attendance in a month  
Every week                      Three times                      Twice                      Once                      Don't attend
7. Participation in training about LGBT sexual orientations in the past 12 months  
Yes                      No
8. Has worked with people seeking counseling because they were gay, lesbian, or questioning their sexual orientation?  
Yes                      No

## APPENDIX E

### Questions asked of Parents of LGBTQ Students

- (1) When did you first realize that your child was different when it came to their sexual orientation?
- (2) In the times that you have worked with a school counselor, what was your experience when discussing your student's classes? If you discussed LGBTQ issues with the counselor, what was your experience like?
- (3) Explain the similarities and the differences you found in the counseling after they knew your child was part of the LGBTQ group?
- (4) What difficulties have you had in school as the parent of a student who identifies as LGBTQ? What was the school counselor's role in assisting you with such difficulties?
- (5) Tell me about an experience when you have talked to the school counselor about your child coming out to you or getting counseled with your student. What was it like having your child involved in this type of counseling?
- (6) Have you ever been a part of a social justice group advocating for your child's rights as an LGBTQ student?
- (7) What has been your experience with the teachers in your child's classes and the teacher knowing he/she is an LGBTQ student?
- (8) What has been your experience with the administrators in your school as a parent of an LGBTQ student?
- (9) Do you think the adults in the school system know how to help your child with his/her concerns? What about your concerns?



(10) What type of services do you think would have been helpful to your child, during their four years in high school that you did not receive?

## APPENDIX F

### Flyer for University Student Center

---



# A Qualitative Study



Student volunteers are needed for a qualitative study on the LGBTQ student and their experience in working with their high school counselor

Individual interviews and a focus group will be two ways of collecting data for this study. If you identify yourself as a member of the LGBTQ community, are at least 18 years of age, and would like to participate in this study, please contact Annelise Vela at [cvela3@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:cvela3@islander.tamucc.edu) or call her at 361-660-4691.

All participation is confidential

This study will hopefully help school counselors identify the needs of LGBTQ high school students as well as the needs of parents of LGBTQ students.



This study is a part of Texas A&M University Corpus Christi and has been approved by the University's Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects



## APPENDIX G

### Consent Forms for School Counselors, LBGTQ Students and Parents of LBGTQ Students

#### **CONSENT FORM- Individual interviews**

##### Identifying the Experiences of LBGTQ Adolescent Students and Parents with the Secondary School Counselor: A Qualitative Study

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in this research study. If you decide to participate in this study, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, or Questioning (LBGTQ) students and their parents with the high school counselor. The purpose of this study is to identify the experiences LBGTQ students and parents have had in working with their school counselors as well as explore the experiences that school counselors have had in working with students with LBGTQ sexual orientations and their parents. This is a phenomenological inquiry that will result in descriptions of the experiences and themes. The research questions are, “What are the school counseling experiences of an LBGTQ high school student?” and “What are the experiences of parents of LBGTQ students while working with the high school counselor?” and “What are the experiences of school counselors working with LBGTQ students?” You were selected to be a possible participant because you have identified yourself as a college student who is LBGTQ, a parent of a student who has identified themselves as LBGTQ, or a school counselor who has worked with LBGTQ students.

#### **What will I be asked to do?**

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to be interviewed by the researcher for one to two hours at a time and place that is convenient for both researcher and interviewee. The interview will be audio recorded. Once the data has been transcribed, the researcher will conduct another small interview called a debriefing to share the information and to collect any additional comments you would like to share. This process should only take 10- 25 minutes. At another time, after all individual interviews have been collected, you will be asked to join a focus group with other students who identify themselves as LBGTQ, or if a parent, with other parents of students who have identified themselves as LBGTQ. If a school counselor, you will be invited to join a focus group of school counselors who have worked with LBGTQ students. The focus group will be an open discussion about the experiences LBGTQ students have had with their school counselors, the experiences parents of LBGTQ students have had with their student’s school counselor, or the experiences of school counselors who have worked with LBGTQ students and will not last longer than one to two hours. This focus group will be audio recorded. The collection of data for this study will take two to three months, from the initial individual interview to the completion of the focus group.

#### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life. Your confidentiality will be protected.

#### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

The possible benefits of participation are to help school counselors identify the needs of the LGBTQ student community and see that their needs are being met as well as identify the types of training school counselors need in order to better serve the LGBTQ community in schools.

**Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi being affected.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential, and confidentiality will be maintained by the researcher. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely, and only Carol Annelise Vela, Dr. Kaye Nelson, and Dr. Manuel Zamarripa will have access to the records. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely, and only Carol Annelise Vela, Dr. Kaye Nelson, and Dr. Manuel Zamarripa will have access to the recordings. All recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and destroyed upon completion of the transcription. Only pseudonyms will be used on the transcriptions. Consent forms will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

**Is there anything else I should consider?**

If you are in therapy or use medication for depression or any other DSM-IV diagnosis, you are not eligible to be a participant in the study.

**Whom do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Carol Annelise Vela at (361)660-4691 or [cvela3@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:cvela3@islander.tamucc.edu); Dr. Kaye W. Nelson at (361) 825-2739 or [kaye.nelson@tamucc.edu](mailto:kaye.nelson@tamucc.edu); or Dr. Manuel Zamarripa at (361)825-3467 or [manuel.zamarripa@tamucc.edu](mailto:manuel.zamarripa@tamucc.edu).

**Whom do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or [erin.sherman@tamucc.edu](mailto:erin.sherman@tamucc.edu)

**Signature**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study. You also certify that you are 18 years of age or older by signing this form.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want to be audio recorded.

**Signature of Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name** \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX H

### Consent Forms for Focus Group

#### **CONSENT FORM- Focus Groups**

#### **Identifying the Experiences of LGBTQ Adolescent Students and Parents with the Secondary School Counselor: A Qualitative Study**

##### **Introduction**

The purpose of this form is to provide you information that may affect your decision as to whether or not to participate in the rest of this research study. If you decide to participate in the focus group, this form will also be used to record your consent.

You have been asked to participate in a research project studying the experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered or Questioning (LGBTQ) students and their parents with the high school counselor. The purpose of this study is to identify the experiences LGBTQ students and parents have had in working with their school counselors as well as explore the experiences that school counselors have had in working with students with LGBTQ sexual orientations and their parents. If you are receiving this form, you have already agreed to do the individual interview and are now selected to be a possible participant in a focus group because you have identified yourself as a college student who is LGBTQ, a parent of a student who has identified themselves as LGBTQ, or a school counselor who has worked with LGBTQ students.

##### **What will I be asked to do?**

After all the initial individual interviews have been collected, you will be asked to join a focus group with other students who identify themselves as LGBTQ, or if a parent, with other parents of students who have identified themselves as LGBTQ. If a school counselor, you will be invited to join a focus group of school counselors who have worked with LGBTQ students. The focus group will be an open discussion about the experiences LGBTQ students have had with their school counselors, the experiences parents of LGBTQ students have had with their student's school counselor, or the experiences of school counselors who have worked with LGBTQ students and will not last longer than one to two hours. This focus group will be audio recorded. It is important to keep the confidentiality of the participants within this group, so by signing this form, you agree to not reveal the identity of anyone participating in the focus group if you happen to recognize someone. The collection of data for this study will take two to three months, from the initial individual interview to the completion of the focus group.

##### **What are the risks involved in this study?**

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life. By signing this form, you are agreeing to protect the identity of all participants in the focus group. Your confidentiality will be protected as well.

##### **What are the possible benefits of this study?**

The possible benefits of participation are to help school counselors identify the needs of the LGBTQ student community and see that their needs are being met as well as identify the types of training school counselors need in order to better serve the LGBTQ community in schools.

**Do I have to participate?**

No. Your participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without your current or future relations with Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi being affected.

**Who will know about my participation in this research study?**

This study is confidential, and confidentiality will be maintained by the researcher. The records of this study will be kept private. No identifiers linking you to this study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be stored securely, and only Carol Annelise Vela, Dr. Kaye Nelson, and Dr. Manuel Zamarripa will have access to the records. If you choose to participate in this study, you will be audio recorded. Any audio recordings will be stored securely, and only Carol Annelise Vela, Dr. Kaye Nelson, and Dr. Manuel Zamarripa will have access to the recordings. All recordings will be transcribed by the researcher and destroyed upon completion of the transcription. Only pseudonyms will be used on the transcriptions. Consent forms will be destroyed upon completion of the project.

**Is there anything else I should consider?**

If you are in therapy or use medication for depression or any other DSM-IV diagnosis, you are not eligible to be a participant in the study.

**Who do I contact with questions about the research?**

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Carol Annelise Vela at (361) 660-4691 or [cvela3@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:cvela3@islander.tamucc.edu); Dr. Kaye W. Nelson at (361) 825-2739 or [kaye.nelson@tamucc.edu](mailto:kaye.nelson@tamucc.edu); or Dr. Manuel Zamarripa at (361) 825-3467 or [manuel.zamarripa@tamucc.edu](mailto:manuel.zamarripa@tamucc.edu).

**Who do I contact about my rights as a research participant?**

This research study has been reviewed by the Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or [erin.sherman@tamucc.edu](mailto:erin.sherman@tamucc.edu).

**Signature**

Please be sure you have read the above information, asked questions and received answers to your satisfaction. You will be given a copy of the consent form for your records. By signing this document, you consent to participate in this study and agree to keep the identity of all focus group participants confidential. You also certify that you are 18 years of age or older by signing this form.

\_\_\_\_\_ I agree to be audio recorded.

\_\_\_\_\_ I do not want to be audio recorded.

**Signature of Participant:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of Person Obtaining Consent:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Printed Name** \_\_\_\_\_



## APPENDIX I

### Letter from Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board



ERIN L. SHERMAN, MAcc, CRA  
Research Compliance Officer

5900 OCEAN DRIVE, UNIT 3144  
CORPUS CHRISTI, TEXAS 78412  
O: 361-825-7139 • F: 361-825-7775

February 15, 2011

Ms. Carol Annelise Vela  
6029 Oriental Avenue  
Corpus Christi, Texas 78414

Dear Ms. Vela,

The research project entitled "Identifying the Experiences of LGBTQ Adolescent Students and Parents with the Secondary School Counselor: A Qualitative Study" (IRB# 184-10) has been granted approval through an expedited review under category 7.2.1(9) by the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are authorized to conduct the project as outlined in the IRB protocol application.

IRB approval is granted for one year from the date approval is granted. You must submit an IRB Continuing Review Application for IRB committee review and approval should the project continue beyond February 15, 2012. Please submit the IRB Continuing Review Application one month prior to the approval expiration date to allow time for IRB review.

Please submit an IRB Amendment Application for any modifications to the approved study protocol. Changes to the study may not be initiated before the amendment is approved. Please submit an IRB Completion Report to the Compliance Office upon the conclusion of the project. Both report formats can be downloaded from IRB website.

All study records must be maintained by the researcher for three years after the completion of the study. Please contact me if you will no longer be affiliated with Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi before the conclusion of the records retention timeframe to discuss retention requirements.

We wish you the best on the project. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Erin L. Sherman".

Erin L. Sherman, MAcc, CRA  
Research Compliance Officer

THE ISLAND UNIVERSITY

## APPENDIX J

### Email Inviting Counselors to Join Focus Group

Dear High School Counselor,

I am a third year doctoral student with Texas A&M University Corpus Christi and my dissertation topic is a qualitative study on the experiences school counselors have while working with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgendered, Questioning (LGBTQ) students. I will also be interviewing LGBTQ identified student volunteers from the university and parent volunteers from the PFLAG of Corpus Christi Organization on their experiences with their school counselor.

I am hopeful that those of you who have had any experience with this student group will be willing to be interviewed and participate in a focus group, so that I can eventually find out how a school district may help school counselors with the appropriate training concerning the LGBTQ student needs.

If you are interested in being a participant in this study, please know that your answers and comments are confidential and will only be viewed by the researcher and two university professors. Please email me if you want to be considered. I would appreciate any time, no matter how much experience with this group of students you may have had. You may email me at [annelise.vela@ccisd.us](mailto:annelise.vela@ccisd.us) or [cvela3@islander.tamucc.edu](mailto:cvela3@islander.tamucc.edu). You may call me at 361-878-7300 opt. 4, or 21555 if you are within the CCISD phone system. My cell phone is 361-660-4691.

Thank you in advance for considering participating,

C. Annelise Vela